Alvise Sforza Tarabochia, a.sforza-tarabochia@kent.ac.uk

Author Biography: Alvise Sforza Tarabochia was awarded a PhD in Italian Studies in 2011 at the University of Kent, defending a thesis on the thought of the psychiatrist Franco Basaglia. He was appointed Lecturer in Italian at Kent in the same academic year. Dr Sforza Tarabochia has completed a large research project on biopolitics, Italian Theory and psychiatry, which culminated with the publication of a monograph entitled Psychiatry, Subjectivity, Community. Franco Basaglia and Biopolitics (Peter Lang, 2013). His main research foci a part from biopolitical and Italian theory are now photography and visual culture in Italy, especially in connection with psychiatry and medicine.

From the Obligation of Birth to the Obligation of Care: Esposito's Biophilosophy and Recalcati's 'New Symptoms'

Abstract: This essay addresses the controversial status of subjectivity in Esposito's affirmative biopolitics and articulates it using Recalcati's psychoanalytical theory, with the aim of promoting a non-vitalistic affirmative biopolitics. In biopolitical theory in general, and in Esposito's especially, subjectivity has a problematic status: while life precedes intersubjectivity, it is not clear whether subjectivity is regarded as a consequence or as the precondition of intersubjectivity (and thus of life). Esposito acknowledges such an aporia, the subjectum suppositum, but fails to recognise it in his own reasoning, ultimately envisioning a powerful interpretative and transformative paradigm—affirmative biopolitics—whilst leaving at its core a life-less subject. In this essay, I read Esposito's affirmative biopolitics through Recalcati's clinical approach to the 'new symptoms', with the aim of envisioning a subjectivity compatible with the ontogenetic primacy of life posited by biopolitical theory. Ultimately, the aim of this article is to suggest that an affirmative biopolitics, grounded on the promotion of neither a pre-subjective bare life, nor of a lifeless subject, but of a fully subjective life, a living subject is possible.

In this paper I analyse the notion of subjectivity in Esposito's proposal for an affirmative biopolitics in relation to Recalcati's psychoanalytical (Lacanian) theory of the 'new symptoms'. I aim to promote a non-vitalistic affirmative biopolitics through a critical discussion of subjectivity; and mutatis mutandis envision a subjectivity compatible with the ontogenetic primacy of life posited by biopolitical theory. My aim is therefore to advance a possible affirmative acceptation of biopolitics, grounded neither on the notion of a pre-subjective bare life, nor on that of a lifeless subject, but on a more articulated, fully subjective life, a living subject.

It is no longer 2006, when Campbell could quite rightly maintain that 'the name of Roberto Esposito is largely unknown in the US' (Campbell 2006: 2) (and in Anglophone

academia, we should add). The consequence of 'the appearance of Bios itself' in its 'disclosure of how […] categories of political philosophy […] block the emergence of a vital politics' (Campbell 2006: 19) are now old news; Esposito's oeuvre is available in translation and his reflections have been studied extensively. However, not much scholarship on Esposito problematises the vitalist foundations of his biophilosophy. This is surprising: Bird and Short, in their timely and rich collection of essays, signal that 'in the burgeoning English literature on Esposito, a single question is constantly raised about his work: "what kind of politics can come from such an approach?"' (Bird and Short 2013: 2). If the answer is to be an 'affirmative biopolitics', a politics of life, which stems from life itself to foster and protect it – the answer that Esposito himself would probably give – a problematisation of the vitalist premises of such a biophilosophy is pivotal. Scholarship has rather focused on Esposito's analysis of personhood, strangely disregarding the fact that his notion of the impersonal cannot be thought without the biological notion of life, with all the vitalist implications this entails. For instance, while Bird very aptly proposes introducing the notion of 'sociality' in assessing the ethical implications of Esposito's paradigm of communitas – in order to rectify its otherwise rather 'ascetic' and 'cold' functioning (Bird 2013: 45) – he does not mention the notion of life. In the same volume, two other papers address the vitalist core of Esposito's biophilosophy from the perspective of gender: the reduction of a woman's role to maternity (Deutscher 2013: 50) and Esposito's actual neglect of sexual difference – to the point that O'Byrne ironically suggests writing a sister volume to Communitas entitled 'Communitas: This Time with Sex and Women' (O'Byrne 2013: 126). In the same year, Kordela returns to biological matters in Esposito's philosophy and identifies the issue of 'blood' with the conceptual moment in which Esposito eventually manages to 'capture immanence' (Kordela 2013: 165). According to Kordela, that which allows us to grasp the transhistorical nature of the biopolitical paradigm and its logic is 'the prohibition of self-referentiality on the level of blood' – that is to say, the prohibition of

incest (Kordela 2013: 182).

