

THE UN-APPROPRIABLE AND THE MIXING: ON THE ANTHROPOCENE AND MIGRATIONS

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Abstract

This essay aims at analysing the relationship between the Anthropocene as *fashionable* concept and the migrant issue as the *return of the repressed* in the self-absolving Western narrative. First of all, we will deconstruct the mainstream concept of Anthropocene (starting from a well-known essay by W. Steffen, J. Grinevald, P. Crutzen and J. McNeill), showing its disquieting continuity with the conceptual and political devices of Western modernity; then, we will analyse the migrant issue, starting from the problematization of *climate refugee* and Achille Mbembe's conceptualization about the *becoming-Negro of the world*. Secondly, we will address the concept of *un-appropriable* (Mbembe and Agamben): the thesis is that the Negro (in its wider meaning) can become the subject of emancipation starting from new perspectives of "use" beyond capitalist property and appropriation. Thirdly, we will show how the un-appropriable needs a new realism starting from a renewed cosmology and an ontology of *mixing* (Margulis and Coccia). The conclusions will investigate the implications between the two fundamental political questions: *how is to be?* and *what is to be done?*

Keywords: Anthropocene, Migration, Western Modernity, Climate Refugee, Un-appropriable.

1. Anthropocene as a fashionable notion, return of the repressed and blind spot

The Anthropocene, the supposed new era in which the human being becomes a geological force capable of transforming the geomorphological structure itself of the Earth System and that tells how the origin of global warming and climate change is anthropogenic¹, represents at the same time

1 It should be emphasized that the discourse on Anthropocene engages many more experts in the humanities and social sciences than in the "hard sciences", which, at the moment, have not yet accepted Anthropocene as a new era of the Earth System (speaking of *anthropocentrism*, we can't help but noticing how the two "last" eras, the Pleistocene and the Holocene have to do with humankind, the first

a *fashionable notion* that crosses all fields of cultural production², a *return of the repressed* in the complex structure of modern Western rationality³, and a *blind spot* within the possibility of vision of the present⁴.

A *fashionable notion*, but above all a simple and simplified narrative. As historian Jason W. Moore rightly notes “as with all fashionable concepts, the Anthropocene has been subject to a wide spectrum of interpretations. But one is dominant. This tells us that the origins of modern world are to be found in Britain, right around the dawn of the nineteenth century”⁵. One of the dates that is usually presented as auroral moment for the Anthropocene is 1784, the year in which James Watt filed the patent for the steam engine, but the fundamental ideological aspect of this dominant historical reconstruction (presented as neutral and objective) is the fact that the driving forces behind this epochal change are *sic et simpliciter* coal and steam, and when one wonders what are the social-historical forces the answer is “not class. Not capital. Not imperialism. Not even culture. But ... you guessed it, the *Anthropos*: humanity as an undifferentiated whole”⁶. And it is pre-

roughly with the appearance of the first hominids, the second with the “Neolithic revolution” – one could say that these are already in some ways human epochs, *Anthropocenes*). On this point, Bruno Latour’s joke is significant: “the *Zeitgeist* decided by a sub-commission?” (B. Latour, *Face à Gaïa. Huit conférences sur le nouveau régime climatique*, La Découverte, Paris 2015, p. 148 – this translation and the others from French and Italian are ours).

- 2 J. W. Moore, *The Capitalocene, Part I: on the nature and origins of our ecological crisis*, in “The Journal of Peasant Studies”, 44, 2017, pp. 594-630.
- 3 The Anthropocene seems to have the power of the event, the appearance of something unexpected, something like a sudden and unforeseen shock. For a criticism of the idea that only now (Western) humanity would have noticed its impact on the environment see C. Bonneuil, J.-B. Fressoz, *L'événement Anthropocène. La terre, l'histoire et nous*, Editions du Seuil, Paris 2016.
- 4 There is a “blind spot” in the human eye that is “filled” with the information that the brain acquires from what is around it: the complexity of the notion of Anthropocene, which can also be defined as a semi-empty signifier, also concerns this blindness. Trying to determine what cannot be seen in our present is surely the decisive challenge for philosophical thinking.
- 5 J. W. Moore, *op. cit.*, pp. 594-5. The historian’s theoretical proposal is to define this era as Capitalocene and not Anthropocene, because the current ecological crisis would not be generally anthropogenic, but specifically capitalogenic. According to Jason W. Moore, the initial moment would have to be found in the long 16th century, when a series of transformations in the determination of value and wealth were activated, leading to the advent of Capitalism (this is, of course, a Braudelian approach).
- 6 Ivi, p. 595. On this issue Dipesh Chakrabarty never ceases to question himself: he is trying to think of a new possibility to answer the question *what humankind is beyond universalism and differentialism* (see D. Chakrabarty, *The Clima-*

cisely on this last point that these brief reflections will focus: one cannot fail to note that, even in the most important reconstructions and analyses of the problem, not only the word “capital” or “capitalism” seldom appears (it is undoubtedly an extremely significant *linguistic-conceptual taboo*), but often it is not even critically analysed who this undifferentiated *Anthropos* is (does an American have the same ecological footprint as a Kenyan? does the 1% of the richest men who grab 48% of the world’s wealth have the same ecological footprint as the poorest half of the planet who has to be content with 1%⁷).

