
Andrea Righi is Associate Professor of Italian and Director of the Italian Studies Program at Miami University. He is the author of *The Other Side of the Digital: The Sacrificial Economy of the New Media* (University of Minnesota Press, 2021), *Italian Reactionary Thought and Critical Theory: An Inquiry into Savage Modernities* (Palgrave, 2015), and *Biopolitics and So-cial Change in Italy: From Gramsci to Pasolini to Negri* (Palgrave, 2011). He co-edited, with Cesare Casarino, *Another Mother: The Symbolic Order of Italian Feminist Philosophy* (University of Minnesota Press, 2018).
Contact: righi@miamiOH.edu

THE CRITIQUE OF THE LAW OF THE FATHER IN CONTEMPORARY ITALY¹

Andrea Righi

Miami University

Abstract

This essay investigates the crisis of the Symbolic Law of the Father in the context of Neoliberalism and debt economy by looking at two approaches by Italian intellectuals: Massimo Recalcati's myth of Telemachus and Marcello Veneziani's trope of Ulysses' bed. As it lays out the shortcomings of both options, this essay sketches the contours of a progressive alternative solution based on the thought of sexual difference.

Keywords

Topology, Sexual Difference, Debt, Symbolic Law of the Father.

Resumen

Este ensayo investiga la crisis de la Ley Simbólica del Padre en el contexto del neoliberalismo y de la economía de la deuda a través de dos enfoques de intelectuales italianos: El mito de Telémaco de Massimo Recalcati y el tropo de la cama de Ulises de Marcello Veneziani. Al tiempo que expone las deficiencias de ambas opciones, este ensayo esboza los contornos de una solución alternativa progresista basada en el pensamiento de la diferencia sexual.

1. Reception date: 18th March 2021 ; acceptance date: 21st April 2021 . This is a revised and edited translation of "Il figlio e il talamo di Ulisse: la legge del Padre e la crisi neoliberale," in *Differenze italiane*, ed. by D. Gentili and E. Stimilli, Rome: Derive Approdi, 2015. Article translated by Matthew Zundel. The essay is the issue of a research carried out within the Italian Studies Program, Miami University.

Palabras clave

Topología, diferencia sexual, deuda, ley simbólica del padre.

One of the primary aims in contemporary political and philosophical reflection is to bring to light the intersection and codependence of the symbolic (or psychic) and the socioeconomic. Only after we put these two areas of thought (too often regarded separately) in conversation can we begin to clarify their crossover. To use Mario Tronti's expression (2006): "The critique of democracy [...] has a father, *operaismo*, and a mother, the *autonomy* of the political. This critique is their daughter". This daughter must grow and help us to grow.

In this essay I will focus on current theoretical responses to the crisis of the symbolic order by investigating two hegemonic variants: one that is moderate, that of Massimo Recalcati; the other conservative, that of Marcello Veneziani. Neither reveal a trace of feminine daughters, thus it will be our job to attempt to bring them to light through a discussion of concepts that feminism has elaborated over time. To this end, I will speak about space in a general sense: as *topology*; that is, a form of consciousness and symbolic processes spatially organized, and discuss how these structures reflect the de-constituent processes of the symbolic economy. I will, therefore, discuss the neoliberal crisis not as a crisis of neoliberalism, but, instead, as an economy of crisis (one that actually produces and exploits crises), which will allow me to bring to focus how the interconnection between the symbolic and the economic may change spatial organization. In fact, our topological situation has moved out of what mathematician Georg Cantor called, a state of "consistent multiplicity" turning into a typology that is shattered, and bent outwards (extroflexed). This shattering opened up a field of absolute infinity, or what Cantor (1967, p. 114) calls an "inconsistent multiplicity". To clarify, the set theory of a consistent multiplicity is that of a Venn diagram; wherein the unity of the elements is delimited by an external foundational element, i.e., the exception that unifies the field. Opposed to a consistent multiplicity, an inconsistent multiplicity embodies as absolute infinity because it is not based on enclosure, but, instead, on a typology that is ostensibly open. This open multiplicity deals with a form of *limit* that is always in excess, most of all in regards to itself.

This crisis of foundations and of boundaries clearly appears, for example, on a geopolitical level. Sandro Mezzadra (2013) writes that today “a differential regime of accumulation seems to assert itself both at the global and individual level of formally unitary spaces; thus recombining work figures, modes of production, and territorial hierarchies”. Using a concept coined by Deleuze and Guattari (capital’s axiomatic substance) Mezzadra concludes that the neoliberal typology “does not merely tolerate, but constantly promotes the generation of social ‘heterogeneity,’ both temporally and spatially”. Similarly, in terms of symbolic declination, we can say that the social normativity, which orders modern society (patriarchy), changes post-oedipally: from a vertically grafted power of separation to a horizontal power of dispersion that governs, more or less effectively, late modernity. This type of governmentality reflects extractive processes of capital at the expense of subjectivity, of social relations and, as we will see, of the proliferation of difference in the form of economic debt.

