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LAOCOONTE
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"Cuanto más penetramos en una obra de arte más pensamientos suscita ella en nosotros, y cuantos más pensamientos suscite tanto más debemos creer que estamos penetrando en ella".

G. E. Lessing, *Laocoonte o los límites entre la pintura y la poesía*, 1766.

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PANORAMA

POÉTICAS DE LA INOPERANCIA

LA PEREZA Y EL RECHAZO DEL TRABAJO EN LA ESTÉTICA CONTEMPORÁNEA

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LAOCOONTE

PANORAMA: POÉTICAS DE LA INOPERANCIA

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ARTÍCULOS

LAOCOONTE

PANORAMA: POÉTICAS DE LA INOPERANCIA

Lumpen Logistics
Stop Working and Get Mad, or Get Mad and Have Fun

Logística Lumpen
Deja de trabajar y enfádate, o enfádate y diviértete

Maurizia Boscagli*

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to approach the problem of the political potential of the lumpenproletariat, and of the forms this potential may assume, via the question of space and movement. The instability and mobility that defines the lumpenproletariat in social terms, and its affinity with street wandering, make the urban transient or vagrant the key lumpen subject. Such mobility today, at the time of global logistics, is inscribed in the figure of the migrant, whose fugitivity simultaneously embodies and rejects the circulation of capital. The representation of the lumpen subject in the figure of the migrant makes visible moments of rupture and refusal, but it also points to the desire to rest, to moments of nonwork that question the modern imperative to productivity. In the films I analyze, *Riff Raff,* (1991), *Mediterranea* (2015), *Guie'dani' Navel* (2018), and *Crossing the Line* (2007), the moment of disruption takes place both through acts of destructive praxis and moments of wandering without a specific aim and direction.

Keywords: Lumpenproletariat; mobility; idleness; refusal; revolution.

Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo consiste en abordar el problema del potencial político del lumpenproletariado, y de las formas que este potencial puede asumir, a través de la cuestión del espacio y el movimiento. La inestabilidad y la movilidad que definen al lumpenproletariado en términos sociales, y su afinidad con el vagabundeo callejero, convierten al transeúnte o vagabundo urbano en el sujeto lumpen clave. Dicha movilidad se inscribe hoy, en la época de la logística global, en la figura del migrante, cuya fugacidad encarna y rechaza simultáneamente la circulación del capital. La representación del sujeto lumpen en la figura del migrante hace visibles momentos de ruptura y rechazo, pero también apunta al deseo de descanso, a momentos de no-trabajo que cuestionan el imperativo moderno de la productividad. En las películas que analizo, *Riff Raff,* (1991), *Mediterránea* (2015), *Guie'dani' Navel* (2018) y *Crossing the Line* (2007), el momento de ruptura tiene lugar tanto a través de actos de praxis destructiva como de momentos de vagabundeo sin un objetivo y una dirección concretos.

Palabras clave: Lumpenproletariado; movilidad; ociosidad; rechazo; revolución.

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For Marxist theory, the problem of the lumpenproletariat is the problem of its political potential. This is the problem that many critics, from Marx and Engels on, have addressed.[1]

I will approach this issue, the problem of the political potential of the lumpenproletariat, and of the forms this potential may assume, via the question of space and movement, of the space occupied by the lumpen in material, physical terms, as well as in the imaginary of late capitalism. The instability and mobility that defines the lumpenproletariat in social terms, and its affinity with street wandering, make the urban transient or vagrant the key lumpen subject. Such mobility today, at the time of global logistics, is inscribed in the figure of the migrant, whose fugitivity simultaneously embodies and rejects the circulation of capital. The representation of the lumpen subject in the figure of the migrant makes visible moments of rupture and refusal, but it also points to the desire to rest, to moments of nonwork that question the modern imperative to productivity.

My essay is articulated in three moments: after a brief discussion of the ex-centric and possibly counterhegemonic position of the lumpenproletariat, I turn to the historical moment when its mobility and instability is captured into the logistics of global capital, to conclude with a reflection on the possibility and modalities of lumpen resistance through acts articulated by anger and ressentiment, as well as by the search for pleasure, as registered in the contemporary cinema of work and migration—that is, in the sphere of the aesthetic. In the films I analyze, *Riff Raff* (1991), directed by Ken Loach, *Mediterranea* (2015), dir. Jonas Carpignano, *Guie'dani' Nave*l (2018), dir. Xavi Sala, and *Crossing the Line* (2007), dir. Pietro Marcello, the moment of disruption takes place both through acts of destructive praxis, moments that punctuate the apparently smooth surface of what Guy Deborg calls «the spectacle» (1967), and moments of rest and movement without a specific aim and direction, a mobility that for the migrant prefigures the possibility of «going back», of returning home. Both these antilogistical forms of rest and movement without a point of arrival are a consequence of the lumpen's refusal of work, and as such they are deeply political.