But these contributions do not exhaust the issue of biological life and vitalism in the foundations of Esposito's thought. The additional issue is that, the moment we turn our attention to the life at the core of Esposito's biophilosophy we are confronted with another, possibly more problematic notion – that of subjectivity, a notion that was disregarded not only by Esposito himself, but also by the scholarship on Esposito and, I would say, in general, by Italian biopolitical theory. While life has been unquestionably regarded as the precondition for both intersubjectivity and politics, subjectivity is assumed to pre-exist political relationships while, at the same time, it is regarded as a mere consequence of such relationships, almost as a byproduct of them. Within such a conceptualisation, subjectivity paradoxically emerges as both the pre-condition of any political discourse and a consequence of relations of power, therefore further problematising the relationship between subjectivity and life itself. In Pensiero vivente, Esposito actually praises Italian biopolitical theory precisely for having avoided the above impasse, that is to say for having '"mundanised" the subject' and thus criticised the subjectum suppositum, a 'figure, posited on itself that is at the same time the substance on which it is posited' and which is clearly aporetic (Esposito 2010: 30).[1]

As Tarizzo has it, however, Esposito himself does not completely escape the aporia of the subjectum suppositum:

> A subject, however weakened and cross-eyed' is nonetheless there. Esposito tries to 'substitute the semantics of life to that of subjectivity, reducing the subject to a mere effect of something, that is to say, life, which always precedes it and of which the subject would only be an epiphenomenon (Tarizzo 2011: 436).

Undoubtedly, I agree with Tarizzo when he maintains that 'the more we venture on this road […] the more we fall into a metaphysics of life' (Tarizzo 2011: 436). In brief: even if we

[1] All citations from Italian sources have been translated by the author of this essay.

want to deal solely with Esposito's formulation of impersonal politics, we cannot disregard that his is a biophilosophy, a philosophy of biopolitics whose ultimate aim is to think biopolitics affirmatively. The moment we turn our attention to the life that is at the core of this reflection, the notion of subjectivity rears its ugly head as an uninvited guest shaking the very scaffolding of Esposito's affirmative biopolitics and revealing its concealed metaphysical vitalism: thus, ultimately confirming that affirmative biopolitics and thanatopolitics do not rest on very different ontological premises after all.

Subjectivity: The uninvited guest of biopolitics (and what we can do about it)

In his famous theorisation, Esposito posits that the communitas is grounded on the munus of subjectivity itself, a gift that, in his own words, 'cannot be not given'. If life – logically, ontologically and ontogenetically – precedes subjectivity, what is it that is donated to form the community? And if immunitas – the avoidance of the munus – is not exactly the opposite of the communitas but its necessary counterpart, a certain amount of which is fundamental for the wellbeing of the community, how can this subject-less life immunise itself? Does this life 'have an opaque sense of self and a dark will of sustenance and self-preservation that is preliminary and presupposed to the process of immunisation?' (Tarizzo 2011: 436). From the ontological idea that gestation and birth metaphorically epitomise the perfect permeability of communitas and immunitas, Esposito concludes that on an ethical level, birth cannot be not given – implicitly overlapping birth and the munus. Such primacy accorded to birth, and the consequent establishment of a metaphysics of life, is not without severe consequences. As Chiesa has argued, Esposito's affirmative biopolitics reaches a 'bio-theo-political' dead end, sanctioning very clearly the 'obligation of birth' and thus drawing dangerously close to extreme pro-life stances (Chiesa 2011: 110).

The tension between an implicit, 'cross-eyed' and overshadowed semantics of

subjectivity and an imposing and enthusiastic semantics of life persists in Esposito's thought well beyond his germinal works Communitas and Immunitas. The shadows of the onto-ethical obligation of birth and the bio-theo-political drift still fall on his recent book Le persone e le cose. Here, he advocates 're-opening the horizons of the mind to the vitality of the body' in order to re-establish a 'contact with the very origins of life':

> Reason prevails on the body inasmuch as 'one's own' [il proprio] prevails on the common, the private on the public and the individual profit on the collective interest. This happens when the urge to immunity prevails on the passion for the community. To protect themselves, human beings compress the power of the body within control apparatuses that bond them to the established order of the time. (Esposito 2014: iii, 2)

It is as if life possessed some kind of implicit altruism that could exuberantly quench the egotistic whims of individual subjectivity. In Le persone e le cose Esposito mentions the notion of the 'subject' only in passing, in reference to other philosophers (such as Locke, Descartes and Kant), but does not thematise it, invoking as the only possible future for the community the enthusiastic acceptance of a (de-subjectivised) vitalism of the body.

Thus, even if the semantics of subjectivity, as Tarizzo notes, has been overshadowed by the overgrown apparatus of the semantics of life, it is still there, however 'cross-eyed', even later in Esposito's work on personhood. This is why my reading of Esposito's biophilosophy starts from subjectivity rather than avoiding it. In other words, instead of trying to read Esposito's thought in between the contrasting dynamics of (absent) subjects and (exalted) life, I believe that it is possible to identify a notion of the subject that does not overshadow life, and that could even make life – biological life – a central feature of subjectivity: a subjectivised life, a subjectivity for the biopolitical age.