To fully understand the “functioning” of the dominant Anthropocene narrative – and the way it “locks” the thought within predefined and strongly ideologized stakes – it is sufficient to read and analyse one of the most authoritative and quoted essays on the issue, *The Anthropocene: conceptual and historical perspectives* by Steffen, Grinevald, Crutzen and McNeill⁸, where it is possible to find 1) a self-absolving narrative of Western-led history of the last five centuries, starting with a techno-scientific positivism (out of time by now) based on a sort of *anthropodicy*, i.e. a *linear and non-conflictual* history of human progress (always Western-led) based only on technological development, 2) the revival of the distinction nature/culture and anthropocentrism in its most modern and ideological form (Prometheism/exceptionalism), always poised between the *paradigm of domination* (a veritable geo-engineering delirium⁹) and the *paradigm*

te of History: Four Theses, in “Critical Inquiry”, 35, 2009, pp. 197-222; Id., *Postcolonial Studies and the Challenge of Climate Change*, in “New Literary History”, 43, 2012, pp. 1-18; Id., *Anthropocene Time*, in “History and Theory”, 57, 2018, pp. 5-32).

7 Cfr. C. Bonneuil, J.-B. Fressoz, *op. cit.*, pp. 88-89.

8 W. Steffen, J. Grinevald, P. Crutzen, J. McNeill, *The Anthropocene: conceptual and historical perspectives*, in “Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society”, 369, 2011, pp. 842-867.

9 One cannot fail to be amazed when reading the following passage: “The geo-engineering approach based on this phenomenon is to deliberately enhance sulphate particle concentrations in the atmosphere and thus cool the planet (...) Near the ground, the cooling effect of sulphur particles comes at a substantial price as they act as pollutants affecting human health. According to the World Health Organization, sulphur particles lead to more than 500.000 premature deaths per year worldwide. Through acid precipitation (“acid rain”) and deposition, SO₂ and sulphates also cause various kinds of ecological damage, particularly in freshwater bodies. This creates a dilemma for environmental policymakers, because emission reductions of SO₂, and also most anthropogenic organic aerosols, for health and ecological considerations, add to global warming and associated negative consequences, such as sea level rise”, *ibid.*, p. 858.

of stewardship (at the basis of the various *green new deal* proposals), 3) the de-historicisation and de-politicisation of the human-nature relationship and the desire to establish a possible “geo-power” through specific “geo-politics”¹⁰.

By reading this essay, it is possible to affirm that the *mechanism of repression* is still well resisting – the Anthropocene is read through the same conceptual schemes we read Modernity ideologically with – even though a whole series of symptoms are beginning to be felt and our own cultural and economic structure seems increasingly creaky¹¹. The preliminary thesis of this essay is that the current migration flows represent the most important symptom of this *return of the repressed*. Some efforts of conceptualization are needed.

A first form of social-historical therapy can be activated by reading the essay by Bonneuil and Fressoz, *L'événement Anthropocène*¹². It is a historical work aimed at tracing the way a certain dominant narrative has silenced a series of counter-narratives in the last two and a half centuries: in a Foucauldian style, it is a matter of giving the word back to what has been reduced to silence in the dominant setting. The dominant narrative goes as follows: “we”, the human species, have started the destruction of our metabolic relationship with nature and we have deeply altered the structure of the Earth System *without being aware of it* and the notion of Anthropocene represents the first real overall ecological consciousness, a nightmarish awakening after a beautiful (and lasting) dream; according to Bonneuil and Fressoz, this historical reconstruction would be more or less a “fairy tale”. This “fairy tale” or “grand narrative” (the Anthropocene also seems to be

10 For an overall criticism of this essay, as a manifestation of the fashionable Anthropocene, see D. Salottolo, *Senza il nuovo, quanto può durare una cultura? Tina e la ricerca di una “cosmologia” all’altezza dell’Antropocene*, in “S&F_scienzae-filosofia.it”, 23, 2020, pp. 350-87, especially pp. 353-64.

11 One of the symptoms of this *return* is probably the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic itself. There are many reflections that tend to connect ecological crisis and SARS-CoV-2 pandemic but, both when we talk about “climate” in general and when we talk about “pandemic processes”, the problem is that the classic and mechanistic relationship of cause and effect is not very useful, because the causes are multiple and unravel over the centuries and the effects are not only unpredictable but they are not even univocal. On this issue, see R. Wallace, *Big Farms Make Big Flu: Dispatches on Infectious Disease, Agribusiness, and the Nature of Science*, Monthly Review Press, New York 2016; R. Wallace, A. Liebman, L. F. Chaves, R. Wallace, *COVID-19 and Circuits of Capital*, in “Monthly Review”, 72 (1), 2020, freely available at the following address: <https://monthlyreview.org/2020/05/01/covid-19-and-circuits-of-capital/> (link consulted on 20 August 2020).