I.

Often presented as a reactionary class formation, the lumpenproletariat possesses a controversial status in Marx's thought. See for instance his indictment of the alliance between the dispossessed, former laboring classes and the petite bourgeoisie with the parasite section of the finance aristocracy, which supported the rise of Louis Bonaparte in the midst of the workers' uprisings of 1848 (Marx, [1852] 1963). In fact, both Marx and Engels felt a deep aversion, disgust even, for this class formation: «Passively rotting mass», «offal», «knaves and outlaws… the scum of society», in Engels's words (Engels, [1850] 1978). The «proletariat in rags», consists, by definition, of disenfranchised people, no longer members of the proletariat, incapable of an organic political allegiance, and all too often prey to reactionary politics. With no connection to the means of production, the lumpen was, *de facto*, a non-class, opportunistic, whose members often subsisted on illegal activities.

1 See Frantz Fanon (1963), Eldridge Cleaver (2006), Hal Draper (1972), Robert Brussard (1987), Peter Stallybrass (1990), Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2004), Nathaniel Mills (2017), Clyde Barrow (2020) and Kathi Weeks (2023).

Both Marx and Engels made a crucial distinction between the respectable, productive wage-earning proletariat, and the non-productive, ragged and dangerous underclasses that had so disturbed the bourgeoisie and such social reformers of the Victorian period as Henry Mayhew, Jeremy Bentham and Thomas Malthus. As critics such as Peter Stallybrass and Kathi Weeks point out, both Marx and Engels's effort to purify the term proletarian from its Lumpen elements –the «illegal», the deviant, the outlaw, the parasite– seems to participate in the nineteenth century discourse of bourgeois morality (Weeks, 2023: 326; Stallybrass, 1990: 82-83).[2] The lumpenproletariat itself gets divided by Engels and Marx into subcategories—«honest» and «dishonest», the former represented by «the large mob of day laborers», dockworkers, for example, who show a marginal attachment to the labor market, vs. the outlaw components of «the rabble» (Engels, [1843] 1978a).

The lumpen remains in any case a surplus population, in excess to the labor market and industrial productivity, and defined by social and economic exclusion. This exclusion is actually demanded and created by capital: this population is «the reserve army of the unemployed». By creating «the reserve army of the unemployed», a reserve pool of labor, which Marx writes about in Chapter 25 of *Capital Vol. I*, «The General Law of Accumulation», capital assures the constant availability of labor power, of bodies willing to work at any cost and under any condition, through the creation of an excess of wageless, workless people, always at the beck and call of potential employers, surviving in a state of destitution and enforced «idleness», as a way to keep the wages low by keeping the available supply of labor high. This condition is maintained today with the intensified precarization and scarcity of labor.[3]

When, in Chapter 25 of *Capital*, Marx divides the Lumpenproletariat into floating, latent, and stagnant forms, he poses the pauperized Lumpen, the stagnant variety, as the least recuperable category, that includes «vagabonds, criminals, disabled victims of industry, the elderly» (Marx, [1867] 1977: 380). These are the «jobbers» Engels mentions, «peddlers forced to hawk whatever they could, huckstering and peddling at any street corner, eking out a precarious existence by selling» (Engels, [1845] 1975: 433). Together with the «knaves and the outlaws», the prostitute and the thief, the lumpen exists and subsists outside the grid, any grid of labor, property and propriety (economic, social, or moral). In Hal Draper's words: «The lumpen class is a catch call for all those who fall out or drop out of the existing social structure, so that they are no longer functionally integral part of society» (Draper, 1972: 2309). In this perspective they are socioeconomic outsiders with no class identity, whose heterogeneity always includes subversive, disreputable unproductive elements.

Different historical figurations of the lumpenproletariat share several characteristics: distance from the wage-economy, unemployment, «laziness» and criminality, and a possible adversarial agency that cannot be easily interpellated, and that moves in unpredictable directions. The Lumpen stands as a figure of dissidence first of all because of its lack of any type of productivity –economic, as well as reproductive–. The heteronormative family stands as a form of social discipline adjacent to the work discipline of the factory. The female body that refuses reproduction, as in the case of

2 This is also the position of Dominick la Capra (1983) and Robert L. Brussard (1987).

3 For a discussion of the contemporary precariat see Franco Berardi (2009) and Guy Standing (2011).

the sex worker, and the body of the gay male aesthete, both affirm an anti-family and anti-work ethic (Gans, 1994: 275). The bohemian artist is another modern figure who refuses the imperatives of thrift, moderation, and value production that capitalism demands (Gluck, 2005). The lumpen's position as suspicious subject is occupied at great cost: poverty, incarceration, medicalization, invisibility. The prison continues to be a place of disenfranchisement and functions to establish a divide between «working families» and «an underclass of criminals», identified for instance in the figure of the mother on welfare (Wacquant, 2001).

