

## **The General Body. Representations of the *cognitariat* in Italy: a Provocation.**

Numerous recent Italian studies in class composition, social anthropology and political philosophy revolve around the definition of immaterial labor.<sup>1</sup> The notion of immaterial labor itself, however, is subject to many interpretations. While Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt use the expression to refer to any form of labor that produces an immaterial good, such a “service, cultural product, knowledge or communication” (Hardt and Negri 290), the concept is more generally understood as the new form of labor introduced and made possible by digital technologies. In one of his articles on the topic, Maurizio Lazzarato, a scholar and activist who has written on political and labor movements since the early 1990s, states that the concept refers to two different aspects of labor:

On the one hand, as regards the ‘informational content’ of the commodity, it refers directly to the changes taking place in workers’ labor processes in big companies in the industrial and tertiary sectors, where the skills involved in direct labor are increasingly skills involving cybernetics and computer control. On the other hand, as regards the activity that produces the “cultural content” of the commodity, immaterial labor involves a series of activities that are not normally recognized as ‘work; in other words the kind of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashion, tastes, public norms, and, more strategically, public opinion. (Lazzarato 133)

This new conception of work (also called cognitive labor) has given way to the identification of a new class of workers that intermittently takes the names of “virtual class” or, in the more recent definition proposed by Franco Berardi (Bifo), the *cognitariat*.

One of the founding elements of the *cognitariat*, if we wish to use this evocative half-Cartesian, half-Marxist neologism, is the inherent convergence of the categories of work and leisure in the new system of production. This convergence is apparent in the definition of *cognitariat* itself, in that *cognitariat* labor includes categories not traditionally definable as work. At the same time, however, this new techno-class represents quite accurately what work is for a large

number of contemporaries, especially (but less and less exclusively) in the Western world. The cognitarian worker is defined by the indeterminacy of his or her labor. The major conundrum present in the very definition of the cognitariat lies in the application of the term *labor* (and by consequence, of *class*) to a concept that is apparently self-contradictory. As is known, labor is one of the most cherished words in Marx and in most studies derived from Marxist theories. To speak of immaterial labor, however, goes against the very core of the Marxist argument on work, which states that labor is in the first place the process of transformation of nature operated by the human being. If the Marxist “nature” is by definition something that may be transformed to result in a product, it necessarily has to deal with materiality. In other words, Marx thinks of heavy things when it comes to labor. What “nature” then, can immateriality transform?

The problem of immaterial labor, we can see, is first and foremost one of definition, not only of work, but also of the nature of the immateriality brought about by the introduction of technology in the workplace. It is around this definition, and the contradictions that derive from it, that the core of Italian late Marxist discourse revolves.<sup>2</sup>

One way of trying to redefine this immateriality, then, is to analyze the most important points that surface in studies of immaterial labor. In other words, what is immaterial in labor theories? The first notion that comes to mind is that of *general intellect*, one of the most debated terms in Italian recent Marxist studies. The idea behind the general intellect is a complex one, characterizing both a mass intellectuality and a multiple, active agent. Even though Marx has only used it once in the *Grundrisse*, the expression has been extensively analyzed by philosophers such as Paolo Virno, Maurizio Lazzarato, Bifo, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, and it has been used to define a crucial characteristic of the immaterial laborer. This notion has literally been devoid of weight, that is to say it has been somehow detached from the bodies that it makes reference to.<sup>3</sup> The general intellect, in Marx, indicates a crucial factor in production: a “combination of technological expertise and social intellect, or general social knowledge” (Marx 706). The general intellect is widely employed in new studies of class composition because of the