From De Gasperi to Telemachus

In order to follow the transformations of the symbolic sphere I would like to take up, in a critical vein, the thought of Massimo Recalcati; a psychoanalyst who, in the last decade, has gained a certain popularity. The way in which his terminology was used, without being properly cited, in the 2010 Report on the Social Situation in Italy (Censis) is significant. The report outlines a profile of Italy using psychoanalytic terms that are uncommon in sociological research. In the wake of Recalcati’s 2010 volume, *Man Without an Unconscious (L’uomo senza inconscio)*, the Censis document speaks of the Italian crisis as stemming from the crisis of law and the loss of desire in the collective unconscious. Recalcati’s reflection, which was helpful up to that point, took different directions in his later books, *What Remains of the Father (Cosa resta del Padre)*, (2011) and *Telemachus’ Complex (Il Complesso di Telemaco)*, (2013).

Bringing us to the crux of the question, Recalcati suggests that the crucial problem today is that the institution, insofar as it is a third level guarantor of civil cohesion, is in crisis because it is perceived as intrinsically corrupted; the purveyor of an abuse of power with respect to individual liberty. For the psychoanalyst (2011, p. 42), this is the symptom of a decline, or even of a ruinous collapse, of the “dissolution of the function of the Law of symbolic castration”, the so-called “law of laws”—the Paternal Law. In the time of post-oedipal society, the restrictions and limits of the order imposed by

patriarchal prohibition dissolve and are replaced by a new type of command typical in marketing: “Enjoy it!” “Just do it!”—. The injunction to pleasure and self-affirmation inevitably determines a prefabricated style of life. This trend is already implicit in classical liberalism, a doctrine that has always emphasized the wild spirit of the individual and which has, at the same time, mistrusted the institution as a potential space of a more or less harmonic regulation of reciprocal interests.

Yet, consumerism is no more a distortion than it is a (bad) critique of the preceding patriarchal order. According to Recalcati, the exemplarity of Berlusconiism lays in the fact that it did not permit the satisfaction of desire through possession; rather, it demonstrated an acute cynical relativism that openly admits the impossibility of the fullness of pleasure. This basic notion reintroduces the open nature of the capitalistic process. By reusing Lacan’s analysis of capitalist discourse, Recalcati (2011, pp. 43, 45) affirms that the hypermodern apparatus “consists of an illusory brightening of the object, not in order to make satisfaction possible, but to demonstrate the character of greed; the constant push towards enjoyment as impossible to truly satisfy”, while “intertwining the object’s illusory dimension and promise of salvation with its fundamental vacuity”. Because there is no final possession, one must possess indifferently. On the more abstract level of circulation, insofar as circulation is a gesture towards oneself ending in oneself, possession is erected as an autotelic mechanism. Contemporary hedonistic permissiveness announces the truth of a subject who can’t ever truly possess its object and therefore liquefies the preceding experience of limit—that of masculinity under patriarchy—. Even the subject, then, can be said to have an inconsistent nature; a nature without foundation; rendered so by the processes of subjectification. Yet, at the same time, the inconsistent nature of the subject demystifies those processes of subjectification through an open and inexhaustible drive to consume goods that also consume life.

How do we confront this situation, which creates profit while undoing society? As I was saying at the beginning, it seems to me that two possibilities are entertained by mainstream Italian media. First, the formally “leftist” position: the left which is more or less obviously neoliberal; and second, the genuinely conservative position, which eagerly resurfaces as the *gut solution* to the crisis. There is a third possibility, however, which enjoys less attention with national media in creating public opinion; the feminist one, which I will attempt to briefly outline at the end of this essay. Let’s begin with the first possibility: the myth of Telemachus proposed by Recalcati. The problem is nihilism, which has become hegemonic under a cynic form and better controls the dissolution of post-oedipal foundations. This situation obviously translates onto a political level, or

better, into that of the symbolic dimension. Recalcati (2010) retraces the transformation by constructing a precise historical periodization. If during fascism Italian society is organized as a pre-oedipal structure, given that “the representation of power hinged on the hypnotic and charismatic figure of the Duce”, the first republic instead enters a phase of oedipal maturity. Hence Recalcati’s evaluation of Alcide De Gasperi and Enrico Berlinguer “as figures bearing exemplary witness to the subordination of individual interests to collective ones”². Finally, we arrive at the third stage, the Berlusconiian injunction to unlimited pleasure. Recalcati (2010) writes: “Berlusconi embodies an epoch because he raised the problem of who/what could become the father during a time of its evaporation, a time when its ideal-orientating function was on the wane”. Despite the doubtful periodization, especially considering the rushed attribution of an exclusively pre-oedipal dimension of power to fascism (not to mention De Gasperi’s supreme commitment to anti-communism), Recalcati’s point is interesting for what it reveals: a nostalgic commemoration of the first republic and of the absolute value of the Law of the Father.