The space occupied by the lumpen, either by social exclusion or by choice, its marginal position, is the space of the abject, but of an abject that refuses to stay put. Its social and political instability is made visible in spatial terms: from the postfeudal bands of vagrants at the time of the land enclosures, when a part of the population avoided the future of waged labor in an act of exodus, to become part of a wandering mob (Papadopoulos, 2010), to the contemporary migrant, to the dwellers of the porous Victorian slum, to the subproletarians portrayed by the cinema of Pier Paolo Pasolini or the Dardenne brothers: in each case the Lumpen moves, in search of work or running away from work. When Marx, in that famous passage of *The Eighteenth Brumaire* describes the lumpen as «the whole indefinite, disintegrated mass, thrown hither and thither, which the French call *la Bohème*»,[4] he uses a spatial image to describe the lumpen's disorder and its incapability of being contained within a precise and delimited space—that of the working class and the potential sites of the workers' revolutionary politics.

There has always been an affinity between the Lumpen and the street, the space of the barricades as well as of «laziness» and fugitivity, of those Marx defines as «People without a definite occupation, *sans feu et sans aveu*», without a home and a space in society, and therefore disreputable (Marx [1850] 1964: 110), that is, of people without a socially recognized occupation. The connection between the Lumpen and nomadism brings to the fore the image of lascar, the gipsy, the *flâneur,* the unemployed loitering in the street, wasting time, the protester, the worker on strike, all figures that take their distance from the subject positions they are supposed to occupy, that of well-functioning and well-adjusted working subjects. They are dissidents and deviants all, antagonistic to both the work ethic and the family ethic, deaf to the siren song of bourgeois respectability through which the working class is being integrated into dominant culture.

The marginality and instability implied in the image of being «thrown hither and thither» and its ambivalence as both a passive and agentic condition, is clearly visible in numerous modernist texts: from the images of the unemployed tramps and vagrants in George Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933), to the queer lumpen Bohemia on the streets of Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* (1936), to the vagabonds in Beckett's plays, or in Charlie Chaplin's cinema. *Down and Out in Paris and London* is a critique of the work ethic and of what the author calls «useless work», carried on through the narration of his own experiences in the underworld and in the slums of the

4 The whole passage reads as follows: «Alongside decayed *roués* with dubious means of subsistence and dubious origin, ruined and adventurous offshoots of the bourgeoisie, were vagabonds, discharged soldiers, discharged jailbirds, escaped galley slaves, swindlers, mountebanks, *lazzarone,* pickpockets, tricksters, gamblers, *maquereaus,* brothel keepers, porters, *literati,* organ-grinders, ragpickers, knife grinders, tinkers, beggars—in short, the whole indefinite, disintegrated mass, thrown hither and thither, which the French call *la bohème*» (Marx [1852] 1963).

two European capitals. First as a *plongeur*, a dishwasher and kitchen hand in a Parisian restaurant, and then as a tramp, an unhoused person in London, Orwell experiences firsthand the lumpen condition. The book stages movement as circular, as a movement-in-idleness that refuses to be channeled in the direction of productivity and profit, but focuses instead on survival and subsistence, parasitism and destitution. Above all, Orwell makes visible a lumpen living rhythm that involves an alternance of movement and stillness, an image of loitering that disturbs the Fordist strict division between work and leisure and its organization of time and space. The daily experience of the Lumpen in Orwell's account of the Parisian slum involves the continual circulation of the destitute characters from squat to street, to workhouse to squalid hotel room, from pawnshop to the subterranean kitchen where the narrator washes dishes for a few sous per day and back, unceasingly. This is «a life of 6 Francs per day. Thousands of people in Paris live it, struggling artists and students, prostitutes when their luck is out, out of work people of all kinds» (Orwell, 1933: 19). Urban walking is imperative for the urban poor, sometime to reach the workplace, more often without a precise direction and a point of arrival. The bed, when available, is the only place where the exhausted unemployed or underemployed person, can stop and rest. Sleep is not just a physical necessity but rather becomes a real pleasure, «a debauch more than a relief» (91). For the derelict, who has nothing to look forward to, and for the overworked individual, sleep represents an indulgence, a real moment of enjoyment, a temporary point of arrival after their city wandering. The fugitivity of the early modern plebs and their threatening nomadism are repeated in the urban nomadism of the modern tramp. This figure's loose and nomadic condition, the consequence of either unemployment or of the refusal of work, needs to be continually recaptured and contained by capitalism. Orwell's text makes visible both the necessity of, and the ambivalence towards, this fugitivity on the part of the lumpenproletariat.