adaptability of this notion to both categories of work and socialization (read *leisure*). Paolo Virno, one of the most prolific writers among new Italian Marxists, defines the general intellect as a system that works on mutating and influencing the ways in which we understand social communication, while Maurizio Lazzarato associates with it the activities that have become “the domain of what we call a mass intellectuality” (Lazzarato 137). All interpretations underline that the main feature of the general intellect is its indeterminacy. It is precisely within this indeterminacy that the general intellect finds its strict connection with the cognitariat. We can say, with Virno, that both the cognitariat and the general intellect incorporate “the intellectual activity of mass culture” (Virno 22). Neither defining an individual nor a collective of workers, the two terms signify a *moment of passage* between the singular and the multitude. In other words, they exemplify the irresolvable tension between human nature and its place in society. The dematerializing of the general intellect and the subsequent references to communication, networking and multiplicity that the term carries with it, have made the general intellect particularly apposite for the explanation of immaterial labor. The expression also shares many characteristics with other ways of recounting the social reshaping that network technologies -- and the insurgency of what has been called the information society -- have brought about.<sup>4</sup> To quote an example, in his early analysis of the impact of digital technologies on human beings, Pierre Lévy writes about the formation of a *collective intelligence*, an intelligence that is universally distributed, “constantly enhanced, coordinated in real time and resulting in the effective mobilization of skills” (Lévy, *Collective Intelligence* 13). Lévy’s notion of collective intelligence, which he exposes in his 1995 book and reprises in his later work on cyber culture, is put in relation to the increase of workers’ nomadism and the transformation of “scientific, technical, economic, professional and mental landscapes” (Lévy, *Collective Intelligence* xxii). This concept immediately appears as a “technical brother” to that of general intellect. However, the similarity between the two terms lies both in the lexicon, and in the apparent denial of individuality and materiality that they assert.

Terms like general intellect, collective intelligence, or

cognitariat evidence the need to define the immaterial, that is to say to give shape and materiality to what is inherently diverse, indeterminate, and ultimately multiple. But in working around a mainly abstract paradox (the individual identity of a multiple), these notions run the risk of over-intellectualizing this multiple identity: what is evident in all definitions, or descriptions of the multiple agent that is central to information society is the association to the brain that the terminology developed around immaterial labor suggest. To cite an example, Levy, writes in *Collective Intelligence*:

The agent intellect establishes itself as a transcendent collective intelligence. How can we articulate an immanent collective intellect? As an experiment I will retain the Farabian schema, but reverse its principal terms. The ethereal divinity of theological speculation is thus metamorphosed into a desirable possibility lying on the horizon of humanity's future. Within this transformed vision, the angelic or celestial world becomes the region of virtual worlds through which human beings form collective intelligences. (79)

Without going so far as Lévy, who seems to evoke an angelic form for the collective intelligence, the discourse that shapes the notions of cognitariat tends to suggest a disembodied entity producing immaterial commodities. In other words, even the Italian late Marxists, clearly less interested in the transcendental, seem to have neglected the importance of the materiality that is behind this new way of working and socializing. Most studies of immaterial labor, though often mentioning the importance of the actual bodies of individuals who constitute the immaterial class, leave nonetheless their physical component aside. It is however crucial to reinstate this materiality, because even if we want to redefine notions of work, it is clear that the worker may never be mistaken for a transcendent entity. Reducing his or her work to an abstract category, a “body without organs”, would carry deleterious consequences. The body without organs is an expression that Deleuze and Guattari define as the reservoir of potential traits, connections, affects, movements. It is “the unproductive, the sterile, ungendered, the inconsumable”

(Deleuze and Guattari 8): it is pure potential, and for this reason it contains revolutionary power in itself. The cognitarian body, however, literally perceived as lacking organic traits, loses all potentiality, and is rather functional – as is – to the immaterial economy, since it appears to forego all its primary needs and desires in favor of productivity and consumability alone. The immaterial, weightless, ungendered general intellect is reduced to a machine that is devoid of desire, and whose only potential is to work. The effects of this dematerialization are already evident in more practical examples, as *cognitariat* is the keyword, at least in Italy, for the definition of precarious (temporary) workers, one of the fastest spreading, least safeguarded categories of workers.