Yet Recalcati’s thought outlines a phase that goes a step further than the society of enjoyment, one that distinguishes the present from the immediate future. It is approximately born from a physiological necessity and falls under the sign of the mythological figure Telemachus. Recalcati, (2013a, p.112) in fact, purports that it might be possible to defeat the disorder beset by Berlusconiism by beginning with the question demonstrating how “our time does not seem to be under the sign of Oedipus, of the Anti-Oedipal and of Narcissus, but under that of Telemachus”. This is the phase in which a new generation, embodied by Telemachus and tired of Berlusconiism, “demands that the Law be restored”. But how might we go about doing that? Facing the new opening-dissolution of the subjective field, Recalcati chooses what I call a nominalist solution. Why nominalist? The Law of the Father, the “law of laws”, was also a guarantee of some sort of semantic stability in the chain of signifiers. Yet, Recalcati is an up-to-date philosopher and doesn’t maintain a return to the foundational meaning as such; that is the meaning secured by a logo-centric order. He instead seems to propose what Ida Dominijanni defines as a “weak” version of the father, a father who is no longer the possessor of an absolute truth, but is the executor of an ethical gesture. The father should therefore embody surrender—that singular moment in which the reckless run to possession halts—.

2. Alcide De Gasperi was one of the founders of the Christian Democracy Party and prime minister of Italy from the end of World War Two to the early 1950s. Enrico Berlinguer was the general secretary of the Italian Communist Party at the peak of its electoral consensus.

The slippage of the chain of signifiers is realized in the ethical gesture, in the word that shows the way. The subject can no longer base itself on the transcendent pretext of patriarchy; the word becomes a singular version of the law.

As the concrete example of a law that as such no longer exists, that is, as a concrete application of a faded universal rule, the weak father represents a form of nominalism that recalls Benedetto Croce's theoretical move contained in his *Estetica* (1902). Facing a similar crisis of referents, the crisis of positivism, Croce found in the idea of the pure intuition of art a device for the realization of the Spirit. Likewise, Recalcati (2013a, p. 146) argues that the job of the new father is not to represent the law in general, but to testify to "the word of the law", which embodies the concrete instantiation of a vanishing universal. It is "the act that introduces an impossibility", consequently representing "a singular testimony that brings onto the subject a sense of limits" (*ibidem*). Thus we have returned to the notion of the limit, to a topology that furtively recuperates the patriarchy and in doing so betrays the classically modern nostalgia. The "law of laws" exercises a constitutive allure onto psychoanalysis that is in part due to the fact that it is precisely the prohibition of the Thing, which, coincidentally, is also the Maternal Thing, that gives access to the symbolic field.

This discourse is long and requires a lot of space to discuss. However, we must note that this presupposition is both an undisputed and irrefutable point of departure even for a scholar with demonstrated critical acumen such as Recalcati. The question of "what remains of the father?" must necessarily be addressed by finding some (male) substitute mechanism. Ida Dominijanni (2014a) comments that "it took another myth in order to allow a male son without a father to take power, legitimizing him in some sense". What apparatus might be best for this new myth if not that of Telemachus, a son who remained male, yet young and better suited to administer the contemporary fluidity of a society that has liquidated the verticality of the patriarchy? From this perspective there is a certain congruence with Recalcati's (2012b) explicit support of former Prime Minister Renzi, which crowns the historical periodization I mentioned earlier: "with Achille Occhetto begins a process of humanization and fragility of the leaders who join Matteo Renzi whose charisma seems to decidedly separate him from the vertical force of the father, assuming a more horizontal dimension"³. If power has become horizontal, then even his instrument of regulation and implementation must follow this same

3. As the last secretary general of the Italian Communist Party, Occhetto directed the transformation of the Communist Party into the Democratic Party of the Left.

form. Here again emerges a reconfiguration of Cantor's multiplicity, a patriarchal order arranged as a sort of business friendly "on call employment".