My purpose, on a much smaller scale, is in line with Breu's: to contribute to the theorisation of a 'leftist ontology', capable of mending the poststructuralist criticism of the biological yet at the same time recognising that the materiality of the biological poses limits to

discursive constructions (Breu 2009: 187–188). Breu looks to Lacan's psychoanalytic theory to solve the surprisingly idealistic deadlock – as he calls it – faced by biopolitical theories. Breu thinks that Lacan can offer, 'perhaps uniquely among contemporary theoretical perspectives, […] a theory of the relationship between language and materiality that does not simply or immediately subsume the latter term to the former category or vice versa' (Breu 2009: 189). The theory thus enables us to 'atten[d] to the productive and constitutive work done by language via the symbolic' while, at the same time 'theorising the limits of the linguistic and the equally constitutive dimensions of desire and materiality' (Breu 2009: 193).

To this end, I will turn to Lacan's theory of the ontogenesis of the subject, especially as it was received by the Italian psychoanalyst Massimo Recalcati. Lacan claims that we, as humans, come into being as helpless creatures, anatomically inadequate for surviving in the world. This condition sets in motion a process that indissolubly ties subjectivity with otherness – the ontogenesis of the subject. Life and subjectivity – in the homo sapiens – are thus co-substantial (or, better still, co-in-substantial): life does not persist without the advent of subjectivity qua otherness, which emerges to make up for a constitutive deficiency in human biology, and in human life itself.

By reading Esposito's proposal for an affirmative biopolitics through Lacan's theory of the subject, I hope to show that the bio-theo-political impasse and, ultimately, metaphysical vitalism, can be avoided in theorising an affirmative and immanent declension of biopolitics.

While it is only in his latest book Le parole e le cose that Esposito refers more extensively to Lacan, echoes of Lacanian theory sound throughout his oeuvre. This is all the more evident if we reconstruct not so much Esposito's relationship with Lacan, but rather his dialogue with Recalcati. It is by directly referring to the latter's work that Esposito proposes rather clear correspondences between his system of thought and Lacanian psychoanalysis. In a footnote in Pensiero vivente, Esposito defines Recalcati's *L'uomo* senza inconscio as 'a

precious re-elaboration in psychoanalysis of the paradigm of immunisation' (Esposito 2010: 248n). More recently, in reviewing Recalcati's Jacques Lacan, Esposito hints at a correspondence between his own paradigm of immunisation and Lacan's theory of the ontogenesis of the subject. On the one hand, Esposito equates the excess of immunisation to an 'inane attempt at mending one's original fault'. On the other, he mentions a possible correspondence between communitas and the symbolic order, 'understood as a request for reciprocal recognition, as the law of speech and gift' (Esposito 2012). Finally, in Le persone e le cose, Esposito directly engages with Lacan's theory, especially with his notion of Das Ding in connection with the Real (Esposito 2014: ii, 5).

For his part, Recalcati often mentions Esposito's immunitas, seemingly as a paradigm for interpreting intersubjective psychoanalytical notions in a wider socio-political key. He claims that Esposito elaborates, on a political level, the 'paradox of a tendency towards self-preservation that flows into the self-destruction by incentivising self-preservation itself' (Recalcati 2010: V, n3). Recalcati's proposal for a 'clinic of emptiness' – which is his proposal for a psychoanalytical clinical approach to 'new symptoms' such as anorexia, bulimia, addictions, etc. – could even be read, I contend, as a clinical approach to the extreme consequences of an excess of immunisation on the single individual subject. More recently, Recalcati openly declared his esteem for Esposito's biophilosophy, which, in his review of Le parole e le cose, he considers as 'one of the most original and innovative philosophical explorations of the past twenty years' (Recalcati 2014).

Articulating Recalcati's Lacanian notion of the subject with Esposito's paradigm of immunisation enables us to achieve a twofold result. On the one hand, and most importantly, it enables us to shift the focus of biopolitical paradigms, bioethical debates, and with it, our understanding of biological normativity, from the life-in-potency of the foetus to a life-in-act, a living, self-conscious, subjectivised life. This shift in premises ultimately leads, I believe, to

rephrasing Esposito's onto-ethical obligation of birth, the ur-protection of a transcendental life-in-potency, into an ethical obligation of care, the protection of an immanent subjectivised life always-already thrown into a communal relationship. This, I believe, could partially address the still very actual need to theorise an affirmative biopolitics, that is to say a politics capable of channelling biological normativity to fostering and protecting life without appealing to a dogmatic metaphysics of life.

On the other hand, on a more theoretical level, the Esposito/Recalcati articulation shows that Italian theory, far from exclusively being a political philosophy, has also had a strong influence on Italian psychoanalysis, to the point that a certain reception of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory (e.g. Recalcati's) could be considered an integral part of the field of 'Italian theory'. This, in virtue of the patent connection it establishes between bare life and subjectivity and of its rather humanist, even 'operational' reading of Lacan's theory – which some theorists might define as 'dynamic usage', whether positively (Rabaté 2004: xiv) or negatively (Chiesa 2007: 3).