12 See C. Bonneuil, J.-B. Fressoz, *op. cit.*

the era of the return of the grand narratives) on one hand has an absolutory function (especially for the West), as we have seen, and on the other (and in close connection) an ideological connotation aimed at deresponsibilizing the Western history of the last five centuries and finding the human being in general as the great actor of this era – this strategy makes it possible at the same time to announce an epoch-making crisis and to immunize against any radical transformation project.

In this article, we intend to approach the question of the Anthropocene – and its relationship with the complex field of migration, i.e. how migration can represent the fundamental political moment in the Anthropocene – starting with two notions: 1) the *un-appropriable*, the possibility of imagining new dynamics of “use” beyond the Western and capitalist paradigm of “property” – an utopia, maybe, but we will test it as a possibility of building an innovative political horizon; 2) the *mixing*, the possibility of thinking, starting from a renewed ontology and cosmology, the world as a complex network of vital relations involving human, non-human and non-living realities, in order to verify the possibility of an original and creative imaginary beginning with a new and productive alliance between natural and human sciences¹³.

Before addressing these philosophical questions, we need to deepen the reason why – precisely with reference to the question of migration flows – the notion of fashionable Anthropocene, but also of Anthropocene in general, is connoted in a neo-colonial key.

2. *On the nature/culture relationship and the ideological crux of the climate refugee*

One of the most discussed questions, when analysing the issue of Anthropocene, is the relationship between nature and culture – whether these two fields should be thought first separately and then related or whether this dichotomy should be removed *ab ovo*. Ecological reflection does not stop problematising this question, and the contradictions are innumerable¹⁴.

13 See I. Progogine, I. Stengers, *La Nouvelle alliance. Métamorphose de la science*, Gallimard, Parigi 1979.

14 We immediately mention one example: Malm and Hornborg say that the “climate change is *denaturalised* in one moment – relocated from the sphere of natural causes to that of human activities – only to be *renaturalised* in the next, when derived from an innate human trait, such as the ability to control fire. Not nature, but human nature – this is the Anthropocene displacement” (A. Malm, A. Horn-

Thinking in an ideal-typical way, we can find two fundamental approaches to the question:

a) *nature and culture/technology as opposite and irreducible poles* giving rise to two specular attitudes: 1) those who believe that nature is object, quantity, predictability, background, cheap resource for humankind who is subject, quality, unpredictability, figure and is capable, and indeed *must*, manipulate the world in a cultural, technical and technological way in view of his own ends¹⁵ – therefore: fundamental fracture, (progressive) “leap” of nature from living beings to human, exceptionalism or Prometheanism, technocratic optimism (up to the geo-engineering proposals we have seen above); 2) those who believe that nature is the truth, the unfathomable mystery, the mother-matrix of all reality and the human being is the delirious traitor, the almighty Frankenstein who creates monsters because of his thirst for dominion over nature – therefore (also in this case): fundamental fracture, (regressive) “leap” of nature, pessimism that leads to representations of “lost paradises”, myths of wilderness, seductions of the *good savage*, but also apocalyptic and catastrophic imaginary, desire for mass extinction, death drives;

b) *the overcoming of the distinction between nature and culture/technology*¹⁶ as ideological constructs displaying why we have never really been modern¹⁷: those who believe that culture/technology represents the human adaptive way of being in the world and who push towards an overcoming of typically Western dichotomies or in *cyborg mode*¹⁸ (a less fashionable option today), or as a rethinking of relationships between human, non-human and non-living, analysed as a movement of co-construction and co-implication between living beings and between living beings and environment

borg, *The geology of mankind? A critique of the Anthropocene narrative*, in “The Anthropocene Review”, 1, 2014, pp. 62-69, here p. 65). On how the notion of nature has played a decisive role in the determination of the knowledge of modernity, as well as in the ethical determination of human, see S. Pollo, *La morale della natura*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2008.

15 This is the position of the ecomodernists, the text of the Manifesto of the movement can be consulted at the following address: <http://www.ecomodernism.org/> (link consulted on 20 August 2020). A criticism of the Ecomodernist Manifesto can be found, for example, in C. Hamilton, *Anthropocene as rupture*, in “The Anthropocene Review”, 32, 2016, pp. 93-106.

16 See P. Descola, *Par-delà nature et culture*, Gallimard, Paris 2005.

17 See B. Latour, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes*, La Découverte, Paris 1991.

18 See D. Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century*, in Id., *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, Routledge, New York 1991, pp.149-181.

(following the indications of the heterodox biologist Lynn Margulis¹⁹, for example, or starting with the overcoming of the representation of the genome as a programme or building plan, thanks to the analysis of environmental implications in the selection of gene activation times²⁰).