A possible reconsideration of this problem, then, would entail giving a body to the general intellect, that is to say open the concept to possible representations of its diversity that are not necessarily linked to the abstract fields of the “circuit,” “network,” “multitude,” as Negri and Virno’s seem to be, nor to the intellect or intelligence alone. To find a representation for this material, albeit multiple, body would also open a path towards a possible understanding of the inherently diverse category of the *cognitariat*. How could we possibly define or even identify the concrete bodies that quite literally surround an immaterial and indeterminate production?

The inherent multiplicity and diversity that is the basis of this category makes the task an onerous one, but we must note that such attempt is not unprecedented.<sup>5</sup> In recent considerations on the role of the *cognitariat*, activist-philosopher Franco Berardi (Bifo) is aware of the necessity to consider the material aspect of the immaterial laborer, and affirms that “collective intelligence neither reduces nor resolves the social existence of the bodies that produce this intelligence, the concrete bodies of the male and female cognitarians” (Bifo 57). In his article, Bifo provides a detailed analysis of the effect that cognitive work has on the body of the cognitarian, concentrating on the frustration and manic-depressive syndromes derived from the “modern” aspect of such labor: the ideology of competition and self-fulfillment, and the inability to cope with inevitable failure. Here too, however, the figure of the cognitarian appears as a disembodied, or at best a fragmented one.

Bifo talks about “nerves that stiffen in the constant strain of attention, eyes that stare at a screen and hands that type on a keyboard” and once again makes use of a lofty terminology when he mentions the “rarefaction of community ties and a security-driven sterilization” (57). According to Bifo, the cognitariat is a class that cannot be defined, and is also denied basic rights such as cooperating and unionizing, because it includes such diverse elements as the architect, the travel agent, the teacher, the lawyer. The cognitive laborer suffers from the sterilization and rarefaction of community relations and the mechanization of relationships into standardized, regulated mechanisms who gain less and less pleasure and reassurance from human relations and daily life. It follows that for the new generation of cognitarians “a consequence of this dis-eroticization of daily life is the investment of desire in work, understood as the sole space of narcissistic reaffirmation for an individuality used to seeing the other according to the rules of competition, that is, as a danger, an impoverishment, a limitation, rather than a source of experience, pleasure, and enrichment” (57). Even keeping in mind that this body exists, that it is gendered and multiple, Bifo can only represent it as a series of very sad pathologies, disjointed limbs and sick organs. It appears as if there is no possibility of representing anything but a disabled body, when facing the problem of how to deal with new, technologic and sterile working environments. In this sense, his argument is reminiscent of what Paul Virilio had written ten years earlier about the effects of fast-spreading new technologies on human perception. In his book *The Art of The Motor*, Virilio insists that our bodies simply cannot keep up with the acceleration (and the virtual dissemination) that the new “motors” are imposing on us. The French philosopher has come to very similar conclusions to Bifo’s when he talks about the “media complex,” and “technology-driven sight overflowing.” He affirms:

Apropos of communication technology, the old law is thus being borne out: the faster the announcement effect, the more the announcement becomes accidental and insubstantial. Like the erstwhile theater show, radio, cinema, and television aimed to arouse natural emotions such as anger, surprise, distress,

anticipation, desire. But only pending the artificial effects of the paroxysmal acceleration of representational techniques. Tetanization, vertigo, overexcitement, a state of shock will evacuate all judgment, any system of rational evaluation, any positive, negative, or even simply deleterious selection of messages and images. (Virilio 73-74)

Even though Virilio concentrates on the effect of the media and technologies on our perception and on the ways in which they have changed the art form rather than the workplace, he is also reflecting on the changes in our daily lives that the disproportioned increase of technology has imposed. Inevitably, his first reflections are on dysfunctions, diseases, or discomfort. He also does not talk about individuals but only about their eyes, their organs and their perception. The analysis of the effects of technology on our bodies, then, tends to result in a conflicting relation in which the cognitive worker rarely surfaces out of in one piece.

