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A view of 'social work' through the *attualità* of Italian thought

Heather Lynch

The burble of the narrow river rushing past grasses that capture passing flotsam detains my senses. A bombastic duck skites across the water, attracting some little recognition from the raft.

I ponder if this tufted, monochrome bird is playing, showing off, conducting an experiment with the current or simply touching down in the only way that it knows how.

"Heather".

My name disturbs the contemplation of ducks.

"Dae ye no recognise me?"

A woman stands directly in front of me blocking my path, not more than 12 inches away. I step back. She moves toward me retrieving the lost ground.

"Chrissy. Sorry. I never recognised you. Didn't expect to see you here. Are you staying around here? How are you?" I scramble to retrieve my earlier distraction, not wanting to cause offense.

Her presence relocates to me to meagrely furnished interviews rooms that circulate aromas, of council hash, super lager, Lynx deodorant, human sweat, occasionally human faeces and always the stale odour of spent cigarettes. The panic button underneath the desk, conveniently situated close to my right hand presents itself to my thoughts.

A man in his late 30's approaches Chrissy from behind and glowers suspiciously at me. "You want it?" He hands her a bottle of white wine with barely a couple of inches remaining in the bottom. "Aye" she responds and takes the bottle from him. "She's awright", she tells him, in response to his glower. As she lifts her hand, I notice the can of Butane gas concealed up her sleeve. It summons one of the most horrific deaths by misadventure that I can recall in many years of working with people who enjoy the intoxicating release of mind-altering substances. The man looks toward the birds shrieking and squawking, he mirrors their call and Chrissy responds. He climbs to the top rung of the fence where his long, lean body pendulates between path and river. He sways toward the water catching the breeze then ebbs landward, his body a sinew of the riverscape.

"He's mah new pal" Chrissy announces, her glowing smile, folds me into this intoxicated moment. I sense their elation.

Meeting Chrissy and her friend in the arbitrary movement of everyday life, outside the regime of professional social work, caused me to pause. Their impact was not that of 'service user' but people energised by not just substances but, river, sunshine and the multiple forms of life in that setting. The standard tropes of social work that position them as people in need, either due to pathology or oppression cannot sufficiently explain that encounter nor its affects. It calls for a mode of sensemaking that accounts for the vibrancy and energy of the animal, vegetal, material factors at play. One that is not tethered to the cerebral.

Italian thought provides a radically different mode of understanding this situation than dominant strains within critical social work that are premised on philosophy that extends from Descartes. Contemporary political philosopher, Roberto Esposito claims dominant

strains of thought that flow from the Cartesian separation of mind and matter create a 'self-referential loop' which is preoccupied with the 'constitution of subjectivity, the problems of consciousness and the theory of knowledge' (2012, 10). In contrast, Italian thought deactivates hierarchical dualities in favour of a 'unity of divergence' (Saidell and Rossello, 2020) that belongs to the corporeal presence of life. Italian thought is set against the Hobbisan exclusion of animality, which separates human life from all other life in an attempt to protect. It is for this reason that Foucault's biopolitical theory has developed in Italy, as Italian thought has always been biopolitical. In *Living Thought* Esposito (2012) covers the ambit of Italian thought, starting with Machiavelli and Vico before moving to Cuoco, Leopardi and de Sanctis to the recent work of Negri. He includes the contributions of artists from Dante and Da Vinci to Pasolini. His argument is that Italian thought has a distinct and separate trajectory from the Cartesian line that dominates modern philosophy. Italian thought presents a politics of life that finds the political in expressive interrelated bodies as much as the work of the state. As such it is a biopolitics that predates Foucault. This situated politics is found in the motion of life in *attualità*, always underway and therefore relevant to social work, as social work involves encounters with life. Italian thought offers a means of making sense of my impromptu meeting with Chrissy and her friend that challenges the tropes of critical social work which extend from Hegelian conflict theory. In this short chapter, I explore three propositions, that follow Esposito's rendering of Italian thought. Understanding life requires poetic knowledge; the earth is animal; and freedom cannot be disaggregated from chaos. This Italian view of politics found within the material contingencies of life that is not bound by chronological time offers an alternative to the Hegelian dialectic that anchors the theoretical underpinning of so much critical social work.