Orwell wrote in the 1930s. The Lumpen came to occupy a more visible and central position in the 1960s and 1970s: in anticolonial struggles in North Africa and in the praxis of Black activism in the US. For Frantz Fanon, in the space of the colony, the lumpen is a revolutionary, rather than a reactionary force: it is constituted by «the fraction of the peasantry blocked at the urban periphery who still have found nothing to gnaw in the colonial system» (Fanon, 1963: 130). The inhabitants of the African shanty towns, these «classless idlers», as Fanon calls them, will spearhead the revolution as «the most radically revolutionary forces of the colonized people» (Fanon, 1963: 129). For the Black Panthers Party in the US the spontaneity and radical revolutionary power of the colonized is replicated in the black urban population of the American inner city: this is a lumpenproletariat that is cut off from the capitalist relations of production, and as such, carries a revolutionary consciousness against the neocolonialism of the state. It consists of people who have no real place in industrial America: «black domestics and porters… maintenance men, laundresses and cooks, sharecroppers, welfare mothers, and street hustlers» (Brown, 1992: 136), «the vanguard of the proletariat» (Cleaver, 2006: 173). Angela Davis shared the same opinion on the political importance of jobless men of color: «The role of the unemployed, which includes the lumpenproletariat, in revolutionary struggle must be given serious thought» (Davis, 2016: 35).

The 1960s and 1970s were a time of antiwar mass protests, and of antiwork politics of refusal; this was the time of class recomposition in Italy, and, with Italian

Autonomia, of the emergence of a new political subject whose identity was no longer immediately tied to the wage.[5] These two events changed the view of class struggle and of class itself, to include the unwaged, women who worked at home (and who became part of the movement of Wages for Housework), students, migrants, feminists, queers, and radical political groups who had no part or representation in political institutions. This expansion of the surplus population, combined with the rise of identity-based politics, articulated against, and outside of, the capitalist relations of production, came to constitute a new social formation that did not respond to the calls of party and union.

This window of insurgent opportunity, as we might call it, becomes restricted or closed in the following decades, with post-Fordism, deindustrialization in the West, and the lumpenization of labor globally. As Sylvia Wynter puts it, «the multiple anti-colonial and social protest movements and intellectual challenges of the period to which we give the name The Sixties… [was the moment when] multiple terrains of struggles erupted soon to be erased» (Wynter, 2003: 312). This erasure was followed by a strong class polarization between the rich and the category that Zygmunt Baumann calls «the new Poor» (Bauman, 1987: 94). The New Poor, according to Wynter, is a category defined at the global level «by refugees, economic migrants, stranded against the gates of rich countries as the postcolonial variant of Fanon's category of *les damnés*» (Wynter, 2003). This category also includes «the criminalized, incarcerated majority of Black and dark skinned Latino inner-city males… the kicked about welfare mothers, with both being part of the ever- expanding global transnational category of the homeless, the jobless, the semi-jobless, the criminalized drug offending prison population» (Wynter, 2003: 313). This new list, a new version of the emerging late twentieth century lumpen, re-centers the possibility not simply of dissent, but also of a new revolutionary potential. This is also Michael Hardt's and Toni Negri's position, who argue that the centrality given to the proletariat obscures the socio-political potential of the global poor. For them, the Lumpen is a term used to denigrate and demonize the global poor as a whole (Hardt and Negri, 2004).

II.

At the center of this emerging formation of a global underclass is the figure of the migrant, whose mobility and unstable relations to labor is a direct reference to the lumpenproletariat. Through migration there emerges, on a global scale, a new lumpenproletariat, a mass of circulating labor power, and a new «reserve army of the unemployed». As Silvia Federici affirms, this new contingent of «labor force reduced to abstract labor, pure labor power with no protection, ready to be moved from place to place, job to job, employed mostly through short terms contracts and at the lowest possible wage» is also a form of primitive accumulation (2018: 192). This new surplus population, whose movement from the South to the North, within the «locality» of one single country, or across continents, follows the path traced by capital, its logistics. To

5 Paolo Virno explains the emergence of Italian Autonomia: «The workday may be the accepted unit of measure, but it is no longer a true one. The movement of the 1960s points out this untruth in order to stake up and abolish the status quo. They signaled their opposition, their utter disagreement, with objective tendencies. They vindicated the right to nonwork. They enacted a collective migration out from the regime of the factory. They recognized the parasitical character of working for a boss» (1996). On the topic see also Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt (1994) and Sylvére Lotringer (2007).

think of logistics is to think of shipping, moving commodities, money, information, people, but also troops and military supplies –logistics is initially a military concept– across the globe. The container, the actual metal anonymous container carried on ships or trains is the essence of logistics. As Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle describe it, with its modularity, homogeneity, and opacity, the container is «the dumb, indifferent, interchangeable materialization of capitalist abstract circulation» (2015: 96). The opacity of the container makes invisible the process of production, the chain of labor and the social relations of production that make the commodity available for circulation. The container allows no view either of the workers who produced the commodity or of those who, sometimes, on their migrant journeys, travel within it.