Rather than concentrating on how working with new technologies changes our bodies, then, we may reverse the question and ask instead how can we represent the body of this new class, which is somehow indivisible from the work it performs.<sup>6</sup> In other words, how is it possible to reinstate the body in its very material entirety to the immaterial worker, without for this reason losing track of the main potential of its body without organs, of his or her multitude? It is apparent that the overintellectualization of the notion of collectivity is partially due to the language used to define it. An attempt to answer this question, then, is to work around that language. After all, before influencing our gestures, desires and bodily functions, technologies have their highest impact on a language we need to continuously re-adapt in order to relate to the new and changing elements, one that is more and more detached from the body. The frustration that Bifo speaks of, then, can be associated with a displacement of the bodily functions, which, we could argue, firstly operates through language. It might be commonplace to say that language has mutated with the introduction of technologies (and work on technologies) on a large scale. To look at how such language has changed or may change, on the other hand, might reveal many aspects of the body created by

immaterial work. When people say they “talk” to each other when what they really do is type messages, or when someone “hands in” a document via email, while their hands are really not visible; or else when we “send” something without for this reason planning a trip to the post office, what we find in these expressions are clear symptoms of an attempt at redefining the body and its now displaced functions.<sup>7</sup>

As issues that mainly pertain to workers’ rights, political activism and social analysis, the causes and effects of immaterial labor have often been studied as a political and sociologic category. The literature that surrounds the issue, including activist literature that comes directly from the cognitariat, also keeps underscoring the same problem. If we analyze most of the texts that have recuperated the notion of cognitariat and apply it to daily exchanges – the terminology has been embraced in Italy by groups of activists for workers’ rights, precarious workers’ unions – we will see that these writings are mostly concerned with maintaining the multiple aspect of the cognitariat as a class rather than the actual identity of the individuals that form it. The working bodies, just like in the imagery that Bifo proposes, are clearly corporeal but fractioned and dissatisfied: we can get a grasp of some of their parts (the eyes, hands, ears), but not of the cognitarians in their entirety. If we can no longer identify an individual body, we might try to find a language to narrate a body that multiplies and displaces itself, though remaining one. It might be up to a narrative or a representative effort, then, to get closer to this body that is inevitably hidden behind -- and inherently oppressed by -- an immaterial power. This consideration seems to go in the same direction that literary critic Antonio Caronia takes when he speaks of the necessity of finding a language to narrate the “virtual body.” In his book *Il Corpo Virtuale*, an analysis of how bodies and technologies interact in literary works, Caronia starts with a few sarcastic remarks on the democratization of the digital era (a concept that was found in Virilio and Mattelart as well, though in a less ironic stance), and goes on to question the supposed “interactivity” of new media that is often seen as an advancement for human relations. His idea is that the corporeal simulacrum that digital and especially network technologies publicize as an



extension of the real body is not exactly working in favor of the human body. He thinks that although technologies do succeed in disseminating bodily gestures, we can never talk about body as a biological concept when we associate this word with networks and digital communication, but only of the body as a cultural concept. In his attempt at finding the “virtual body” that interacts and struggles with “external” technologies, then, Caronia can only revert to literary representations, from ancient mythology to Frankenstein’s monster.

A plausible place to look for a language that treats the body in a different way, then, is fictional representations that narrate, describe, and even romanticize the cognitariat, rather than theories on work. This operation would not only shift our point of view from the theorizing to the theorized (and hence, in a Gramscian sense, distance the subject matter from a hegemonic perspective) but it would also shed some light on the actual potentiality of the body at work. Whether it is because most theories on immaterial labor originated in Italy, or because issues surrounding *precariato* (the paradoxical condition of being permanently tied to temporary jobs) are particularly prominent there, most attempts of representing the cognitariat come from Italian contemporary writers.<sup>8</sup>

One example is the fictitious figure of San Precario, the patron saint of temporary workers, which has often been adopted as a symbol for activist expressions of cognitariat in Italy. This figure is not just evoked in writings that advocate the rights of this new class of workers, but, just like other more “official” saints, has a physical representation that is carried around in protests and demonstrations all around Italy. Paradoxically, San Precario is the opposite of Levy’s “angelic” intelligence: he has a body that is outrageously mundane (he is represented grabbing his genitals for good luck, as in the most recognizable and common Italian tradition) and although he is clearly gendered and identifiable, he does indeed represent the needs and desires of a class. From the analysis figures like that of San Precario, it appears as if, in what we could call cognitarian iconographies, fictional bodies are perceived as more real than the bodies without organs that inevitable mutations in language fail to describe.