According to Recalcati (2013a, p. 116), in fact, "in the case of Oedipus the Law is an impediment of desire and the father intervenes as if he were an adversary casually passing by; while in the case of Telemachus the Law is that which can bring the devastating chaos of mortal pleasure back to the necessary experience of castration and of desire". Now, independently of political sympathies, for the cynicism demonstrated in his rise to power—and involving the usual authoritarianism justified by the decisionism as a practice of Government—the figure of Renzi little befits the new mechanism that Telemachus embodies. This does seem to be a symptom of a deeper problem in Recalcati's thought. By only considering the contemporary psychodynamics he forgets about the biopolitical passage from waged work to human capital. It is as if we were still in a Fordist referential system, rendered unstable from continual crisis and unemployment. It is as if the movement of capital in search of profitability has never overcome those Fordist structures (e.g. the difference between time and place of work and non-work; the nonproductive appearance of non-producing activities such as consumption; etc.), which regulated the old democracies based on industry before transferring into a valorization of life as *bios*. Recalcati ignores the truth of the economy of debt. This economy extracts value on the biopolitical level (think of "data mining" in social media) and on the moral one: debt invests the being of each individual, who is forced to work on itself hoping for a redemption (or a bail-out) that will not come (Lazzarato 2012). Bail-outs are for those who run the financial machine, Mladen Dolar argues (2014, n.17 p. 18), as these elites are always granted assistance because they are "in the mercy", eternally saved because of "their very position which entitled them to speculation. [...] This is where entitlement to mercy acquires the structure of blackmail, for otherwise the whole economy would (supposedly) collapse". What Recalcati calls "the force of the dream" embodied by Renzi, similar to the "forces of necessity" evoked by his predecessors or slogans such as "Only Monti could save Italy" and "Only Mario Draghi...", is simply a rhetorical strategy used by the neoliberal discourse as it implements a debt economy. Evocations of "the dream" and apparent charisma become congealed and stylized inside the coordinates of such exploitation; a type of control that is not immediately recognizable as a coercive emptying of communal space.

Ulysses' Conjugal Bed

It is not by chance that scholars always come back to Ulysses. Adorno and Horkheimer (2002, p. 35) had their finger on the pulse of the Greek hero's modernity, an example of an individual who "disintegrates the hierarchical order of society", the mythic and primitive world that surrounds him. Ulysses is, in fact, "the shipwrecked, tremulous navigator [who] anticipates the work of a compass. His powerlessness, leaving no part of the sea unknown, aims to undermine the ruling powers". He is therefore the Father of modernity and of tradition, but also of technical power to come. In this sense the continual reference to Ulysses is not surprising in a book that seeks to, in an opposite political sphere with respect to Recalcati, establish the foundations of a new theory of the Law during the time of its decline.

In *God, Country, and Family After the Decline* (*Dio, patria e famiglia dopo il declino*, 2012), Marcello Veneziani takes on the challenging task of recreating a unitary framework, and altogether hierarchical, of the social without ignoring the reality of facts. Here we must note that the catalyst for decline in Veneziani's argument is 1968—an argument that he had previously developed (see: 2008)—in which the conservative thinker triumphantly recognizes the forms of hedonism exhibited by Berlusconi, though he doesn't ever directly cite the tycoon turned politician. To this idea he adds (2012, p. 95) that the daily decline of society also derives from "the liberation of the woman as an independent subject"; an event which he considers simultaneously a "great conquest" and a "dangerous loss". Associating conquest with loss is indeed confusing and is a point to which progressive observers would surely turn their nose up; but Veneziani mentions this point in contrast to the discussions on the left.

Veneziani's analysis of contemporary social decomposition follows the clichés that are commonly brought up alongside the "loss of values"—an abiding God, country, and family—a decline that is due to the uninhibited egoism of late modernity. Thus, even in this case the problem is that of the *limit* as a constraint or safeguard. For Veneziani, once this societal limit falls one is left with a self-determination that descends into desolation. The final outcome is that by having erased "those universal factors in all of their particularity, the only universality that remains, and that is recognized as objective and independent, is guaranteed by exchange and technology, that is, by commodities, machines, and money" (2012, p. 13). Here again we encounter the problem of the universal vs the particular, and thus the problem of meaning. At first glance, Veneziani seems to want to reestablish the old vertical order through a purely voluntaristic act.

However, Veneziani (2012, p.146) is careful, commenting: “renovation succeeds, though the restoration of the status quo less so because the first required inactive bodies while the second involves bodies that were alive”. Therefore, how might we bring back up a framework that is in point of fact waning? How might we operate on the living body of a suffering society (obviously only men)? The answer is an underlying commitment to the idea of the nation and thus infinite patriotic nostalgia. For Veneziani the source of the immortality of patriotism is our social bond. The social bond is the place (origin) that preserves nostalgia for country (*patria*) because it is logically unattainable, but it is also a point of emergence from which one could (or must) still turn his gaze toward in order to reconquer a social order that is not merely restorative. Something vital must therefore remain after the fall and, metaphysically (here Veneziani is in perfect harmony with the tradition of the Italian Right) he affirms that this fountain of vitality can still placate our thirst. God and country are two obvious and classically interactive figures of this process. For our purposes I will follow the third figure: that of the family, since our discourse centers on the symbolic problem posed by post-patriarchy.