In our opinion, if a conscious philosophy must certainly start from this second option, the problematization – in the Foucauldian sense of becoming-problem, emergence (*Entstehung*) and provenance (*Herkunft*)²¹ – is the continuity between these two options in a doubly self-contradictory device, typical of advanced capitalism: those who think fracture and Prometheanism, in view of capitalist profit, have already been practicing (and continuously imagining) human engineering, biotechnologies and geo-engineering, on one side as a function of *enhancement* in those who are at the centre of the productive system from the “cognitive” point of view (self-exploitation, inner panopticon, interiorisation of the exogenous desire of capital, as the Korean-born philosopher Byung-Chul Han²² and the “non-professional” philosopher Mark Fisher²³ rightly note, even if starting from different approaches) and on the other side as a function of *old-style machinic “exploitation”* in those who are at the centre of the industrial production system from the classical point of view (hetero-exploitation, external panopticon, discipline and so on); those who think of the fusion between human and technical find their weapons blunted precisely because global capitalism has already been doing it and the post-human is just risking to become a reality beyond theoretical reflection, only that fusion has not been liberating, as Donna Haraway wished for at the time of her *socialist cyborg*, but even more subjugating²⁴.

19 See L. Margulis, *Symbiotic Planet: A New Look at Evolution*, Basic Books, New York 1998.

20 The reference is to the acquisitions of evo-devo biology, which can certainly have an innovative impact in the way we read the evolution of the species, but also and above all the relationship between organism and environment.

21 We are obviously referring to Foucauldian archaeological and genealogical “methodology”, see on the philosophical-political meaning of the problem of origin M. Foucault, *Nietzsche, la généalogie, l’histoire*, in S. Bachelard (ed.), *Hommage à Jean Hyppolite*, Puf, Paris 1971, pp. 145-172.

22 See B.-C. Han, *Psychopolitik. Neoliberalismus und die neuen Machttechniken*, S. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 2014.

23 See M. Fischer, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*, Zero Books, Winchester 2009.

24 The case of Donna Haraway is symptomatic – in her latest book, *Staying with trouble*, despite the undoubted effectiveness of some theoretical cues, from the point of view of *what is to be done?* it does not go beyond a sci-fi imaginary, in some ways surrendering, of the Camille, a technical fusion of human and animal,

The thesis we intend to propose is that the dominant narrative of the Anthropocene, notwithstanding the admission of the problems related to global warming and climate change, is in perfect continuity with the official narrative that the capitalist and imperialist West has constructed regarding what we can define, with an old fashioned terminology, “universal history”.

This is the narrative and temporal scan: a) at the moment of the removal of the ecological problem, there is the celebration of the GDP growth of advanced industrial societies beyond the Malthusian trap, starting with two elements: the continuous development of new technologies thanks to carbon-steam couple, which has allowed the growth of the possibilities of energy consumption per capita, and the abolition of all forms of common ownership of the land with the annexed privatisation of all natural resources; b) when the reality of global warming and the ecological crisis has been recognised, we can find on one hand the definition of the *Planetary Boundaries theory*²⁵, with the need for technologies with lower energy consumption but without any systemic change in the productive, economic and social structure, and on the other hand the Ecomodernist proposal that relaunches the need for the adoption of nuclear power, GMOs and geo-engineering.

Within this narrative, even if extremely stylized, we can find 1) a story of the White and Western exceptionality and superiority, in terms of technical-scientific, institutional and cultural development, 2) a story that positively evaluates the whole Western-led history of the last five centuries, including colonization, and that completely obscures the historical, social, spatial inequalities that this development has produced and continues to reproduce even in times of ecological crisis²⁶.

in which the asymmetrical plan of socio-economic relations completely disappears. See D. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Duke University Press, Durham 2016.

25 These are the researches of the Stockholm Resilience Centre (see <https://www.stockholmresilience.org/> – link consulted on 24 August 2020).

26 The dematerialization of the Western economy is made possible by the shift of production of goods with high pollution potential to other countries; the computerization of services produces the need for massive extraction of rare minerals, undermining social and natural ecosystems, and at the same time the need for disposal of hazardous waste, that are “sent” to the poorest countries – this is environmental racism which, even in the North, mainly affects communities considered ethnically and socially “expendable” (see R. Keucheyan, *La nature est un champ de bataille. Essai d'écologie politique*, La Découverte, Paris 2014).

Our thesis on the connection between Anthropocene and the migration issue is that migration can represent the most effective adaptive response to climate change if and only if the distinction between natural and human history is overcome, nature and culture are integrated, the horizon of the un-appropriable and the mixing is defined. The question is extremely complex: we are increasingly starting to think that the great migratory flows, connected to globalisation and deriving from the long history of the rise of capitalism, also have an environmental and climatic root. We have been increasingly talking about “climate migrant” and “climate refugee”, definitions (not legal) that, while recognizing a *de facto* reality, immediately present new problems in their “functioning”. If this is certainly a rather important step forward in the reflection on migration, the risk is that, when we talk about “climate migrant”, this definition may in some ways obscure the historical-social conditions that determine at the same time the environmental crisis and these migratory flows, i.e. capitalism and (neo)colonialism²⁷. The risk is *to naturalize* the migrant issue.