Understanding life requires poetic knowledge

For Vico, there can be no separation between mind and matter. "For the mind does not make itself as it gets to know itself.....and since it does not make itself, it does not know the genus or mode by which it makes itself" (Vico, 1948, 52). For Vico humans can only have knowledge of that which they have made. He opposes the Cartesian abstraction of reason from material life. Reason cannot be disaggregated from the situation in which it arises. It is 'in atto', 'a theory that is entirely absorbed by the materiality of its object' (Esposito, 2012, 46). This makes it supremely relevant to social work – as itself a practice. A practice that is shaped through exchanges that unfold in the process of living. Vico proposes that human knowledge is always situated and therefore changes in relation to context and time. This *sapienza poetica* (poetic knowledge) relies on imagination. It is the 'initial and recurrent, moment of every human experience' that occurs at each arousal of 'wonder' and 'at that moment is a "beast"'. Poetic knowledge is a connection to animality, it does not manage or reduce but instead keeps 'open links with earth' (Cimatti, 2020, 101). My confounded state, that day by the river, was a point of connection to a moment that demanded to be understood in ways that did not exclude the flow of the river, birdsong and the intoxication of Chrissy's intensity. It refused to be packaged as a meeting with a relapsed substance user in need of help, as this would deny and obliterate all that was alive in that encounter. Edward Said, who was profoundly influenced by Vico recognised the danger of losing sight of the significance of poetic knowledge. He says, "the mind, scorning its 'poetic' origins, becomes an increasingly abstract instrument: it has merely passed from a poetic

barbarism to a barbarism of reflection” (Said, 1967, 351-352). The failure to understand that human knowledge involves imagination can lead to acts of violence based on a false rationalism. For Said this led him to critique of the logic that underpinned colonialism. Vico’s rejection of rationalism in favour of poetic knowledge offers a means to critique my knowledge of Chrissy derived from social work systems that was challenged by this encounter.

Chrissy, as is standard practice in UK social work, was first introduced to me through the multiple records accrued through her contact with services. The parallel account of her existence that occupies paper archives and digital recording systems was how I first came to ‘know’ her. The details of not just her childhood, her relationships, health profile and criminal history which I participated in creating, flooded my head at the moment that I recognised her voice. Social work systems are premised on an infrastructure of classification and ordering technologies. Introna (2017) describes social work as a ‘sociomaterial assemblage’ that includes high-status records and recording systems. Recording systems from case notes of contact or filed reports produce a proxy version of the body of the service user, such that they are ‘taken to be the client’ (318). General frameworks that set the terms for contact with those in receipt of services produce a manageable body that can be passed between professionals and claimed as the basis of informed assessment. The parallels with Foucault’s (2003, 2008) critique of classificatory systems that are generative of biopolitics are so obvious that I need not labour the point. The work that these classification systems undertake is to produce a population, they take the singular and produce a universal. My first encounter with Chrissy was through records linked to criminal justice and mental health. Each diagnosis, observed behaviour or criminal classification was aligned with others who share these characteristics and formed the speculum through which she might be known. They act to distil and focus, to reduce the confusion and excess of expression and generate a manageable individual who can be readily processed across professional contexts. What is known, however, is dislocated from Chrissy in the material world, as there is a gulf between the artifice of filed Chrissy and the corporeal encounter of that day.

Chrissy has been measured against well-worn social work models. As a baby, she had been removed from her mother and adopted by an affluent family, who holidayed abroad and bought her a pony. These privileges did not quash her yearning to connect with her biological mother as an adult, nor quell her fascination with her mother’s hunger for intoxication. Her parallel self that was produced through records and files is fleshed with accounts of ‘disordered attachment’ (Bowlby, 1980) and symptoms of chronic trauma (Williams, 2006). I recall her telling me that she knew why she ‘is like she is’ as a social worker, with a fresh certificate in complex trauma training had told her that her ‘brain was damaged’ due to her childhood experience. The Chrissy found in the files is injured, pathologised by a hard life and in need of considered management that will contain her desire for visceral, unpredictable and often self-destructive experience. Such knowledge is premised on reason and the logic of protection. Chrissy must be protected from her impulses. The problem with this is that Chrissy, as many of the people that I have come to know through the reach of social work systems, do not want to be protected. They are often described a ‘falling through the net’ or caught in the ‘revolving door’ of services. No number of multi-professional meetings or plans achieve their intention to protect and order. These

tools are insufficient and there is need to generate knowledge that connects with the boundless often disconcerting life that Chrissy desires.