In the same fashion, but in more contemporary expressions,

another attempt at recuperating the body in narratives is what we encounter in the work of the Italian collective of writers Luther Blissett/Wu Ming.<sup>9</sup> This is a nationally acclaimed group of novelists who are actively involved in the political struggles of the cognitariat, and who write essays and historical novels where the themes and the preoccupations of the new class are the focal point. Rather than idealizing the potential of the virtual body in the information society, or lamenting the exploitation of the multitude's actual body, the writers' approach is to consider the cognitariat just like other categories of oppressed in history. The group insists that a possible way for the class to obtain their identity is to identify with *characters* of the recent as well as distant past. Wu Ming calls this operation *mythopoiesis*, that is to say the creation of foundational myths to explain the history of the multitude, in order to create an opposition with official histories of power. And this is probably the mechanism that spurs the adaptation of novelistic genres to the reconstruction of history. The narrative praxis of mythopoiesis, the collective affirms, is the basis for a possible counter-history, or the narration that constitutes the necessary inspiration for the "struggle against the present state of things" (Wu Ming, *Giap!* 32). The fact that mythopoiesis works through the creation of characters conveys the effort of reverting to a form of biologic body. Through the description of the characters' highest virtues as well as their lowest impulses and bodily functions (which might or might not have inherent all the potentials of the body without organs) Wu Ming's narratives respond to an anxiety for eliminating the rarefaction of the virtual, the disembodied. In an explanation of the purpose of mythopoietic narration we read: "In the last decades many rebels were drawn to an alienating form of 'iconophilia' (see for instance the Christ-like cult of Che Guevara) or, alternatively, to an iconoclastic attitude that prevented them from understanding the real nature of the issues at hand" (Wu Ming, *Giap!* 32). Developing fictional characters whose corporeality is crucial to the story, and who are seen from many different points of view in their continuous (physical) interaction with other characters will possibly help us constitute an alternative to the blinding dualism iconophilia/iconoclasm. In one of their earliest manifestos of the aims of *mythopoiesis* in literary expression,<sup>10</sup> the

group states: “We believe that the multitudes need new *foundational myths* ... For a new world to be possible, it is necessary to imagine it, and make it imaginable for many” (*Mind Invaders* 1).<sup>11</sup>

Wu Ming’s stories usually inscribe within the genre of historical novels, and narrate what could be called counter-histories addressing current political, environmental, social struggles, at times directly -- their latest work, *Previsioni del Tempo* is a road novel dealing with illegal garbage recycling -- at times transposing the story in the past: *54* narrates the post WWII period from a global perspective, concentrating on the Yugoslavian situation and the uncertainties and contradictions of the Italian Communist Party; *Manituvana* revolves around the alliances and conflicts between the Iroquois confederation and the Western settlers in 1775 North America. The link that connects all these seemingly diverse narrations is that the numerous characters involved in these stories are all described with great insistence on their corporeal and emotional elements: women and men, real or imagined historic figures (*54* features Tito and Cary Grant) reveal their most human and contradictory characteristics, so that they cease to become a category even when they are effectively part of a multitude. In acknowledging the necessity to define the one-multiple, which is also the main idea behind writing as a collective, the group reinstates corporeality as the only means with which language may actually rematerialize a multiple body. The purpose is to remind us that general intellect is enclosed within a body, and not just a body as an ethereal intellect or (un)desiring machine.