Modern logistics, as the capitalist fantasy of a frictionless, expedited, optimized and efficient circulation, without arrests or disruptions, begins with the Atlantic slave trade, as the containerized transportation of labor power. As Stefano Harney and Fred Moten write

> From the motley crew that followed in the red wakes of these slave ships, to the prisoners shipped to the settler colonies, to the mass migration of industrialization in the Americas; to the indentured slaves from India, China, and Java, to the one-way ticket from the Philippines to the Gulf States, or Bangladesh to Singapore, logistics was always the transportation of slavery, not "free labor". (2013: 92)

The new contingent of «the reserve army of the unemployed» whose members reach the coasts of Greece or Italy, for instance, constitutes this new flow of the captive audience of capital.

Logistics remains, as Harney and Moten insist, «the transport of objects that is held in the movement of things. And the transport of things remains, as ever, logistics unrealizable ambition» (2013: 92). The object is the correlative of the subject; the thing instead is matter beyond the dynamic of subject and object. In the container, the human object disappears to become formless and invisible materiality. This is the ultimate ambition of logistics: to make its containerized bodies into an abstraction, nothing that might disrupt the circulation of labor power—so that the working body, the suffering body and the «negativity of labor» (90) becomes invisible.

Nevertheless, logistics cannot fully contain what is relegated to the hold, what Harney and Moten define as «hapticality», touch, feeling with the other in homelessness, connection between bodies that are not subjects or objects, but matter abstracted into value. The space of hapticality, in the container, generates a «feeling» that is not collective, so that the feeling non-subject cannot and does not reclaim its place in «the nation, state, territory, or historical story» (98). No self-consciousness or knowledge of oneself and of the other emerges, but «an improvisation» (98). Hapticality therefore is a means and a mode of survival for bodies contained in the hold, the ship, the truck. Yet it does not get translated into collective subjectivity, consciousness, and agency, but rather remains caught, or just remains, in the sphere of affectivity.

III.

In the cinema of work and migration to which I want to turn now, the disappearance, invisibility, and opacity of the containerized migrant is turned into a presence that disturbs and disrupts the perfect circulation of logistics. These disruptions show

that the space of logistics contains difference and disconnection, against its claimed uninterrupted, homogeneous flow. What these films portray is not hapticality, the affective, intercorporeal experience of the objects/matter of logistics. Rather, the object of logistics affirms its agency with a vengeance, through acts of anger, the destruction of property and commodities, both in the work and the domestic space. These actions are not part of an organized rebellion or protest. The characters in these films are not activists who fight together against the conditions of their labor and existence, as the contemporary «most iconic figures of the lumpen are doing today: sex workers, day laborers, domestic workers, and welfare recipients» (Weeks, 2023: 334). *Vis-à-vis* the coordinated efforts of the militant, these are instead, mostly, acts of sabotage. Can these acts and courses of action and their perpetrators be interpellated into a politics? Can they be organized into a recognizable and productive politics? Should they be? At any rate, these are political actions nonetheless, guided by an anger that cannot wait: it wants everything, and it wants it now, and possibly wishes also to have fun in the process.

The moments of sabotage and violence we see in each of these films signal the criminal edge and the negativity of the lumpen, as well as its efforts to resist integration into the proletariat, an industrial proletariat which itself no longer exists as a cohesive class in the context of Western political economy, when labor power is being relocated and outsourced to the South of the world. The rebellions we see staged in the cinema of work and migration are most of the time individual, but they are not the heroics of a romantic individualism: rather, these are often the only available forms of resistance available to the migrant-as-lumpen, caught and pushed, as it is, into the contemporary terrain of neoliberal work scarcity and precarity.

Each of the three films I will cite, *Riff Raff*, *Mediterranea*, and *Guie'dani's Navel* culminate in scenes of destructive action. The fourth and final one, *Crossing the Line*, focuses instead on the journey and on the possibility of return, that is, on a different aspect of the question of Lumpen logistics.