Of course, the production of population does not just relate to medical discourse. The project of critical social work that foregrounds structures that create populations who have and have not, rely just as much on classificatory systems. Chrissy might be understood as oppressed by a birth family who could be viewed through the powerful prism of poverty. Within criminal justice systems she is classified by gender, and many argue discriminated within a system designed around men (Malloch and McIvor, 2013). These frames articulate structural patterns that provide a different rendering of population Chrissy, but these too are blind to the material relations of that day by the river.

Meeting Chrissy outside of the strictures of the professional frame brought these classifications, this population Chrissy to mind, and left me feeling uncomfortable. What was this information doing in my head, after some years? How could it be right that I have this detailed creation of her while she had only partial, opaque knowledge of my histories? How relevant was any of it for this sunny day by the river, as it had nothing to offer the sensibilities of our meeting. We were composed by the sunlight, sounds, scents and motion of that situation not an abstracted version of ourselves retrieved from a file. Moreover, Chrissy and her friend were connected to the space, its sounds and gestures with an ease that I never observed in the sterility of any social work setting. As I wrestled with the imperatives of harm reduction and public protection that configured our professional contact in previous years, she abandoned to place. Both she and her friend reached beyond the limits of human frames and conduct norms. The alcohol and gas that she used were tools that enhanced this abandonment. Reason alone cannot explain the affects of this meeting. Poetic knowledge is one that flows with the sensorial experience of the day, attempting to understand this corporeal sensory experience for itself, not with any intention to regulate or protect.

The earth is animal

She laughed when I asked her what she was drinking and noted the can of butane gas concealed up her sleeve. She could give chapter and verse on the risks associated with these substances. She has doubtlessly sat through the educational talk on their harms more times than I have given it. 'It's a beautiful day', she proclaimed, 'I'm with ma new pal', 'the sun's out, the ducks are out. It's all good'. She is intoxicated not just by the chemistry of alcohol and butane but by her ability to abandon herself to this context, to this instant that does not belong to anybody. Vico's rejection of Cartesian duality centres the animality of life. Felice Cimatti (2020) proclaims the 'earth is animal' and adopting the 'animal model' deactivates dualism and hierarchy. Vico's account of 'forests', 'giants' and 'beasts' allude to the physicality of living. Unlike Hobbes who aims to separate wolf from human, manage and separate human from nature, Vico accounts a real that cannot disaggregate human life from all life. For Esposito, Vico's giants allude to unrepresentability, not a 'form of life but a life without form' (Esposito, 2012, 77). The body does not begin and end with the individual but is the material confusion within which form is found. It is the forest of confusion that prefers indifference to 'proper differential status' (Esposito, 2012, 78). Vico's giants confer the excesses of the body, its sprawl and escape, its resistance to containment. When Chrissy's

friend climbed onto the fence and announced that he would fly into the river, he exceeded the limitations of arms, legs and torso. His birdfish body was composed of the elemental forms of river and breeze. I looked on, concerned that he might hurt himself while conscious of the energy pulsing through limbs, flesh and water.