Communitas and immunitas: The genesis of the onto-ethical obligation of birth

Famously, Esposito derives his interpretation of communitas from its etymology. Communitas is composed of cum- [with], 'that which is not one's own' and munus, the gift that 'is given because it must be given and it cannot be not given' (Esposito 1998: xii, xiv). The munus is the gift 'of [an] initial property [:] subjectivity' (xvi). Individuals are not 'independent atoms' of the community, ready to realise themselves upon establishing a relationship with the other. On the contrary, the 'individual subject, undivided, far from being an unaware part of the community, is precisely what hinders it' (Esposito 1998: 74).

Immunitas is instead the avoidance of the munus. On the one hand, this can be understood on a socio-political level, as the 'original autonomy, or [...] a subsequent exemption

from a previously incurred debt' (Esposito 2002: 8). On the other hand, immunitas can be read through biomedical language as a 'condition of resistance of the organism towards the risk of contracting an illness' (Esposito 2002: 9). If we consider both levels (socio-political and biomedical) simultaneously, it becomes clear that as much as there is no un-immunised body, there equally cannot exist a communitas without a certain amount of immunitas. Like the human body, the community needs some level of protection and immunisation: on a macro-social level, this is a condition of affirmative biopolitics. The social body is barely immunised from both the outside and the inside: it is 'porous' (Esposito 2008: 26). On the other hand, though, the risk is that 'immunisation, which is necessary to protect life, if brought beyond a certain threshold, ends up disallowing it' (Esposito 2005: 161). On a macro-social level, this is the opposite of an affirmative biopolitics: it is thanatopolitics, an exertion of ruthless biopower. With the paradigm of immunisation, Esposito seals the overlapping of biological and socio-political levels: the community and the living body work (or should work) in the same way.

According to Esposito, gestation, pregnancy and birth epitomise the porous balance between communitas and immunitas, the ideal state in which immunisation and community permeate each other; and immunity serves as a protection to the community and not to its dispersion:

> Pregnancy is precisely the diversity of two organisms that come into contact to protect the product of their union. The mother is different from the child and the child from the mother. Yet this diversity is the spark of life. [His] own mother, [...] carried him inside herself fighting against him in the tension of two different and opposed immune systems […]. Birth constitutes the original point in which immunitas is one and the same with communitas [...]. The newborn is the singular, but also infinitely plural, bearer of the munus. (Esposito 2005: 165, 166)

Drawing on these considerations, Esposito reaches ominous conclusions, eventually sanctioning the sacredness of pre-natal life and, as Chiesa contends:

> Suggesting that the acknowledgement of biological birth as a binding gift is by itself a necessary and sufficient condition for the foundation of the humanitas of

> man, his symbolic—and ultimately blessed—communitarian dimension. And this is so because, before becoming the object of any bio-ethical legislation, birth and the ontological obligation it carries with it directly issue from "the force of life itself", the ur-protection of a life that is otherwise as yet unprotected. (Chiesa 2011: 110)

If not a Catholic pro-life position outright, this at least indicates the presence of a strong metaphysical vitalism in Esposito's affirmative biopolitics. Is it possible to think biopolitics affirmatively without necessarily regarding life as blessed and birth as an onto-ethical obligation? In other words: is affirmative biopolitics necessarily vitalistic and pro-life, and does it have to forsake the notion of 'subjectivity' entirely?

Dealing with the notion of subjectivity in Esposito's biophilosophy is crucial for questioning the prescriptive drift of his affirmative biopolitics. Subjectivity can no longer be regarded as that which is paradoxically donated – as the munus – for the coming into being of the community: this would be an aporetic subjectum suppositum, which comes into being the moment it has to be donated. This theoretical operation eventually leads to dismissing, as Esposito does, the subject as that which is either donated or that which hinders the community, at the same time elevating life (as birth) to the beating metaphorical heart of communal existence. Yet the reintroduction of subjectivity into the discourse would entail neither ascribing a strong substantive existence to the subject, nor denying that it indeed comes into being the moment it is donated, nor abstracting it from its biological life. To maintain these premises while at the same time returning the subject to a central foundational and non-aporetic role in the coming-into-being of the community is to think subjectivity in terms of continuous ontogenesis rather than static (and possibly transcendental) ontology. A re-thought immanent and living subjectivity could then take the place of the transcendent notion of life that is the beating heart of the community.

In order to think of the subject in such a way, almost as a conceptual bridge between bare life and the political, I believe it is first necessary, as previously mentioned, to look at

Lacan's theory of the ontogenesis of the subject.

Subjectivity and bare life in Lacan

According to Lacan, the whole process of the ontogenesis of the subject is set into motion because humankind is born biologically premature. And because of this initial inadequacy, which will then be elevated to 'lack' upon entrance into the symbolic order, the human being is caught up in an alienating relationship with its own bodily image first, and then with the Other, from which it will never recover. In other words, this initial inadequacy constitutes the subject in its intrinsic characteristic of being secondary to intersubjectivity.

The infant's organic inadequacy involves a radical vulnerability. Unlike most primates, the infant cannot provide for itself, and depends on the other to fulfil its elementary needs. Communicating these needs is hence the key to primary survival: needs become demands. The infant must tell the Other (the first nourishing figure, usually the mother) what it needs, so that the Other can provide it. This is the central moment in which biological inadequacy becomes lack, the moment that turns the state of biological inadequacy in which we come into being into a linguistic request; the bridge, if you will, between nature and culture, between the organic bare life and bios.