Riff Raff is a film about Thatcherism, the disappearance of industrial labor, and the Lumpenization and precarization of work in the neoliberal climate of 1990s England. The workers employed on the building site in London, where a hospital is being converted into luxury apartments, are migrants within England, moving around the country looking for work after factories and manufacturing jobs have disappeared. They are itinerant, casual laborers, hired as «self-employed» —with no benefits or any form of protection. The protagonist, Stevie, is just out of prison, and sleeps on the street. He has no sense of loyalty to the workplace and to the dignity of work (there isn't any): he steals and resells tools from the worksite. As part of the lumpenproletariat, he makes ends meet as he can. Invested as he is in the Thatcherite ideology of entrepreneurship, dangerously and painfully replicated in his categorization as «self-employed» according to the management, he affirms more than once that his building job is only temporary, and one day he will start his own business selling underwear. The isolation Stevie experiences in his squat is compensated for by the very tenuous camaraderie the workers share in the on-site tearoom, when they cook and banter together. But their togetherness does not last. An older worker is fired when trying to convince the others to join the union, and another man dies by falling off an unprotected scaffolding. At the end, Stevie and another laborer set the hospital on fire, and enjoy the spectacle at a distance, sitting on a wall at night, before leaving, like the rest of the group. The

film ends as it began: with the image of rats scuttling around, the frame voided of the human presence, to signify the ephemerality of human solidarity when sustained by the volatility of casual labor.

Jonas Carpignano's *Mediterranea* (2015), follows the journey of two African migrants, Ayiva and Abas, from Burkina Faso to the south of Italy. Carpignano, the director, is American-Italian born in New York, he moved to Italy to shoot the film, and in fact did a large part of the journey from Burkina Faso with a group of migrants himself. Ayiva and Abas have a contact in Calabria, and upon their arrival in Italy they obtain a three-month residence permit, pending on their finding a job. After the three months, unless they find a permanent work contract, they will have to leave the country--this was the requirement of Italian migration law in 2015. The two find work as day laborers, picking fruit in the fields under harsh working conditions. At the beginning they live in a laborers' encampment and finally move to a squat in the center of the town, soon to be evicted by the police. Under this new condition of homelessness, having to face the racism of the locals and the threats of a groups of young Italian thugs (two migrants are killed), the Africans organize a protest which soon becomes a violent riot—they destroy and set fire cars on the streets, break the windows of businesses and get in a huge fight with the police. This is practically a reenactment of the actual Rosarno riots, that took place in the town of Rosarno in 2010. *Mediterranea* addresses a very important issue: the migrant's mobility movement and, simultaneously, the question of place. What happens to migrants when they reach the country to which they have travelled? Do they find a new place? In the film the epic quality of their journey is dissipated and complicated by the reality of the new forms of enclosure and exploitation they encounter when they begin working in a new country. These conditions are incisively portrayed by Carpignano, who shows how the new circulating labor power survives, while the migrants continue to experience their condition of placelessness. Migrants, documented or not, have no place: their place is the detention camp, illegal encampments, abandoned animal sheds, squats in condemned buildings in Rome, empty houses in London, from which they are removed by the police, and brought back to the detention camps, unless they escape, waiting to be recognized as refugees. This is the paradox of living a nomadic life, and still experiencing a long permanence, in very precarious conditions, in transitory spaces: refugee camps, slums, tents, and detention centers.

Catalan director Xavi Sala's film *Guie'dani's Navel* was shot in Mexico, where Sala lives and works. This film appeared the same year as Alfonso Cuaron's film *Roma*, and Sala's text describes the same situation as *Roma*: family life and the figure of the indigenous domestic help, minus the sentimentality and exploitative familialism of Cuaron's movie.

Two indigenous women, a mother and her teenage daughter, Lidia and Guie'dani, move from a rural area of Oaxaca to Mexico City to work as maids in an upper middle-class family. This is a film about classism, racism, and discrimination against indigenous people in Mexico, as well as a coming-of-age story. The family's paternalism and continual micro-aggression against Guied'ani and her mother become more and more unbearable. The two women are endlessly demeaned and discriminated against, and their freedom curtailed: they are told to speak Spanish and not Zapotec in the house, that they must use cutlery and not their hands to eat, and «that they should modernize» themselves, change their appearance through haircuts and by wearing

hand me down clothes. The moment of crisis comes when the employer family goes on a vacation, and Lidia, without permission, leaves to visit her own dying mother. Alone in the house, Guie'dani immediately invites another teenager, Claudia, to join her, the daughter of another maid next door. Claudia is her only friend, and she had not been allowed to visit by the employer, Valentina. Together the two girls «take possession» of the house. In the film the question of place, and belonging, that Carpignano's film had highlighted, becomes central: Valentina, during a previous unauthorized visit of Claudia, is upset that the two girls, not respecting their assigned subaltern space, «take over the house». In acts of identification with, and rejection of, the employers, the two girls now trash the house and move to inhabit the spaces previously prohibited to them. Alone lone, before Claudia's arrival, Guie'dani tries on Valentina's evening gowns, and then discards them by throwing them on the floor; she also puts on Valentina's husband's, David, suits, channeling him in front of the mirror: «Guie'dani, bring me a taco!» Both girls cover the dinner table with the precious tablecloth the family used for Christmas, for the meal to which Guie'dani and her mother were not invited. They end up trashing the master bedroom, eating in bed and watching a zombie movie, blasting the sound and not answering the door. Their choice of film genre is significant: the zombie, both in Haiti's folklore and in American films, stands for the image of the exhausted body of the slave, and of the exploited worker at large, who survives its conditions by self-alienating itself from its working conditions through 'death' and returns as the living dead to taunt its exploiter (Neocleous, 2016).