Sarah MacLean's (2008) study of the experience of volatile substance use, notes that this drug is above all about embodiment. It rushes through and beyond the confines of the human frame. It is ineffable, as words cannot capture the altered state that it affords. Evans and Raistrick (1987) state that users not infrequently believe that they can fly such is the bodily connection with environment. For all the significant harms it might cause, and there are many (Crossin and Arunogiri, 2020), it seems this possibility of corporeal awareness and connection compels use. The intoxication of moving beyond the confines of individual human body was infectious. Chrissy's friend shunned what Agamben (2004) calls the 'anthropological machine'. The anthropological machine 'functions by excluding as not (yet) human an already human being from itself, that is, by animalizing the human, by isolating the nonhuman within the human' (2004, 37). This suppression of animal voice that acts to disconnect human life from all life produces a limbo, an always displaced life or what he calls 'bare life'. This concept has been numerous applied to the included excluded migrants and criminalised through Agamben's (1995) theorisation of the 'camp' and 'state of exception'. These issues are not, however, where I want to go with this. What is of interest is Agamben's concern with animality as a means of deactivating the anthropological machine that aims to divide human from animal. Scholars such Cary Wolfe (2010) and Dipesh Chakrabarty (2018) argue that it is this divide that provides the foundation for the familiar human hierarchies established on race, class and gender. According to Wolfe (2012) it creates a situation where all are potential animals. Chrissy's friend defied the 'anthropological machine' through his easy connection with place and rejection of social norms that find such fluid connection with more than human life problematic. My feeling of elation was a vicarious intoxication, an indirect experience of this deactivation of the 'anthropological machine' produced through proximity to this affective material movement that is not subject to any imposed logic but simply flows. This chimes with Esposito's articulation of the borders of life (2008) which he does not frame as excluded, inclusion but why what Massumi (2014, 50) calls the 'logic of mutual inclusion'. I was absorbed in this moment through Chrissy and her friend's fluid relation to river and afforded a visceral connection to the more than human life of this place. This experience could not find expression in the reductive formula of case notes, but perhaps in the artistic media of poetry, dance and music.

Vico scribed the value of poetic embodied knowledge long before the romantics but its sensibility is most certainly found in the work of first era romantics of the 19th Century and second era beat poets, William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac. The Italian film maker and writer Pasolini, whose work belongs to the tradition of Italian thought, had a strong affiliation with this movement and its resistance to norms. Burrough's substance use was a facet of his resistance to the 'societies of control' that he raged against. Both this term and Burrough's 'cut-ups' have been theorised by Deleuze (1992) as a means of undoing the constraining subjectivities imposed by societal norms. This undoing of the subject is not just an abstract notion of particles that connect beyond the assumed limits of any individual body, even though, contemporary biology (Gilbert et al, 2012) confirms such a position. The bodily excess of becoming birdfish is the 'absolute immanence' of animality,

an encounter with 'the living world before Adam gives names to it' (Cimatti, 2020, 95). It is a mode of being with place, beyond human confines, of coming to know beyond given subjectivity. It escapes the controlling hierarchy of mind/matter.

The concept of control has of course been a part of critical social work discourse for some decades. Interest in Foucault's governmentality and discipline has led to the maxim of 'care and control' as a standard of mainstream social work discourse (Hardy, 2015). It is presented as a balance that must be found. However, to impose such limits at the outset is exactly what Pasolini, Vico and Chrissy in this instance set themselves against. Pasolini enjoyed the 'drunken passage of Kerouac' that provoked the 'stupid men of letters' (Pasolini, 1988, 144). According to this view, intoxication enhances poetic knowledge and as such was revered by 19th and 20th century romantics, to the extent that substance use might be considered a symptom of romanticism. To consider Chrissy a romantic, makes sense to me as one who has shared her company but would not sit well in her case notes. As discussed above, these notes are dispositives of a system established to impose order produced by differentiation. Social work relies on a subject. According to Garret's (2020) recent critique of Foucault, critical social work needs a subject.

Although Garret (2019) has drawn on Foucauldian theory to explore power, governmentality and neoliberalism, in this article he decides that Foucault's work is on the whole not useful for social work. Garret's (2020) argument against the utility of Foucault for social work is threefold. First, he claims that it collides or at best exists in tension with – 'focal and embedded tenets of social work related personhood and self-determination' (490). Second, he states that it focuses on 'soft power' and not the violence of institutions. Third he finds that although Foucault helpfully theorises neoliberalism that it does not address capitalism. He detects a moral dubiety that does not align with social work's commitment to 'social justice' and standing up to oppression. Each of these criticisms belies a yearn for the revolutionary subject. The first requires an individual subject, a person who might be assigned moral worth. The second requires an institutional subject, a master who might be resisted. The third subjectifies 'capitalism' as a universalizable character, another form of master that must be overcome. The presence and absence of the subject is the fault line between those who subscribe to the revolutionary view of transformation and those who reject a foundation for thought. The Hegelian dialectic requires a master to dominate and a slave to resist. Vico sidesteps the abstraction of the subject at the point of its arrival as he recognises the vanity of assuming that life is contained within discrete subjects and defined bodies.