In Seminar XI, Lacan spells out this ontogenesis with two 'operations': Alienation (which involves also aphanisis – fading, disappearance) and Separation. Through alienation in language, the first moment of the ontogenesis of the subject, the subject appears only 'in the Other, in so far as the first signifier […] emerges in the field of the Other and represents the subject for another signifier, which other signifier has as its effect the aphanisis of the subject' (Lacan 1998: 218). The signifier manifests the subject to the Other but in doing so it also reduces 'the subject in question to being no more than a signifier, to petrify the subject in the same movement in which it calls the subject to function, to speak, as subject' (Lacan 1998:

207). Alienation, that is, 'condemns the subject to appearing […] on the one side as meaning, produced by the signifier [and] on the other as aphanisis' (Lacan 1998: 210). Lacan gives a simple explanatory example. A mugger attacks a person and exclaims: 'Your money or your life!' If one chooses to keep the money, one dies, thus losing both life and money. If one chooses to live, one chooses a deprived life, a life deprived of money (Lacan 1998: 210). According to Lacan, being and meaning (to be and to be a signifier in the field of the Other) are in the same logical relationship as money and life in the above crime: in coming into being as a subject, one loses being (a substantive, independent, imaginary and possibly psychotic subjectivity) in order to mean, that is, to become a signifier in the field of the Other. If one were to choose being instead of meaning, one would cease to exist (thus it is a paradoxically forced choice): this is the inaugural operation of the subject as manque-à-être, want-to-be, lack-of-being.

However, if 'there is no subject without, somewhere, aphanisis of the subject' (Lacan 1998: 221), the operation of alienation/aphanisis only sets into motion the ontogenesis of the subject. We still need to add a third moment to complete the logic of Oedipus. A third element enters the stage before the advent of the non-psychotic subject: the Name-of-the-Father – the function that effects separation in the relationship between the child and the mother. In Seminar XI, in relation to the diptych of alienation/aphanisis, Lacan calls this further 'operation' separation: 'that by which the subject finds the return way of the vel of alienation [and] finds, one might say, the weak point of the primal dyad of the signifying articulation' (Lacan 1998: 218). In other words, in separation, one finds out that the Other is also lacking (that is to say: the Other desires) and that the object of the Other's desire is oneself. Thus the subject finds out that he himself can be lacking to the Other, and therefore that it is possible to fade – aphanisis – from the field of the Other. The subject eventually lodges his own manque-à-être at the level of the signifying chain: the lack of the Other and the lack of the subject overlap. Separare: to

separate oneself; but also se-parare: to engender oneself, says Lacan.

Simplifying, with alienation the subject avoids hallucinating the filling of his own manque in an idyllic, primeval, imaginary wholeness – which never really existed since, after all, lack rests on an unsurmountable biological inadequacy. With separation, the subject avoids the opposite: to protect oneself from the aphanisis of being in a complete fusion with the all-caring Other: neither solipsism nor a return to the womb can in fact fill the manque. Nothing can. The subject thus comes into being as a desiring subject, desiring specifically insofar as it lacks being. Alienation and separation inaugurate the process of subjectification qua desire of the Other that will accompany the individual throughout his life, almost as a neoteny, in which the original biological inadequacy of the infant continues to dwell. That the subject undergoes a separation from the Other means that the subject cannot blissfully glide into a complete fusion with the Other, thus avoiding his constitutional inadequacy and the symbolised lack: he must separate and – as Lacan says – paradoxically 'return' to his own aphanisis and constantly attempt to 'overcome it' as a desiring subject. That might be said to be the ethics of desire: facing one's own aphanisis cannot be avoided and facing it means to desire, to displace the unfillable emptiness of aphanisis in a lack. In other words, one is only insofar as one is with and within the Other.

Before returning to Esposito and drawing out some correspondences between Lacan's formulation and Esposito's biophilosophy, I still want to briefly examine two psychoanalytical ideas: Lacan's theory of the four discourses, which allows me to connect the theory of the ontogenesis of the subject to macro-social and political levels, and Recalcati's clinical application of this theory – since it is precisely with and through Recalcati's clinical work that Lacanian theory finds its point of entrance and contact with Esposito's biophilosophy.

Recalcati: Psychoanalysis in the discursive regime of the capitalist

Recalcati's clinical interest lies in the treatment of so-called 'new symptoms', such as eating disorders and addictions – 'new' not because they did not exist in the past, but because their prevalence has considerably increased in recent years. According to Recalcati, the reason for this increase is a radical shift in social relations, namely the rise of the discourse of the capitalist or better still, the entrance into the discursive regime of the capitalist. In Seminar XVII, Lacan (2007a) posits that macro- and micro-social relations can be reduced to four fundamental discursive models (Master, University, Analyst, Hysteric). A discourse has four elements (Master Signifier, the Other, the object petit a, and the barred subject). These can occupy one of four invariable positions, which are that of the agent, other, truth, and product/loss, thus generating a new discourse for each position they occupy. The elements do not roam freely in these positions; they undergo orderly permutations: a revolution in the discursive regime beyond a shift from one of the four discourses to the next in the chain of permutations is not possible. In seminar XVIII, however, Lacan (2007b) introduces a fifth discourse, that of the capitalist, noting therefore a profound change in the discursive paradigm of the contemporary era that does not follow the rules of permutation of the previous four discourses.