In this article, it is not our intention to deepen how migrations obviously have different characteristics (human mobility diversifies from a spatial and temporal point of view, seasonal and short-term migrations and permanent migrations, internal flows and international flows, and so on), and it is not our intention to exalt a *sedentary* socio-cultural paradigm²⁸, which always has a nationalistic taste of *blood and soil*, nor to refer to a too simply enthusiastic Deleutian *nomadism*²⁹; it is rather to try to frame how, within a world that is changing in its geomorphological and climatic structure, the question of migrations can be central. This centrality, however, must be read within an overall questioning of the paradigm of modernity which is both biopolitical and necropolitical³⁰ and produces wasted lives and human trash³¹.

It is therefore necessary to identify an innovative horizon: the un-appropriable and the mixing are the two elements in view of a new onto-

27 See G. Bettini, *And yet it moves! (Climate) migration as a symptom in the Anthropocene* in “Mobilities”, 14, 2019, pp. 336-350.

28 The “accusation” of sedentarism in the social sciences can be found in the advocates of the “new mobility paradigm”, see M. Sheller, J. Urry, *The new mobilities paradigm*, in “Environment and Planning A”, 38, 2006, pp. 207-226.

29 See G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *Mille plateaux. Capitalisme et schizophrénie 2*, Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris 1980.

30 See A. Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, in “Public Culture”, 1, 2003, pp. 11-40.

31 See Z. Bauman, *Wasted lives. Modernity and its Outcasts*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford 2004.

logical and cosmological representation that can help us in this preliminary reflection.

3. *The un-appropriable and the mixing*

The historian and philosopher Achille Mbembe concludes a recent article with these words: “Will we be able to rediscover our belonging to the same species and our unbreakable link with all living beings? This is perhaps the very last question before the door closes once and for all”³². This reflection, one of the most lucid on the issues related to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, refers to a series of aspects of his last book (published shortly before the epidemic spread), *Brutalisme*³³, on which it is necessary to linger in order to grasp the inextricable link between (old and new) colonialism and capitalism on one hand and ecological question on the other. This is the first fundamental step to analyse this link and to start thinking about the Anthropocene in the horizon of the un-appropriable.

What the author has defined elsewhere *black reason*³⁴ represents a constitutive element of the modern Western reason itself: the invention of the Negro-as-irrational and the particular point of view of the Negro-as-object allowed on one hand the Western subject to be founded as a rational self-consciousness that rationally consumes the reality in a process of production/destruction and on the other hand the reduction of every living species, every portion of the world, to its dimension of cheap resource and “place” of extraction (of value)³⁵. Therefore, if race – an invention consubstantial to that of the Negro – represents a device at the same time “theoretical” and “political”, decisive for the construction of the modern reason

32 A. Mbembe, *Le droit universel à la respiration*, in “AOC”, 06-04-2020 (see <https://aoc.media/> – link consulted on 24 August 2020). As we underlined for Dipesh Chakrabarty, even for the Cameroonian philosopher it is necessary to think back at a unified humanity, even under the sign of the species, beyond universalism and differentialism. In a previous work he stated: “From the colonial relentlessness to divide, classify, hierarchize and differentiate, something has remained, some cuts, even lesions. Worse, a rift has been erected, which still remains” (Id., *Critique de la raison nègre*, La Découverte, Paris 2013, p. 19).

33 Id., *Brutalisme*, La Découverte, Paris 2020.

34 See Id., *Critique de la raison nègre*, cit.

35 For the Cameroonian philosopher the negro and the race as inventions “represent two figures of the delirium that modernity will have produced” (ivi, p. 10); the negro in particular “unleashes passionate dynamics and provokes an irrational exuberance that always puts the very system of reason to the test” (ivi, pp. 10-11).

in terms of generalised domination, the obscure *black reason* manifests the reverse – but necessary reverse – of the typically biopolitical attitude of modernity. Mbembe’s reflection underlines how *black reason* represents one of the devices that allowed the capitalist mode of production to become dominant. No *linguistic-conceptual taboo* in this case. The Negro represents at the same time the resource and the waste material on which the predatory logic of capitalist domination and its unlimited extraction of value is nourished; the way by which the living beings (including humans) can always be reduced to thing and then, eventually, to commodity; the connection production/destruction that is at the heart of capitalism.

In *Brutalisme* Achille Mbembe takes his discourse on black reason and necropolitics to the limit: if in the modernity’s governmental regimes, the necropolitical attitude was in any case combined with a biopolitical attitude, in the era of brutalism (which is the era of the Anthropocene) the politics of death is now everywhere – on one hand it destroys the possibilities of living of millions of people, it forces them to migrate and then delivers them to torture and/or death, as human waste and material exceeding global production and reproduction, on the other hand it specularly destroys the dwelling possibilities of countless living beings and the very survival of vital ecosystems. The black reason, in times of brutalism, does not stop working on the *becoming-Negro of the world*, which takes place within a series of processes: the most obvious example is the organization of work at the time of biocapitalism in which not only bodies are taken, as biological potential, in the production cycles of capital, but above all they are conceived as a mere “matters”, “objects”, “commodities” in view of extraction of surplus value³⁶. Every living being thought of as infinitely appropriable is a Negro.

The ever-growing affirmation of brutalisme as *becoming-Negro of the world* – this movement of incorporation of the whole of reality within a single device, this sort of dominant monism – displays the fundamental fact, in times of neoliberalism, that there can be no other than the world of production; that *there is no alternative*, using a famous Thatcherian expression.