According to Esposito 'the indissoluble unity of the living body, in opposition to the abstract isolation of the subject and the rational absoluteness of the person' (2012, 142) are problematic, from Machiavelli, through Vico to de Santis, to his own work on *Persons and Things* (Esposito, 2015). The isolation of the subject and its body is what Chrissy and her friend appeared to want to escape. She had left the service where I met her because of the limits it placed on her. Foremost, the expectation that she should privilege reason and protection over sensibility. I was conscious that my questions on what she was drinking and reminders on the risks of butane were a throwback to these prescriptions for a healthy body. Contemplating the pleasure that she and her new friend enjoyed that meeting forced me to consider what was lost and gained through intoxication.

Much is written on the early romantic use of opiates (Hayter, 1968) as a source of inspiration. Given their times, the discussion tends to frame this substance use as a means of accessing the 'inner world'. However, what is most apparent from Sarah Maclean's studies (2005, 2008) and my own experience of those who are intoxicated is not hyper awareness of bodily confines but a dissolution of the boundaries between inner and outer. This aligns with Alvarez analysis of the Beatnik movement. He describes them as 'know-nothings in revolt against the know-alls' (2001, 788). It was not that their drug use heightened thought but dispensed with it altogether. When considered through Vico, it is possible to imagine this as a grounded rejection of Cartesianism, of the necessity to be governed by logic that constrains sensibility. This is not to ignore or diminish the harms, but to acknowledge the affirmative possibilities that make their use so compelling. Pasolini, shared the American Beat culture's anti-ideology and desire to undo (Merjian, 2019). Pasolini's art that flows through the Italian tradition is a rejection of the abstract subject, is evident in this poem:

that life is nothing but a shiver;
bodily, collective presence;
you feel the absence of all true
religion; not life, but survival
—maybe happier than life—like
a population of animals, in whose arcane
orgasm there is no passion other than
for their daily functioning:
humble fervor which gives a sense of festivity
to humble corruption.
(Pasolini, 1973 in Esposito, 2012, 92)

Corporeal life as multi-modal, multispecies collective presence opposes any retrieval or rediscovery of the subject, quite the opposite. For all of the hardships that this incurs, Chrissy for now, prefers an affinity with this living than with the one pursued for her by social work institutions. She is navigating the 'dividing line between the self and the world that the self knows' (Esposito, 2012, 64) as an exercise of freedom.

Freedom cannot be disaggregated from chaos.

In Chrissy's rule free zone, it was not just the lines between subjects and bodies that dissolved but the linear progression of clock time that separated our past meetings from that day. Sequential time or 'Kronos' is problematised by Italian thought. Esposito finds that the idea of 'origin' more than any other concept, sets Italian thought from Machiavelli through to Pasolini apart from modern thinkers. In *Discourses* Machiavelli (1996) claims political institutions need to 'return to first principles' (*riduzione verso il principio*). Much has been written about the ambiguity of this aporetic proposition (Lucchese, 2014; Vatter, 2000, 2013). As I will discuss in the first instance this return is not based on linear time and second this implicates Machiavelli's aporetic understanding of freedom.

On the first point this is not a re-instantiation of structure or law but a reconnection with innovation. In Arum's (2020) analysis of *Discourses* he argues that this return intersects *rinnovare* to begin again and *innovare* to innovate. This return is a turn toward the forces, accidental and serendipitous that created the conditions for the Roman order. It is therefore not a regression or retrieval from the past but a connection with the ever-present forces of renewal. This is not a preservation of the past, but innovation oriented toward an indeterminate future. Vico's notion of temporality involves this same idea of return. His three ages of 'Gods', 'Heros' and 'Men' turn on each other creating alternate possibilities, a repetition not of the same but of difference generated by the motion of the turn. This is an understanding of temporality as force not organisational tool. Esposito finds this throughout Italian philosophy.