According to Recalcati, Freudian psychoanalysis – before the discourse of the capitalist, that is – dealt with neurotic symptoms within the social theory that Freud expounded in Civilisation and its Discontents and that could be interpreted through Lacan's theory of the four discourses. Simply put, in order to be part of the social whole, the subject has to partly relinquish his drives, namely renouncing their immediate satisfaction, to change them, and subject them to social control and acceptance. The compensation for this sacrifice is on the one hand participation in civilisation, and on the other hand the paradoxical enjoyment of sacrifice itself: foregoing satisfaction becomes a paradoxical (and Kantian) mode of enjoyment.

In the discursive regime of the capitalist, however, the imperative is not to relinquish enjoyment for the greater good, but to indulge in it. 'Enjoy!' is the new imperative. The position

of the agent – in the discursive structure – is occupied by the barred subject (qua consumer), who addresses the Market as master signifier. Through the Market, the subject can ask 'knowledge', i.e. science and technology, to produce objects to be consumed, i.e. commodities, that is to say: jouissance. But in the position of truth is the master signifier, which urges the subject to enjoy. Without going into detail – many have written on this discourse, arguing about whether it is a fifth discourse or if it inaugurates a new universe with four new discourses, as Bryant (2008) seems to suggest – let me stick with Recalcati's reading: 'in the discourse of the capitalist [...] the dominant agent is the subject who feverishly demands new objects of jouissance, it is the subject whose lack is reduced to the status of an avid emptiness that requires only its own compulsive filling' (Recalcati 2011: 20):

> The object not only relates no longer to the needs of the subject, but it is also unrelated to his own desire. The object, instead of satisfying or tending to satisfy, engenders new pseudo-lacks so that the demand for new objects continues to reproduce itself infinitely. The discourse of the capitalist opens up in the subject artificial holes, and, at the same time, it offers the illusion that there are objects capable of filling them. (Recalcati 2011: 20)

Drawing on Adorno, Recalcati concludes that this discourse produces an effect of extreme individualisation – it produces a monadic individual: 'an unlimited affirmation of the individual that ends up sanctioning the suppression of subjectivity, overturning it into its opposite. The "unleashed" individual [...] for whom everything becomes possible, defeats the subject's bond with the polis' (Recalcati 2010: xi, 2).

In order to understand the effects of the entrance of the capitalist into the discursive regime, Recalcati introduces a dichotomy between the subject and the individual into his psychoanalytic theory. In strict Lacanian terms, an 'individual' should rather be considered a psychotic subject, in that it faces aphanisis without symbolic mediation and substitutes it (not consciously of course) with a 'profusion […] into which the central signal of a possible mediation is introduced in a deformed and profoundly asymbolic fashion' (Lacan 1997: 87).

However, for Recalcati it is important to introduce a non-psychotic notion of individuality, in order to account for a mode of subjectification (or more properly de-subjectification) that he considers typical of the discourse of the capitalist. The hyperindividualisation of subjectivity in the discursive regime of the capitalist consists of the emergence of a profound distinction between individuality and subjectivity, individualism and subjectification: there is no such thing, Freud and Lacan show Recalcati and us, as an individual as such, an undivided subject; there is no such thing as a monadic individual subjectivity because subjectivity is always hetero-constructed. Individuality and subjectivity are thus at odds: where there is individuality there is no subjectivity, that is to say, in a dynamic framework, where there is individualisation there is no subjectification: embracing a paradigm of hyper-individualism means to relinquish subjectivity and, with it, the intersubjectivity with which it is constitutionally interlinked. This is precisely the tendency in the discursive regime of the capitalist: an urge towards individualisation – thus in psychoanalytic terms, an urge towards the delusion of an independent and undivided 'subject'.

> The subject is not an individual, first of all because it is not undivided, but constitutionally divided. This division of the subject implies, at the same time, its loneliness, but also, differently from the individualistic monad, its non-self-sufficiency, hence its bond to the Other. [...] As manque-a-être, caused by the action of the Other, the subject turns to the field of the Other to cure it, to alleviate it. In this sense, Lacan can affirm that the desire of the subject is always desire of the Other. Here we might be touching the most important point of the difference between subject and individual: as manque-a-être and desire, the subject, differently from the imaginary compactness of the monadic individual, is open onto the Other, hence it is anti-monadic par excellence. (Recalcati, 2010: xi, 2)

However, psychoanalysis does not imply a 'structuralist erasure of the subject, a reduction to a mere effect of the signifier in the signifying chain', but tries to maintain 'the singular discontinuity' in spite of and within the subject's 'dependence of the action of the structure' (Recalcati 2010: iii, 2).