So what of Ulysses? If Recalcati claims that Telemachus is content to watch the sea, and Ulysses is too *weak* to do anything but delay action, then Veneziani definitely claims the opposite. According to Veneziani (2012, p. 97), Ulysses’ conjugal bed is a sacred space that survives the fall: “the bed is Ulysses’ assurance after a long time away [...] the roots of the bed comprise of an origin, a pact, and a promise that the infinite circle of life rejoins to itself”. Here the bed is not only the place of procreation so dear to the Church, but also that of the libertine pleasure of the body, which a certain thinking on the right has always courted (for men at least). But through the *topos* of the bed we can better understand the type of theory of truth that Veneziani wishes to exhume: an insistence on foundations, on the voyage as a return to stability, and on the wandering of the sign and the symbolic, which, even though they are inconsistent, find refuge in metaphysical substance. This is because the secular bed demonstrates “the unveiling of truth”, which, “coincides with the offering of intimacy” (*ibidem*). Here is where the universal mythically emerges to ensure the particular. The conjugal bed, therefore, unknowingly evokes the idea that the regime of sense founds itself on the primal asymmetric contract between the sexes (see Pateman, 1988).

We were saying that Veneziani seems to propose this solution by way of voluntarism. In a society based on an advanced form of cognitive abstraction, that which has an equal value in idealization enjoys success. This happens at the moment in which the incitement to transgression and enjoyment crushes old traditional ideals that may potentially

become an indestructible force through their spectrality. As Veneziani (2012, p.112) argues, “turning to the past the family comes out of history and enters into myth, i.e., an evocative tale [...] In this way the past becomes a symbol and celestial archetype”. Here emerges the technology for regulating the present: an ideal past, which, as such, does not become spoiled by any transgression, but which is held at a distance so as not to suffocate us; remaining a tacit authoritative resource by those who hold positions of power. It is a mythopoeic solution; a universal law that continues to lean on a secure symbolic referent, however pushed to the phantasmatic recesses of myth. I may be mistaken, but despite Veneziani’s contorted and incongruent treatment of the past, his return to the *strong* law of the father probably has more possibility of being adopted by the Italian male in crisis than the always nostalgic, but essentially *weak* one advocated by Recalcati.

The Economy of Crisis and Sexual Difference

When faced with such inescapable authoritarian options the solution is to historicize the problem. There is, thus, an urgency to think of and then deconstruct the mechanisms that work across the post-oedipal symbolic and the neoliberal economy of debt, both of which control the extroflexed structure of the new topology. Through both analyses the female difference remains a mysterious and dangerous object. For Recalcati, she remains tied to the Thing (*das Ding*) in and of itself, and therefore is treated as either a pathology of suffocating maternal incorporation or as a victim of the reification (commodities in this case) that the sexual commerce of Berlusconi continuously produces. Veneziani, with his virile and antimoralistic act of nostalgia on the one hand, admits of its existence and speaks (2012, p. 106) of a revolution “that passes through our bodies”. On the other hand, he is aware that female independence creates problems when conjuring up symbolic authority in late modernity. Therefore, the naturalizing myth of the Homeric conjugal bed reabsorbs and neutralizes decades of fighting, which demonstrated just how on this bed fundamental social and economic conflicts took place.

We have thus arrived at the inevitable point of analysis of the present: the question of sexual difference, which is not, in my view, a reductionist way to approach social and economic problems. On the contrary, the problem of sexual difference is the great (repressed and taboo) question, which continues to reemerge with the stubborn doggedness of factual reality. Only a thought that engages with this question may break away from the strictures of the masculine approaches I described. Particularly, in a situation

marked by the existential precariousness of the neoliberal way of life. In other words, cultural work in its exploitative form and through its feminization allows for an existential condition, in which, as Cristina Morini writes:

the asymmetry that characterizes the man-woman relationship from within domestic quarters is exported into the cognitive factory; into the relationship between capital and work, in which the lack of protections enjoyed by labor forces the female worker, and also the male, into a dimension of total dependence. (2010, p. 13)

This results in the diasporic conditions more or less desired by the migrant. There are, therefore, at least two historical reasons within the centrality of female difference. The first is undoubtedly that the feminist revolution in and of itself produced unavoidable material consequences. The second is the pressing way in which neoliberalism imposes itself as a mode of production of subjectivity.