The forms of Guie'dani's and Claudia's Potlatch bring together destruction and enjoyment, destruction as enjoyment. The two are having fun together: eating, dancing to exciting music, and surreptitiously kissing, they affirm their fugitivity and refusal of their confinement to servitude and subalternity. Of course, their enjoyment (they even set on fire a life-size puppet that serves as garden décor), doesn't last: the family comes back earlier than expected and Guie'dani's punishment is inevitable. After Lidia is fired, and just when mother and daughter are about to leave the house, Valentina goes into labor, and the baby is born with Lidia's help —she is the midwife of her village. After this event, Lidia is asked to stay and become «part of the family» —that is, she is asked to do even more work by also taking care of the baby: she is interpellated into the duties and the care labor of a mother, without the privileges. Guie'dani understands that this will be her future too, and the close-up of her face, that ends the movie, betrays all her anger and disappointment. Her displacement to the aseptic bourgeois family home where she has no place, is countered by her desire for her own place of origin, and for the indigenous culture to which she belongs: «home», the land of the village. That original home is contiguous with, and inscribed by, her own body: as she explains to her friend, when she was born, a piece of the umbilical cord was buried under a tree close to her house, «so that you will be able to return». Upon leaving the village, Guie'dani puts a bit of the soil she collects from under the tree in a plastic bag, which she opens and smells repeatedly in the film, as a sign of her connection to her place of origin, and of her desire for autonomy.

We could think of the way Guie'dani expresses her anger at her subalternity in the Potlatch scene, as a form of what Lauren Berlant in her book *Cruel Optimism* calls «lateral agency» (Berlant, 2011: 116-17). Lateral agency is a way of pursuing the object of desire (a «normal life») that cannot be had, by approaching it sideways, («small vacations form the will itself… toward making a less bad experience. It's a

relief, a reprieve, not a repair» (116-17) that diverts one's desire for «world building» into a lateral, compensatory space, adjacent to but not part of the working every day. In the films Berlant discusses, the Dardennes brothers' *Rosetta* and *La Promesse*, the protagonists see in the work they cannot find a stepping-stone towards, if not a guarantee of, «the good life», a life of economic stability and social recognition –the access to real citizenship–. In these films, political agency, as well as the energies of the characters and their creativity are diffused, if not dispersed into the effort to reproduce life. Yet, for Berlant, these forms of «world building» are also rewarding, and «can provide the affective pre-experience of a potential site of rest» (185). «At the same time», affirms Berlant, «the improvisations of labor make available alternative, non-kinship organized spaces of positive reciprocity» (168). This is not the case with *Guie'dani's Navel*.

In the films I have discussed, each centered on the contemporary figure of the lumpenproletarian, what Berlant terms «the improvisations of labor» do not produce spaces of «positive reciprocity», but rather focus on the labor conditions of the characters. Above all, these characters do not believe in the «good life»: they are just trying to survive, to hang on, to find a place to stop which is not in sight.

To temporarily stop «the slow train wreck that is always coming in the catastrophic time of capitalism, when you are lucky when you get to be exploited» (171), Berlant's characters turn to affect. While portraying the same «train wreck» of life under capitalism each set of films propose a different reaction: on the one hand, the world building and reciprocity Berlant calls «lateral agency» (forms of affective connection and self-care not unlike the «hapticality» invoked by Harney and Moten), and on the other, in the case of *Riff Raff*, *Mediterranea*, and *Guie'dani's Navel*, the destructive and self-affirming acts of rage. The forms of world-building Berlant studies, do not produce, as she admits, a revolutionary consciousness: the stark choice is «to reinvest in the normative promises of capital [job, family, life]» or «the risk of opting out of the game» (171). The Potlatch acts in the films I discussed so far, have, in my eyes, more latitude and political potential than the affective, interpersonal response. They are not announcing and anticipating a utopian moment in the future, but they affirm what can be said and done now, in the middle of, rather than away from, the subject's real conditions of existence: poverty, unemployment, exclusion, homelessness. They do not search for and create alternative spaces to what is. They are less moments of lateral agency, than of frontal, and confrontational ones, flashes that illuminate for a moment, à la Benjamin, a horizon of political possibility that does materialize, albeit without fully developing. This political possibility remains indefinite and uncertain, and often gets reabsorbed into the fold of capital's «normality»—domestic labor and family obligations in the case of women, as happens at the end of *Guie'dani's Navel*. These acts are not a teleological announcement of the future, but actions in the moment, in the here and now: they are scenes of insurrection that do not yet claim a futurity.