In the regime of the discourse of the capitalist, therefore, new symptoms emerge that

are no longer metaphorical expressions of repressed desires and traumas. Rather, they let a disquieting absence emerge – an emptiness, a void – in which the subject precipitates or from which it runs, terrorised – and, in topological terms, this void appears in that place at the ontological and ontogenetic centre of the subject where there was lack. This emptiness can no longer sustain desire in that it is lack (of being) that causes desire to arise (Lacan 1991: 139) as a means not to fill or disregard lack itself but to subjectivise it, to juxtapose it with the lack of the Other and engender the subject qua intersubjectivity. 'Desire', says Recalcati, 'does not feed itself so much on objects as much as it feeds on bonds' (Recalcati 2011: 22): desire is always desire of the Other.

Several questions certainly remain open at this point: is the new psychopathology of everyday life not neurotic but psychotic, as Recalcati seems to suggest? Is Recalcati's message somewhat messianic: are we witnessing the end of times, or at least the end of the subject of the unconscious and the end of psychoanalysis as we know it? In spite of the legitimate doubts Recalcati's theory may kindle, these questions cannot be answered in the limited space of this paper.

Following Recalcati's argument, we see that the main cause of the new symptoms within the discourse of the capitalist is the dissolution of the community, and its related individualistic (thus anti-subjective and consequently anti-psychoanalytical) forma mentis:

> The hypermodern era is the era of atomised individualism that imposes itself on the community, it is the era of the narcissistic cult of the Ego and of the compulsive drive to immediate Jouissance, that disrupt the circuit of sublimation of the drive, imposing themselves as a novel form of 'performance principle' that places Jouissance as a new superegoic obligation. (Recalcati 2010: Introduction, 5)

We can therefore conclude that new symptoms derive from a dissolution of the community and from a corresponding hyper-individualistic trend: they are, it seems, the consequence of what Esposito defines through his paradigm of immunisation as auto-immune drifts, a community that loses its 'porosity' and whose immune response turns against what it should be protecting.

From the obligation of birth to the obligation of care

The bridge between Lacanian psychoanalytical theory (via Recalcati) and Esposito's biophilosophy follows the path of the 'new symptoms'. Esposito's communitas overlaps with Lacanian intersubjectivity, the Symbolic, the Other: 'the plane of the Symbolic, of the relationships with the Other, understood as a request of reciprocal recognition, as the law of speech and gift' (Esposito 2012), Esposito tells us. Entrance into the communitas requires a munus, a gift that is given because it cannot be not given. Entrance into the intersubjective, communitarian relationship, into the Symbolic order, requires the fading of being: subjects come into being as lacking being itself, they come into being as relational signposts for the Other. This entails a munus, the aphanisis of being that produces the subject as manque-à-être. The subject comes into being as alienation in the Other, but its ontogenesis is not complete until a certain distance – a gap, 'without which anything could be there' (Lacan 1998: 206) – lodges itself between the subject and the Other, in the operation complementary to alienation: separation.

Aphanisis of being, to put it simply, cannot correspond to a total fading into the Other. Aphanisis of being cannot be an 'excuse' for the subject to be only the other, to embrace a complete, total and blissful alienation in the Other. A separation must divide the two, and the ethical responsibility of the subject thus becomes being a subject in that place where there is constant exposure to aphanisis. This ethical responsibility is not, of course, separation itself, which is not an 'ethical' operation that can be consciously deployed. Separation corresponds to immunitas, not yet as an autoimmune drift, not yet as a total exemption from the munus and the debt, but as a necessary counterpart to the dissolution into the community: 'Separation [...] is never a liquidation of the Other, but it always implies opening onto the Other. It does not erase the debt, but it assumes and oversteps it, because only by assuming it we can overcome

it', Recalcati tells us (Recalcati 2010: iv, 2). The subject is thus 'a subject exposed onto its own otherness, [that] does not identify with itself but neither does it lose itself in the other', claims Esposito (2012).

The hyperindividualism of the discourse of the capitalist corresponds instead to the over-immunisation of auto-immune syndromes in Esposito's paradigm of immunisation: a hyper-immunisation against contamination from the other creates such a deep fracture that it turns against itself, fracturing the very subject, ripping it from the Other, disallowing intersubjectivity and thus the very condition of subjectivity itself.

Certainly it would be misleading, to say the least, to consider 'alienation' and 'separation' – but also munus, communitas and immunitas – as 'entities': ethical constructs or conscious operations that we could just deploy, a là Foucauldian 'toolbox', as an emergency (political/social/ethical) measure when our biopolitics risks turning into a thanatopolitics, as if we could suddenly 'subjectify' the communitas and make biopolitics truly affirmative.

Reintroducing subjectivity defined in Lacanian terms, as an affirmative and dynamic balance between fading, alienation and separation that initially stems from a biological characteristic – and is thus engrained in bare life – effectively enables us to read Esposito's 'biophilosophy' without falling into the deadlock of a bio-theo-political drift: the onto-ethical obligation of birth. Through the notion of subjectivity, intrinsically and always-already tied to intersubjectivity and otherness, ontogenetically and also biologically secondary to it, it is no longer biological birth that gives the metaphorical epitome of an affirmative biopolitics, of a paradigm of balance between communitas and immunitas.