Cues about the structure of sexual difference can be found in Valerio Magrelli's long poem, *Genealogy of a Father* (*Geologia di un Padre*, 2013), a collection of autobiographical notes (mostly in prose) on the life and death of his father, a truly Mercurial figure. Magrelli's description of the terminally-ill father stands out as a case of male sexed thought, one that exhibits the criticalities of its assumptions. Terminally ill and confined to a hospital room, his father would lean on the rail of the bed as to brace up for some effort. Magrelli wonders:

When does one brace himself like that? I racked my brains ... This was the secret of secrets: My father was defecating himself. He was expelling that terrible lump that had become his life. He did not hold it back, rather he suffered because he could not extract it. It was the opposite of what happened in a delivery room. The difference was the absence of the mother. This is why the dying patient must impersonate both roles: the mother and the infant, the expeller and the expelled. One must go back to the other side but the opening is narrow and nobody, indeed nobody, can help you. The point is: you must do it yourself. You must face a topological dilation of space where your holothurian consciousness must bend outwards. There were no laments or contractions. The patient extracted himself like a Klein bottle where the container meshed with that which was contained. (2013, p. 28)

In this passage, the nexus between defecation and birth is purely formal. (Magrelli establishes it via a poetic negation). Magrelli is interested in a liminal space where subjectivity is in excess of itself. He continues: “the son is a thread that must pass through the eye of his growth. The father is what must be unthreaded” (2013, p. 29). Avoiding any nostalgic depiction of the paternal, Magrelli poetically designates the *externality* of the subject, or its very constitution. Hence the comparison between the father and sea cucumbers (holothurian consciousness) that thanks to dilation and contraction crawl on the seafloor while they appear to move beyond themselves. Magrelli sketches a subject that encounters a process of deterritorialization, where identity and the dream of sovereignty over reality vanishes. This explains the metaphor of the Klein bottle and its topology that concludes the passage. Because of the entanglement between the exterior and the interior, the bottle exemplifies the structure of Lacanian subjectivity, one that is marked by inconsistent multiplicities, as we will see. But this topology also represents the space that defines modernity: the exteriorization as the symbolic cut that casts light on the borderline nature of a subject. Because of sexual difference, this subject cannot think about itself as an autonomous, self-centered, and transitive agent—a departure from both the sacred space heralded by Veneziani and the weak incarnation of the Law proposed by Recalcati—.

The Oedipus complex is the solution to the unresolvable contradiction produced by the interdiction of the female and the truth of exteriority. This symbolic removal must be administered because it is, as it were, a point of incommensurability: the true heart of inconsistency that we experiment with daily. The widening of this symbolic field emphasizes the fact that our origins continuously fall outside of the subject; that the same subjective dimension is never completely available to the subject. The processes of subjectification offer two ways to deal with this paradox; two different apparatuses of humanization, which represent logical positions that are not necessarily tied to the physiology of the subject. There is a male position based on the exception of the consistent multiplicity, and a female one that, instead, includes an inconsistency of the field of subjectivity; its “not-all” character; *pas-tout* in the words of Lacan. For Copjec (2004, p. 6), the famous formula for the sexuation of woman as “not-all” is “fundamentally an answer not just to the question of feminine being, but to being as such. It is not only feminine being, but being in general that resists being assembled into a whole”. This element defines the position of the subject as directed towards itself as well as the reality that elevates sexed thought to a key perspective for us today.

The inconsistency of the subjective field manifests itself as a historical truth, but this certainly doesn't mean that we have to prepare ourselves to enter into a more righteous era. On the contrary: the neoliberal crisis dynamically manages our present anomie. As I've already mentioned, the society of consumerism puts into practice an anti-metaphysical critique that is forced into a utilitarian sense. Therefore, it also presents itself as a radical tendency to unseat the patriarchal order against which the nostalgic revival of new forms of paternal law seem futile. With respect to the egalitarian propensity of this tendency, one must look further into *difference* in order to discover new pathways. The problem today is that there are modalities through which subjects, subject to biopolitical control, become *debt* themselves. One must work through this question: why is the space of daily action and freedom configured as an infinite task of restitution; as an indefinite action that thus remains open, which is directed from a simple and inflexible principle—atonement for guilt?—. Not having control over one's inclusion in this dynamic is the new mode of neoliberalism's biopolitical control as a producer of crisis. Debt furthers the point that Giorgio Agamben (2011, p. 44) identified in the spectacular regime of the society of enjoyment: the separation of the subject from its impotentiality; from its ability to not act. On a smaller scale, the libidinal injunction that rules the subject duplicates itself, becoming a global mechanism that seeks to apprehend the value of the economy of debt described by Maurizio Lazzarato (2012).

But, how is this all possible? Is not austerity born under the sign of morality and sacrifice? Through debt as a product of the relation between creditor and debtor, neoliberalism ensures a dramatic redistribution of wealth from the bottom to the top of society. As Copjec (2006, p. 24) says, it is in "the expansion of capitalism and the prevalence of the structure of guilt supporting it" that we continue to find this disruptive disciplining of society. This epochal structure of feeling grafts onto the truth of the inconsistency of the subjective field and of that same subject, since the sense of guilt is no more than our presentiment of "an inalienable and yet un-integratable surplus of self", which the new topology must discipline (*ibidem*). After all, if the "law of laws" is truly in decline; that is, according to Slavoj Žižek (2007, *passim*), if God is really dead, the domain of that which was prohibited will not be abolished. On the contrary, it will extend to all those who are living. The same will happen to a sense of guilt, which now accompanies, like a shadow, every action we make. All the while, for all those who are not already "in the mercy", atonement becomes an interminable task because without criteria and proper measurement it will overflow into the field of life.