Each of the films I talked of show people on the verge of getting «out of the game», already excluded from it perhaps, and with nothing to lose. As Berlant's characters, they are surviving otherwise, but by more flamboyant and public, albeit not always collective, modes of protest; by attacking property and refusing their assigned identity as cheap and exploitable labor. They leave, or stop working, and get mad, and some have fun too.

One final film takes us back to the question of the lumpen mobility and logistics.

This is the documentary *Crossing the Line* (2007), by Italian director Pietro Marcello. A film about marginality, work and the lack thereof, home and displacement, and the chance to go back, to return. Marcello's cinema, even when fiction, documents the life of lumpen marginality in terms of class, race, and sexuality. In this documentary the director embarks on a journey through Italy on the night trains that cross the country, to encounter and interview many different people, several on long commutes towards very precarious jobs, or searching for work, traveling from the South to the North, or, for other interviewees, within their region of origin. The train, another form of container, is a space of connection and anonymity, meeting point and site of solitude at the same time. Instead of the postcard image of Italy, the landscapes seen from the train are often squalid and overbuilt, enveloped in a darkness punctuated by the anonymous lights of trains stations.

The stories of the travelers are all stories about crossing lines, of passing a limit, getting out of a space of containment: we hear about the patient who temporarily «escaped» from the hospital to go buy cigarettes outside; of the Italian emigrant who talks of his working abroad as a series of military campaigns («I did France, I did Germany, I did England»), and who concludes the interview with a speech about the utopia of «living without money». Or of the young Italian of North African origin just out of prison, harassed by the police because of the color of his skin and his foreignness. Another man, from Naples, has much the same experience, because of his aspect and accent. Their stories tell about their refusal to be restricted to institutional spaces, the hospital, the prison, the factory, the border. Some of them travel in search of a job, whose precarity is made clear: «They can fire you when they want. I have never had a stable work contract. We are like James Bond, sent on a mission to the North… We go on a mission for one month, ten days, five days, twenty hours». Marcello does not allow a sentimental view of these migrants. The people he encounters are not voiceless victims. They all have a voice and a clear consciousness about their condition but admit lacking the means to react to it, to organize against it. Their self-awareness remains a form of survival, and moves, in some case, toward a defeatist position: «Organize?» answers one of the interviewees, «What can we organize? For what end? We Neapolitans cannot even organize a soccer match among friends», affirms another of the travelers, mistaking the structural, systemic forms of labor precarity for a type of personal and cultural shortcoming.

An elderly man Marcello interviews seems to travel according to a different rhythm and trajectory. Ninety-year-old Arturo sleeps on trains, and travels every night from Bolzano, Italy's «deep North», to Bologna or Rome, or further south, taking advantage, as he notes, of a not too expensive train pass. «The train is my home», he says. We hear that he has been in and out of courtrooms and prisons more than once, as the leader of a political group, and that for his political ideas he has been arrested in the past. His desire for autonomy makes him refuse to go into a home for the elderly, «where you eat and sleep and do not think anymore». He is, in a sense, a fugitive, and the director's choice not to inquire more into the circumstances of Arturo's life, not to turn him into a sociological case or an example of sorts, allows Arturo to stand as a figure of non-logistical circulation, in fact, of circularity, continually embarking on a journey without a specific destination, a journey that offers him the possibility of returning, as suggested by the epigraph that opens the film, from Georges Simenon's novel *Crosssing the Line*: «Three times I passed the line of the border. The first time illegally, as I could,

with the help of a *passeur*. One at least legally. For sure I have been one of the extremely rare people who came back, by my own will, to the point of departure» (Simenon, 1958: 1).

Going back every morning, apparently traveling for the sake of traveling and to find a temporary shelter, to make home nowhere, Arturo embodies perhaps the transgressive mobility of the new lumpen: an embraced marginality, a movement that makes it nearly impossible to be captured by the state, and by the familialism without the family of the old people's home. He, and each of the other figures in these films, embodies the ultimate contradiction of the lumpen condition: movement and rest, doing and not doing, mobility and permanence, at a time of his life when permanence appears to be out of reach. He, and the other figures I spoke of, testify to the adversarial agency of the contemporary lumpen, a figure of dissidence, divided between occupying space to which you allegedly are not entitled, being visible, and disappearing; maintaining silence and yet expressing the desire to protest its condition and the space to which it is limited.

If the lumpen's prerogative is to be outside of orthodox forms of organization and of politics, it is from crossing borders and lines of containment that its energies can generate something new, and also its future.

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