'Because of this constitutive "inoriginarity" of history, the origin is always latently coeval with each historical moment. This allows it to be reactivated as a source of energy, rather than simply endured as some sort of spectral return. From this point of view, the return to the origin is anything but the restoration of a past experience, something that is irreproducible as such. Rather, it should be understood in the opposite sense: as its deflagration in the future, starting from its tangency with the shifting line of the present. While reflective awareness on this question is lacking, Italian philosophy engages with it on a singularly frequent basis.' (Esposito, 2012, 23 – 24)

The rejection of linear temporality is the premise of Pasolini's repudiation of Hegel's dialectic. He says 'I am so metaphysical, mythical, so mythological, that I wouldn't even say that data, when overcoming previous data, dialectically incorporate, assimilate what preceded them. I say that they are juxtaposed to each other ...' (cited in Mariniello, 1995, 111). This juxtaposition is not an overcoming or accommodation and time is not the linear sequence of moments but the difference between them. As Chrissy called my name, I was caught up in a turn that brought back the scents and forms of local authority interview rooms, the language of rehabilitation, harm reduction, disorder, trauma, therapy and risk. These could not be turned away as they created the terms of our connection to each other, yet this confrontation of difference innovated a new mode of thought. For Pasolini, revolution is not found in overcoming that takes place on a linear trajectory but in understanding the difference between moments, to 'act between differences' (Mariniello, 1995, 116).

The revolutionary potential of the return is a shift against kronos or linear time. Of necessity it forces time out of joint. It is not a return to foundation but to discontinuity. The foundation of this return is indeterminate. This operates in kairological time. Karen Barad (2017) articulates a current complex understanding of time and timing that draws on quantum physics. She implicates kronos or 'empty clock' time as a facet of the global oppressions of colonialism and neoliberalism. These require a universal measure that positions some as 'on time' and others 'running late'. This assumed objective oversight is reminiscent of Machiavelli's problem with Plato's 'divine shepherd' that 'demonically rules over everything' (Vatter, 2000, 250). Machiavelli's biopolitics recognises the totalising effects of positions outside of experience that generate narratives of order that separate past from future and labour on a linear narrative of progress. His mode of undoing is built

around a return to origin that destabilises ideas of both past and future that bear remarkable similarity to Barad. She also sees undoing oppressive totalising forces as a practice of remembering that involves the 'material reconfiguring of spacetime mattering' (63). Chrissy's reconfiguring was supported by substances that promoted an embodied dissolution of subjectivity and a perilous freedom that risks all.

Chrissy and her friend's embodied experiments with place and substance strained against social work's divine shepherd. Perhaps more than any other term the discourse of substance use pivots on ideas of freedom. Users deemed problematic are defined as 'dependent' by their nature not free. Use by those who have endured past challenges, characterised as traumatic is characterised as a malignant form of self-medication (McKernan, et al, 2015), therefore, not free. All the while public discourse that opposes the control of substances is premised on individual's rights to choose. Unsurprisingly the social work programme through which I met Chrissy adopted a view of substance use both controlled and otherwise as problematic. Many hours were spent on education around the harms of an array of substances from opiates to new psychoactive substances and from alcohol to sugar. This was established on the premise of protection, framed as harm reduction and desistance. The field of desistance is adopted by those who wish to endorse a social approach to criminal rehabilitation. Narrative is one of its main tropes, that those involved with criminal justice should be supported to create a 'new script' a new pro-social story of their life (Rumgay, 2004). It eschews dominant psychological treatments in favour of holistic approaches the understand the person and their life connections with family and community. To desist, to live a life free from crime requires creating a new narrative, one that adopts societies values. This is established on a notion of positive freedom, where freedom is found in interventions that enable the person to adopt such a life. The contradiction in the logic of 'desistance' is inescapable. Applied to Chrissy, she should be supported to sculpt a new narrative of herself that aligns with societies values, but how can this be free?