The Negro represents the infinite possibility of the appropriability of the world. The *realised Negro* and the increasingly generalised *becoming-Negro of the world* tell us how the un-appropriable can no longer exist in

36 Another example is the theoretical emphasis that is given to the representation of reality as a completely dominable connection through the increasingly complex algorithms of big data: the reduction to mere computability is another brutal aspect of the world at the time of the Anthropocene.

our world. And that, therefore, the un-appropriable necessarily becomes a task for thought, a counter-device with respect to brutalisme: *the becoming un-appropriable of the world* can be the counter-movement, the innovative horizon of meaning capable of orienting renewed knowledge and practices.

A philosopher who has worked around the concept of the *un-appropriable* is Giorgio Agamben, both in the work that “concludes” (but is an “open” conclusion) the whole project of *Homo sacer, L'uso dei corpi*³⁷, and in *Creazione e anarchia*³⁸. The argumentation goes as follows: 1) the need for a positive definition of poverty: the whole Western tradition has analysed this condition only in negative (as lack) and in relation to *having* and not to *being*; 2) an ontological definition of poverty needs a new concept of justice: the reference is to Walter Benjamin who underlines how justice should be understood as the condition of something that cannot become possession – “the fact that justice”, Agamben comments, “is taken out of the sphere of duty and virtue – and, in general, of subjectivity – in order to acquire the ontological meaning of a state of the world, in which it appears to be un-appropriable and ‘poor’”³⁹ represents the revolutionary result of the German philosopher’s reflection, in so far as the fundamental characteristic of un-appropriability comes from reality itself, and not from a certain subjective evaluation; 3) a positive definition of poverty: “*poverty is the relationship with an un-appropriable; being poor means: keeping in relation with an un-appropriable good*”⁴⁰ – the relationship is positive and ontological, starting with a state of things that is presented as un-appropriable; 4) a definition of use that differs from possession and appropriation: the reference is to the Franciscan poverty⁴¹ – “the concept (...) of use (...) no longer designates only the denial of property, but the relationship that the poor has with the world as un-appropriable”⁴²; 5) the realisation of the un-appropriable, in Agamben’s thought, should lead to the overcoming of the dichotomy of *zoè* and *bios*, and even more the possibility of completely deactivating the juridical device of the Western tradition: the use as a relation to an un-appropriable calls into question “the very order of law as based on the possibility of appropriation”⁴³.

37 See G. Agamben, *L'uso dei corpi*, Neri Pozza, Vicenza 2014.

38 See Id., *Creazione e anarchia. L'opera nell'età della religione capitalista*, Neri Pozza, Vicenza 2017.

39 Ivi, p. 67.

40 Ivi, p. 68.

41 See Id., *Altissima povertà. Regole monastiche e forma di vita*, Neri Pozza, Vicenza 2011.

42 Id., *Creazione e anarchia*, cit., p. 68.

43 Ivi, p. 69.

For the Italian philosopher, it is a question of completing the project of an ontology based on the *power-of-not* (whose “hero”, in some ways, is the Melvillian Bartleby⁴⁴): if in the analysis of the Aristotelian concept of potency (*dynamis*), Agamben found the crux of deprivation, from that moment on, deprivation, as *power-of-not*⁴⁵, has been articulated first as inoperability and finally as un-appropriability. In the conclusions of the essay *Stato d’eccezione* it is hoped that the whole ontological-legal-political machine will be deactivated, underlining the necessity of “an action as a pure means that shows only itself without relation to a purpose”⁴⁶, going-beyond any possibility of action that implies an internal struggle between the various parts of the machine (a deliberately anti-dialectic thought) but without hoping for a return to an original state that would have been lost (the origin, as *archè*, is a central element of the ontological-legal-political machine of Western reflection). The conclusion seems to be nihilistic: “the fundamental ontological-political problem today is not the operability, but the inoperability, not the tireless and never-ending search for a new operativity, but the exhibition of the incessant void that the machine of Western culture holds at its centre”⁴⁷.

As Didi-Huberman rightly notes, if “*how is to be?* therefore, and not *what is to be done?*”⁴⁸ is Agamben’s fundamental ontological-political question, it is also true that “the exhibition of the void” risks not being able to activate politics; again in Didi-Huberman’s words: “*making inoperative the political power*: this would be the intrinsic power of the gesture that ‘exhibits the void’ and, therefore – paradoxical task for ‘politics to come’ – *it is itself inoperative as a power*”⁴⁹. In conclusion, “such inoperability, elevated to ethics, politics or ‘life-form’, does not it simply risk resolving into pure impotence, like a great lesson of bitterness erected against all the ‘gay sciences’?”⁵⁰.

The danger pointed out by Didi-Huberman is real, pure impotence is exactly the condition in which we find ourselves in the age of the Anthropocene (the “there is no alternative” slogan that we mentioned above), but

44 See G. Deleuze, G. Agamben, *Bartleby, la formula della creazione*, Quodlibet, Macerata 1993.

45 See G. Agamben, *La potenza del pensiero* (1987), in Id., *La potenza del pensiero. Saggi e conferenze*, Neri Pozza, Vicenza 2005, pp. 271-287.