In the book *History Made, History Imagined*, an analysis of the poietic direction in contemporary historic novels, David W. Price gives a definition of “poietic histories,” as novels that direct the reader “to experience the struggle to create values in one of several ways” (2-3). Interestingly, Price’s definition implies that poietic history display a “focus on figurative language, with a special emphasis on the mythic underpinning of all history” (4). Wu Ming’s novels clearly exemplify this direction. They reaffirm the need for poietic history to use language that allows the modern reader to *sense* the past, a process which entails a participation on the part of the reader “in the processes whereby individuals, peoples, and entire cultures and societies *figured* their future through imaginative projections

of their wills” (3). This operation, inherently collective because it extends from the singularity of the character to the multiplicity of the readers, inevitably takes us back to the notion of the general intellect. This time, though, the intellect is no longer an abstract category but rather a figure that can be imagined as taking active part in historical events. Price affirms that the mythic structures are the means by which writers of poietic history “allow us to experience the past in the present with an eye towards the future” (5). In other words, even though the connection between images and language is an “infinite relation,” this relation is precisely what can give shape to a myth.<sup>12</sup> In the narrations of Luther Blissett/Wu Ming, the myth is an essential tool, because it is the only form of narration that would appeal to a collective consciousness (or *general intellect*) by concentrating on the history of power and class relations. It is in this sense that the group also attributes a political value to mythopoiesis.

If immaterial labor gives way to an immaterial class shaping its imagery on a rarefied and disembodied multitude that can easily be subjugated within the system it works for, it has already made way for pathologies and deception, because it has succeeded in having the corporeal needs and desires of the new class actually sedated. In this context, then, reaffirming and exposing the corporeality may constitute a step in a different direction. If to accept the imperative to dematerialize results in frustration, to acknowledge the body’s requests (leisure, mobility, reproduction) may create the foundation for a possible opposition, or at least for a material narrative of this opposition. Language and mythopoiesis, then, may expose the reader or viewer to what we could call the general body, the recognition of a corporeal dimension within the intellect-driven discourse surrounding immaterial labor and the cognitariat.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> See, among others, Berardi (Bifo): “What does cognitariat mean?” Virno and Michel Hardt, ed. *Radical thought in Italy*; Lazzarato, *Lavoro Immateriale*; Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude*.

<sup>2</sup> The contradictions I make reference to are similar to those inherent within the core of Italian late Marxist thought, which has given shape theories of immateriality springing from the direct-action context of movement politics and struggle, or the birth of “a tradition like *operaismo* that, despite its affinities to postcolonial thought, was forgotten in a relatively monocultural context: the rapidly industrializing Italy of the 1950s to 1960s” (Neilson 13).

<sup>3</sup> In his article on “global workerism,” Australian critic Brett Neilson claims: Whoever is trying to nationalize the efforts of Italian thinkers of workerism and immaterial labor should be aware of the “warning to anyone who wants to fantasise that there is anything Italian about the so-called Italian effect. Without denying the specific contributions of thinkers like Mario Tronti and Romano Alquati, they are a call to cut the cord of philology and abandon the notion that an engagement with radical Italian thought must fall under the disciplinary sway of Italian studies or encourage modes of address restricted either to the international English or my national language. With their emphasis on workers’ history rather than intellectual production, Lotringer and Marazzi point beyond the reterritorialising game of the Italian state. And they problematise any attempt to reduce the wider global interest in *operaismo* to an intellectual trend, a form of fashion that would affirm that beloved fantasy of the Italian capitalist class – the allure of the ‘made in Italy’ label. No doubt, there is a moment of truth to such claims, particularly as regards the intersection between the global circulation of ideas and the functioning of academic jobs and book markets. But such combinations do not necessarily lessen the critical force of radical Italian thought. (Neilson 15-16)

<sup>4</sup> See Armand Mattelart. *The Information Society, Communication and Class Struggle*; Pierre Lévy, *Cyberculture*.

<sup>5</sup> See Antonio Caronia’s *Il Corpo Virtuale* (the virtual body). The book constitutes an inquiry around the intertwining of body with machinery, and the concept of cultural body that can be found in literary works that somehow deal with virtual reality. Also on this topic: Hardt and Negri *Multitude*, pp. 194-227.