The gesture that is needed to begin the work of defusing this mechanism emerges from sexual difference. Here one needs to consider a fundamental concept that has been elaborated by Luisa Muraro: the substitutability of the mother in a movement that is circular, restorative; that doesn't provide for an exchange based, as it were, on loss. With the expression "whomever else in her stead", Luisa Muraro (2006, p. 53) wants to unearth "the perspective of the origins" putting into operation a specific kind of critical unveiling. The asymmetry of sexual difference manifests itself in the genealogy of the mother-daughter nexus, which is foreclosed by the father-son line and worse, by the Athenian father-daughter model in which the daughter has only a father. At the center of the argument, here, is an operation that is not only empirical, but logical. This is a condition of possibility based on "the mother's symbolic predisposition who, so to speak, allows herself to be substituted by others without consequences or without serious consequences for the labor of creation of the world she undertakes together with her offspring" (2006, p. 54). Muraro continues (*ibidem*), asserting that "this symbolic predisposition of the natural mother can be explained by considering that a woman becomes a mother while possibly not becoming one and continuing to remain her mother's daughter, so every natural mother is already a substitute".

This substitution is also restitution. Why? Because the figure of the daughter potentially comes back through the figure of the mother, while, a woman who does not have children remains a daughter *ad infinitum*. Thus, a continuum emerges in which the substitutability is not an abstract concept, but materially reproductive labor: the labor of caring, of introducing and bringing into the world a human being vis-à-vis language (2006, p. 58). This suturing, which can be found within the concept of the symbolic maternal, serves a theoretical purpose. The problem of debt as that of guilt, a famous Nietzschean insight linked to *Schuld* (guilt) and *Schulden* (to be in debt), must once again be upended and reframed as openness to communality and relationality. As Samuel Weber (2005) notes: "To be 'guilty' is thus not to have done something wrong but to be obligated to others. Indeed, perhaps the former is only a special case of the latter" (p. 86). Being in debt to the mother opens up this social continuum. Actually, being in debt to one another is the condition of possibility for togetherness, and thus, the substance of the maternal debt is not exhausted and is not extinguished by economic exchange. The symbolic debt of the mother is thus paid with the coin of recognition, validation, and why not even conflict. It belongs to a social pact that boosts the political force and authority of those who participate in it (see Libreria delle Donne, 1987).

One way to formulate this claim is like this: contrary to what I've just said, the infinity which is dynamically managed by an economy of debt does not necessarily have to be structured as a (quantitative) restitution that has no end. This always results in an excessive restitution in exchange for the mere subsistence of a nihilistically determined subject. At the same time, our debt is not settled through our inherited heredity of our father. On one hand, the melancholic gaze of Telemachus is readily erased by political decisionism, which hides the de-constituent drive of neoliberal politics, while, on a formalistic level, this gaze reduces the problem of difference to a question of reparative mechanisms like the "female quota". On the other hand, the stronger gaze of conservative thought recognizes difference even if it subordinates the female to male superiority. This conservative view, thus, reassures the Italian male in crisis, also risking validating violence for those who pretend to still enjoy a dominating social role. Both views don't take into consideration the truth of the crisis of our modernity. It is within the maternal continuum (and within the different positions that each of us occupies with respect to the continuum) that we can, instead, find a structure of emancipatory re-signification for the transformations that we currently face. In these spatial coordinates one can begin to think about an idea of growth that is not generated through guilt, but rather, one which provides "the activation of a principle of reciprocal empowerment" (Muraro 2006, 64).

This is the standpoint of origins advocated by Muraro. According to Dominijanni (2012), this standpoint

is not the purveyor of gender identity, but an original fission, which dissolves the unity and the transparency of the I. 'Sexual difference' is none other than a principle of not-oneness at the origins of the subject; an embodied dis-unity characterized by sexuality, which, in turn, is neither a mere biological marker nor a mere cultural construct. (p. 32)