46 Id., *Stato d’eccezione*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 2003, p. 113.

47 Id., *L’uso dei corpi*, cit., p. 336.

48 G. Didi-Huberman, “*Potenza di non*” ossia *la politica dell’inoperosità*, in “K. Revue trans-européenne de philosophie et arts”, 1, 2018, pp. 25-35, here p. 31.

49 Ivi, p. 32.

50 Ivi, p. 35.

there is an indication in Agamben's reflections – that, from the point of view of a renewed praxis, can undoubtedly not be accepted in its entirety – that may be useful to underline: according to Agamben, the most underhand operation of “power” (especially democratic power) is the fact that “does not act immediately on what humans can do – on their power – but on their impotence, that is, on what they cannot do or, better, may not do”⁵¹.

If in Achille Mbembe the determination of the un-appropriable of the world represents the decisive moment to try to overturn the brutalism of modernity, the becoming-Negro of our relational world, in Giorgio Agamben we find a further fundamental indication (which we adopt dialectically, overcoming the philosopher's reflection but preserving it): activating a new form of work starting from the *power not to do*, e.g. from the creation of new forms of use through a rethinking of the concept of property. If the real justice is the un-appropriability of the world, it is necessary to state an environmental politics starting from this idea and to imagine a renewed cosmology and ontology to be put in place so that the exhibition of incessant void could lead to a (possibility of) re-foundation.

According to the suspicions of postmodernism and post-structuralism, ontology and cosmology represent a linguistic machine with practical performative effects and the possibility of a renewed praxis cannot exist without a renewal of them. A discourse on being is always a discourse that goes from descriptive to prescriptive, a cosmology is always a cosmopolitics: the possibility of a new horizon of meaning and agency. If the reflection on the un-appropriable puts the modern and subjective metaphysical machine into crisis, in order to go beyond the void, the second moment can be represented by an ontology of mixing. The starting point of this discourse is represented by Lynn Margulis' theory of evolution⁵².

The heterodox biologist, in the course of her work that has spanned for half a century, has not stopped thinking, searching and finding new evidences, that the foundation of the theory of evolution, natural selection, cannot be thought starting with individual organisms or the concept of species, but within something that is not determined as substance, but as “function”: symbiosis. At the heart of living reality – from the archeobacterium to the human – there is no irreducible biological and identitary border (individuality), but a relationship: what we define an “individual” represents the expression of essential cooperation between several living realities whose practices produce that surface effect that we call individuality. The theo-

51 G. Agamben, *Nudità*, nottetempo, Roma 2009, p. 67.

52 See L. Margulis, *op. cit.*

retical shift is remarkable: the life-form is defined as a form of cooperation, while the living reality is a reality in which not only the relationship precedes the determination of the parts, but the latter represent ephemeral moments that constantly fall into new relational configurations. There are at least two decisive elements: the cooperation – the struggle for life is not a struggle in the strict sense of the word, natural entities survive because they are naturally cooperative and the genetic heritage can change thanks to the cooperation itself; the relationship – the living reality is a set of cooperative combinations between living beings and between living beings and environment, in which not only the environment produces a selective pressure, but the cooperative life of living beings itself produces pressures (and, therefore, changes) within the environment. Lynn Margulis' theory goes as follows: the starting point is the discovery of DNA and the need to go beyond the fetishism of the cell nucleus, where the identity of the living being is implicitly believed to reside, and to analyse the specific relationship between nucleus and the cell's own environment, the cytoplasm; the fundamental observation is that, in the cytoplasm of plant cells, chloroplasts (elements that carry out photosynthesis) have a very similar structure to bacteria, so the fundamental evolutionary theory shows how the mysterious origin of complex eukaryotic cells is to be found in a sort of community of pre-existing entities that have begun to cooperate and incorporate.

It is therefore necessary to call into question the very biological paradigm that provides pre-packaged answers to the questions *what is life?* and *what is a living being?* and to start talking explicitly about "ontology of mixing". Emanuele Coccia, in the essay entitled *La vie des plantes*⁵³, starting with the idea that we need to face the specific reality of plants⁵⁴, snubbed by the whole tradition of Western thought, from an ontological point of view, believes that the beginning point for a new approach is represented by the autotrophic character of plants, the fact that they transform matter, air and light into life: the fundamental fact that, originally, it is plants that *make world*. The dogma of evolutionary biology – the absolute priority of the environment over the living beings – enters into crisis, also starting with the life of plants: the environment is a surface effect of

53 See E. Coccia, *La vie des plantes. Une métaphysique du mélange*, Bibliothèque Rivages, Paris 2016.

54 Interest in the world of plants is increasing, both from a theoretical and ontological point of view (as in the case of Emanuele Coccia's work) and from an ethical-political point of view. For a reconstruction of the debate in progress and for the rich bibliography that presents, see M. Di Paola, G. Pellegrino, *Etica e politica delle piante*, DeriveApprodi, Roma 2019.