<sup>6</sup> See Virilio’s *The Art of the Motor*. Virilio’s main arguments on art and technology constitute a good point of departure for the analysis of the relations between the body and cyberspace, or biotechnology. It is also one of the first works to present a reflection that is aware but at the same time highly critical of the early enthusiasm (in architecture, urbanism, the arts the academic world) for the supposed endless possibilities of virtual realities and the community-creating power of the newly discovered networks.

<sup>7</sup> See also Virno, *Quando il verbo si fa carne*, ch. 4 “Sensismo di secondo grado. Progetto di fisiognomica” (89-110); and ch. 5 “elogio della Reificazione” (111-139).

<sup>8</sup> Many are the writers who have approached the task of narrating the lives of immaterial laborers. The literature of *precarariato* is in fact an emerging (and possibly fleeting) genre that comprises a good number of young authors and, in spite of its novelty, has already developed a body of criticism. For this reason my choice of texts to analyze might appear reductive. The aforementioned “genre” however, often concentrates on the daily routine of the precarious workers,

usually showing their dependence on media and technologies by submitting their reflections to blog entries, internet searches, online communication, yet again narrating a disembodied class.

<sup>9</sup> The “multiple name” Luther Blissett has been conceived as a collective of writers, activists and performers, and started its activity in Italy -- more specifically in Bologna -- around 1994-5. It is a network of writers and readers: the name Luther Blissett as well as all Luther Blissett’s material, is not just a possession of the group, but may be freely appropriated by anyone, anywhere, then transformed in order to create other texts in different forms (articles, books, websites, music, films, actions). Through collective actions, the group encourages anonymity as a way to escape market and social constrictions. Luther Blissett promotes plagiarism of all texts as a valid method of expression, since, they claim, a progressive abandoning of the authorial name goes hand in hand with the abandoning of the value of originality of the literary work, and would thus enable a type of literary free exchange that can spread through the anonymous internet *as well as* through the traditional editorial channels. In the year 2000 the group has changed name into Wu Ming (“no name” in Chinese). The new group seems to be focused more exclusively on artistic projects (narrative, essays, film, music). As a general description of the newly changed name, retrievable on their website, the authors write: “Wu Ming is a laboratory of literary design ... The new project reprises and suitably modifies many of the characteristics that made The Luther Blissett Project great: radicalism of proposals and contents, identity drifts, heteronomies, and tactics of *guerrilla-communication*. All of these characteristics are then applied to literature, and more generally aimed at *telling stories*.”

<sup>10</sup> The manifesto *Mind Invaders* is one of the first expressions of Luther Blissett. It was issued in 1995 in the form of pamphlet and has been re-published later in a collection of the group’s early writing, *Giap!*

<sup>11</sup> The effectiveness of Wu Ming’s approach may be confirmed by the popularity that their books have acquired with the Italian public in the last five years, which saw the publication of three new novels by the group (*54*, *Manituana* and *Previsioni del Tempo*) and two other stories by single authors from the group (*Guerra agli Umani* and *New Thing*).

<sup>12</sup> In his analysis of poietic history, Price interestingly opposes to two important views of the novel: the Lukacsian definition (and the Marxist tradition thereby following) of historical novel, and the definition (based first and foremost on Linda Hutcheon’s work) of postmodern novel and postmodern poetics. Both these definitions are incomplete from the point of view of poietic narrative. The historical novel, in fact, would be a limiting term that *closes* a genre, while the definitions (Linda Hutcheon, but also others) of postmodernism tend to offer a too enthusiastic (and possibly dated?) perspective in the subversive and anti-totalizing potential of genre-blurring, one that would “lose much of their persuasive power when we consider the totalizing effect of market forces that do much to commodify every postmodern work of art.” (Price 12) In this sense, Price claims, it is useful to go back to the tradition of history as proposed by Vico and Nietzsche (and reprised by modern philosophers concerned with

the role of history as narration, such as Michel Foucault and Hayden White).

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