This is a principle that, as Lacan teaches, is not immediately tied to the physiology of the subject, but to the position occupied by the subject when facing the world. Obviously this female position is neither outright fact nor something metaphysically positive. There exists a long reflection on the negative and on the shadow of the maternal (see Diotima 2005), developed in addition to the fundamental work of Luisa Muraro, which took as its point of departure the deconstruction of the ambivalence

that the patriarchy assigns to the maternal as a mythology of absolute nourishment or as the threat of obscurity. This is to say that we are far from dwelling on what Diana Sartori (2005, p. 24) calls “maternal liturgy”, which marks the headlong rush forward of the prophets of Italian democracy who herald “the politics of women as the image of societal rebirth”. The maternal continuum is not a new positivistic homogeneity. On the contrary, it points to the incandescent matter of the social body; in all its fractures, difference, and historically determined conflicts. It is the first step to debt as the relational paradigm with others. Or, keeping with Sartori’s words, “it is the gift of encountering the human and worldly condition, the openness to the life that is there and that transcends itself, without transcending that which is there, except by passing through it” (2005, p. 28). In other words, the maternal continuum is the immanence of openness. This is the reason for which the post-oedipal chaos must not push us toward doubling down on the “law of laws”; rather, we should move towards comprehension and the continual interrogation of sexual difference insofar as it is a historical, political, and epistemological fact of the present.

References

- Agamben, G. (2011). *Nudities*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Cantor, G. (1967). Letter to Dedekind. En J. Van Heijenoort (Ed.). *From Frege to Gödel: A Source Book in Mathematical Logic, 1879-1931*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Copjec, J. (2004). *Imagine there’s no Woman*. Boston: MIT Press.
- Copjec, J. (2006). *The Object-Gaze: Shame, Hejab, Cinema*. *Filozofski Vestnik*, 37 (2), 26.
- Diotima. (2005). *La magica forza del negativo*. Napoli: Liguori.
- Dolar, M. (2014). The Quality of Mercy is not Strained. *The Yearbook of Comparative Literature*, 60.
- Dominijanni, I. (2010). Venus’s Strabismus. Looking at the Crisis of Politics from the Politics of Difference. *Iris*, 2.
- Dominijanni, I. (2012). Soggetto dell’inconscio, inconscio della politica. Una traccia. *Filosofia Politica*, 1.
- Dominijanni, I. (2014a). *L'icona Telemaco: il discorso dello psicoanalista diventa discorso di governo*.
- Huffington Post. Retrieved from www.huffingtonpost.it/ida-dominijanni/iconatelemacodiscorsopsicoanalista-governo_b_5554621.html

- Dominijanni, I. (2014b). *Governo Renzi, due punti a latere* [Blog]. Retrieved February 24, 2014 from <http://idadominijanni.com/governorenzi-due-punti-a-latere/comment-page-1/>
- Horkheimer, M. & Adorno, T. W. (2002). *The Dialectic of the Enlightenment*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Lazzarato, M. (2012). *The Making of the Indebted Man. An Essay on the Neoliberal Condition*. Semiotext(e).
- Libreria delle donne di Milano. (2013). *Non credere di avere dei diritti*. Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier Ed.
- Magrelli, V. (2013). *Geologia di un Padre*. Torino: Einaudi.
- Mezzadra, S. (2013). Le geografie della crisi e dello sviluppo capitalistico. Appunti preliminari e ipotesi di ricerca. *Uninomade*. Retrieved from www.euronomade.info/?p=465
- Morini, C. (2010). *Per amore o per forza. Femminilizzazione del lavoro e biopolitiche del corpo*. Verona: Ombre Corte.
- Muraro, L. (2006). *L'ordine simbolico della madre*. Roma: Editori Riuniti.
- Pateman, C. (1988). *The Sexual Contract*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Recalcati, M. (2010). *L'Italia senza inconscio. E senza desideri*. Il Manifesto.
- Recalcati, M. (2011). *Cosa resta del Padre? La paternità nell'epoca ipermoderna*. Milano: Raffaello Cortina.
- Recalcati, M. (2013a). *Il complesso di Telemaco: genitori e figli dopo il tramonto del padre*. Milano: Feltrinelli.
- Recalcati, M. (2013b). Da Grillo a Renzi: Il carisma orizzontale. *La Repubblica*. Retrieved November 26, 2013 from www.repubblica.it/la-repubblica-delleidee/polis/news/da_grillo_a_renzi_il_carisma_orizzontale-71978952/
- Sartori, D. (2005). *La tentazione del bene, in Diotima, La magica forza del negativo*. Napoli: Liguori.
- Tronti, M. (2006). L'enigma democratico. *Centro per la riforma dello stato*. www.centroriformastato.it/crs/Testi/recensioni/guerra_e_pace/l_enigma_democratico.html
- Veneziani, M. (2008). *Rovesciare il '68*. Milano: Mondadori.
- Veneziani, M. (2012). *Dio, patria e famiglia dopo il declino*. Milano: Mondadori.
- Weber, S. (2005). *Targets of Opportunity*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Žižek, S. (2007). *How to Read Lacan*. London: Granta Books.