a co-creation, cooperation and relationship, that is played out at a microscopic level within the living beings, which, as we have seen in Margulis, are themselves environment. Therefore, the very distinction between environment and living beings seems to be in crisis, well beyond any holistic paradigm: 1) *the world has the consistency of an atmosphere* – thanks to gaseous exchange and photosynthesis, plants produce the specific world of life, the atmosphere, the fundamental fluid that allows the mixing of the elements and the infinite creativity of cooperation and relationship; 2) *if the consistency of the world is fluidity, being in the world is immersion* – “immersion makes symbiosis and symbiogenesis possible: if organisms are able to define their own identity thanks to the life of other living beings, it is because every living being has always lived in the life of others”⁵⁵; 3) *immersion blows up the distinction between “being” and “making”, because the living being modifies the world by crossing it*: “being means (...) making world (...) every organism is the invention of a way of producing the world”⁵⁶; 4) *the fluidity, the immersion and the mixing also make the distinction between exteriority and interiority unuseful*: “the world is the space of universal mixing, where everything contains everything else and is contained in everything else (...) interiority (being in something, *in esse*) is the relation that unites everything to everything else and that defines the being of worldly things”⁵⁷.

The reflections of Lynn Margulis and Emanuele Coccia can lay the first foundations for a renewed ontology and cosmology: a) *being is making world* – the living beings are builders of worlds just as the worlds are builders of living beings, there is no longer any distinction between being and making, where “making” is at the same time *poiesis* and *praxis*; b) *being is immersion and cooperation* – natural entities are ephemeral forms of immersion and cooperation in continuous metamorphosis; c) *being is function non substance* – the individual as a self-sufficient substance is an optical-theoretical deception⁵⁸ and consequently, on an ethical-political level,

55 Ivi, p. 63.

56 Ivi, p. 54.

57 Ivi, p. 90.

58 See S. F. Gilbert, J. Sapp, A. I. Tauber, *A Symbiotic View of Life: We Have Never Been Individuals*, in “The Quarterly Review of Biology”, 87, 2014, pp. 325-341. It is underlined that “the zoological sciences are also finding that animals are composites of many species that are living, developing, and evolving together”; the theory of symbiogenesis is the radical transformation of “the classical conception of an insular individuality into one in which interactive relationships among species blur the boundaries of the organism and obscure the notion of essential identity”, *ibid.*, p. 326. The essay shows the crisis of the individuality paradigm on multiple levels:

this deception has an ideological function particularly developed in our age of exasperated utilitarianism and social atomism.

4. *Conclusion: how is to be? or what is to be done?*

The passages of our argumentation are the following: a) the mainstream concept of Anthropocene represents the way Western and modern reason continues its process of colonization (political and theoretical) even in times of global warming and ecological crisis; b) the fundamental symptom of the insufficiency of this theoretical and political reconstruction is represented by migratory flows, which manifest the most accomplished form of the “return of the repressed” of Western reason; c) migrations must be read as adaptive forms in times of Anthropocene, but only if we are able to rethink of a series of structures proper to Western reason (the overcoming of the distinction between natural and human history, therefore in general between nature and culture, the definition of the horizon of the un-appropriable and the mixing); d) if the appropriability of all entities is based on the *becoming-Negro of the world* – a necropolitic and brutal element internal (and necessary) to the Western reason (which has become more and more global) – and on a certain conception of use, proper to the Western anthropological machine, which becomes a manipulative will of exploitation and domination, the activation of the horizon of the *un-appropriable* passes through a reversal of these two elements: the first is *historical* – therefore acting so that interhuman relations are structured starting from the return of the repressed, the *Negro* (in its widest meaning) as the subject of emancipation, and the second is *ontological* – therefore acting by claiming the *power-of-not*, by building new dynamics of use beyond possession and appropriation; e) the un-appropriable needs a new realism⁵⁹ that can be provided by Lynn Margulis’ theory of evolution and by Emanuele Coccia’s reflection on plants, an *ontology of mixing* based on three principles: *being is making world*, *being is immersion and cooperation* and *being is function not substance*.

Thinking back about the distinction made by Didi-Huberman – should the political question be *how is to be?* or *what is to be done?* – it is possible to state that an ontological and cosmological revolution of thought, starting

anatomical individuality, developmental individuality, physiological individuality, genetic individuality, immune individuality, evolutionary individuality.

59 This is an expression used lately by the Italian philosopher Maurizio Ferraris: the idea is to provoke a reaction against the dominant anti-realism in philosophy. See M. Ferraris, *Manifesto del nuovo realismo*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2012.

with the above mentioned principles, must reduce the distance between being and making: if *being is making*, imagining new ways of being is *ipso facto* practicing new ways of making – where, as seen, the distinction between making (*poiesis*) and social and political agency (*praxis*) would increasingly fade away.

But the question *what is to be done?* remains as a disturbing background: switching from theory to praxis is the basic problem of all the radical transformation movements of late modernity; a theoretical work may indicate some moments and possibilities, but it is only *the concrete and material history*, always at the faster pace than the hegelian owl of reflection, that *makes world*.