Arguably, Esposito turned away from subjectivity as the founding feature of community because subjectivity could be considered a trait, something all members of the community (must) have in common to be proper members of the community. It would thus create a threshold beyond which there are outsiders – those from which the members of the

community must immunise themselves and enforce a thanatopolitics. Esposito thus places life at the core of the communitas: in coming into being as members of the community we give away subjectivity (munus). He is, however, aware that this operation is equally dangerous and that life at the core of politics does not prevent someone from thinking that there are 'lives not worth living', for instance, as history has sadly shown us. He thus formulates a possible affirmative biopolitics, a sort of preventive measure, as it were, to maintain life at the core of politics, yet distancing it from its possible thanatopolitical drift. This operation however, as Chiesa and Tarizzo have shown, is not successful: affirmative biopolitics rests on a metaphysical vitalism that brings about equally thanatopolitical (autoimmune) drifts. Perhaps it is also for this reason that Esposito began to think life in terms of the impersonal, to highlight how much thinking 'life' enables us to question the discriminatory effects of the category of personhood that we inherited from Ancient Roman law. Yet he remains quite blind to the vitalism that grounds his reflections nevertheless.

Thought in Lacanian terms, subjectivity (and interubjectivity) are the communitas, grounded on a porous balance between munus (alienation/aphanisis) and immunitas (separation), and stemming from life itself. Life therefore no longer needs onto-ethical ur-protection because it is no longer the bare life of the foetus that needs protection. Rather, attention is shifted to post-natal care, to caring for the self and for the Other as the intersubjective relationship, that is to say, to the protection of subjectivised life. This does not shape a static ontological paradigm, but a dynamic, ontogenetic one, grounded in the continuity of the process of the ontogenesis of the self (and of the community), rather than in the bare life that precedes it. Communitas thus no longer signifies the promise of a future or an ideal community where affirmative biopolitics finally 'works'. It rather represents the idea of a living intersubjective dimension that continuously forms and re-forms itself, in a constant process of ontogenesis – of the subject, of the Other, and of the community at the same time. With this I

am not proposing that we should pursue an ideal 'healthy' community of (bio)capitalism, always yet to come, for the coming of which we should subject ourselves to ever stricter medical controls and biological norms. I am thinking of a communitas that is not coming, that is always-already here, and that needs protection not from that which threatens bare life, but from that which threatens intersubjectivity (and with it, of course, subjectivity itself), e.g. hyperindividualism. While I do believe that this can be the ontogenetic foundation of an affirmative biopolitics, it goes beyond the remit of this paper to assess whether it could be a viable path to a global ethics.

The shift from the obligation of birth to the obligation of care, however, does return biopolitical ethical considerations to an intersubjective and immanent dimension, from where they were 'smuggled' into the realm of the transcendental pre-natal force of life. Within such a framework, giving birth can no longer be considered the epitome of the munus since this is always-already at the biological centre of the ontogenesis of the subject and the community, in the form of an insurmountable, neotenic, biological inadequacy that is elevated to lack and thus sets the whole process of subjectification in motion. Munus, understood in these terms, no longer sanctions the onto-ethical obligation of birth, but rather, if anything, promotes an ethics founded on the obligation of care. 'Ethical' is here understood as the ethical dimension of psychoanalysis: the ethics of desire, the ethical responsibility that we have towards our own desires. And since desire is always desire of the Other, the psychoanalytic ethics of desire thus, along with the lacking subject, reintroduces the responsibility we have towards each other in that we are lacking and desiring subjects and not (only) because we are bare lives.

Certainly, numerous bioethical situations, which are unfortunately relatively common in our fragile existence as human beings, such as a pregnant woman who can only be saved by sacrificing the life of her unborn foetus, for example, are extreme cases that would force us to bring any ethics under close scrutiny. In addressing these extreme cases any norm that regulates

a decision on the matter is unavoidably inadequate, prescriptive and, ultimately, sovereign/thanatopolitical – because it does not and cannot account for single individual cases. An ethics grounded on the obligation of care rather than on that of birth, whose ontogenetic grounds I have expounded in this paper, certainly could not help in creating 'better norms', capable of tackling even the extreme cases: an all-inclusive global ethics of care that could be an immanent, non-prescriptive moral system that makes everybody happy and healthy. It could not because it is not possible. And even if it were possible it would be far from desirable. What I hope such ethics could do is actually contribute to thinking a biopolitics capable of fostering and protecting the living intersubjectivity of humanity, at the same time leaving sufficient 'porosity' – as Esposito would have it – to accommodate for the exceptionality of the unfortunately numerous extreme situations that life itself poses to politics and ethics, safeguarding the 'singular discontinuity' of these situations and subjectivities in spite or maybe in virtue of subject's ultimate 'dependence of the action of the structure' (Recalcati 2010: iii, 2).

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