For Machiavelli freedom has no foundation other than turbulence. Miguel Vatter states:

'As it functions in Machiavelli, the return to beginnings should rather be understood as figuring the experience of a radical loss of origin, the experience that nothing predetermines becoming. At the same time, this experience coincides with the emergence of effective renewals. Analogously, only the groundlessness of political freedom makes both for its radical finitude and ensures its existence and survival in and through its historical repetitions.'
(Vatter, 2000, 220)

Freedom cannot have foundation as then it would not be free. Kairos cannot be overwritten by kronos. This is a radically different view of freedom than the one discussed in much critical social. Vandekinderan et al (2020) proclaim the desire to create autonomy of individuals through holding the collective responsible for all to become such. While Kessl (2020) mobilises Balibar's formulation of equiliberty for a social pedagogy that offers 'the public guarantee of human agency as a condition of political liberty and the assurance of political autonomy as the goal of social equality' (7). Each seeks to navigate social work's axis of care/control through a communitarianism that relies on the dialectic of the collective

subject and the law. Italian thought from Machiavelli to Esposito does not start with the subject and therefore affords a different understanding of freedom. The 'project of giving freedom a foundation is an impossible one' according to Miguel Vatter's (2000, 220) analysis of Machiavelli's origin. Thinking with Machiavelli, Michael Dillon calls this 'factual freedom' which is 'neither a "freedom from" nor a "freedom to" but a freedom for,' (2008, 4). Freedom for, is a return to origin that does not conform to a given order, temporal or otherwise, but to disorder. It is 'a leap in the dark'.

The kairological premise of Italian thought that is not based on the discrete subject, or the imposed order of kronos, is underpinned by conflict. Not Hegel's conflict that builds from the unit of the subject but the conflict of antifoundational animality. There is 'no abyss' between 'humanity and animality' for Italian thought (Esposito, 2012). There is no separate state of nature to be managed as 'the wolf is part of the human, the same way nature is part of civilization.' (50) Esposito says 'conflict does not precede order as it does in Hobbes, or follow it, as it does in counterrevolutionary philosophies' (2012, 53). 'Conflict is inherent to reality' and is therefore all that can be returned to. In Pasolini's words 'a chaos not yet proletarian'. Over the time that I knew her, chaos held an allure for Chrissy. Services including the one that I worked for, laboured hard to instantiate order into her life. Basics such as housing, education, substance management programmes all featured as mechanisms that would rid her life of chaos. The chaotic life is a well-worn social work trope, ill-defined yet frequently found in case notes that describe the lives of people who do not conform to accepted behavioural norms. For Italian thought conflict cannot be transcended but embraced as it the only site of renewal, transformation, the possibility of something else. That something else cannot be managed into existence as this is an attempt to circumvent the disorder that is immanent to its coming to presence. There is no plan or model that delivers Chrissy from chaos.

Conclusion

Meeting Chrissy that afternoon disrupted the organisation of my day, the rhythm of a week that is built around the maintenance of a life structure designed to sustain itself. Regularities of sleeping, waking, exercise, work, managed substance use and healthy food are all in place to protect this schedule that ticks through each passing week. Encountering Chrissy by the river punctured the order that moves me through days. It caused me to question why I find exhilaration in her mode of living, why I am intoxicated by her abandonment. It is not that I, or indeed that these Italian theorists to whom I have referred, do not recognise the injustices that she has faced. The problem that confronted me that day is found in the chasm between the order presented as a solution to chaos and the reality of life which is found in chaos.

'In atto', Italian thought allows reflection on life that does not disaggregate human subjects from the motion of life itself. It recognises that there is no contract that points toward an ordered conclusion. In contrast it articulates human knowledge as poetic, generated through the concrete practices of living. In Pasolini's words it is the 'struggle...for expressiveness, cost what it may' (1965, 37). This does not and cannot lead to solutions to chaos but to modes of living within the conflicted disorder that is the substance of life.

Chrissy occupies the leap in the dark that is 'in atto'. This is a dark and perilous place but also one of possibility.

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