

Global Resistance and the Demand for Communism

Mauro Di Lullo¹

University of Stirling

First of all, an insistent reference to the West and to “Western Civilization”, a theme or lexicon whose careless manipulation has often slid over into rather undemocratic theses, as we know now from experience, especially when it is a question of an authentic “decadence” of the said Western Civilization. As soon as anyone talks about “decadence of Western Civilization,” I am on my guard. We know that this kind of talk can sometimes (not always) lead to restorations or installations of an authoritarian, even totalitarian order.²

Abstract

This paper explains and analyses modern neoliberal ideas of freedom and compares them to a Blanchovian understanding of freedom and communism. In modern and neoliberal formulations, freedom is often identified within a persistent form of mastery³. This identification of freedom with mastery, I argue, encourages political and social exploitation, emphasizes the dangerous prerogatives of capitalist authority, and strengthens the extreme resilience of phallogocentric domination. Maurice

¹ To my Supervisors Dr. Andrew Hass and Prof. Bill Marshall for all their support, kindness and encouragement. To all the community of students (the Arabic translation of students is Taliban) in the University of Stirling and beyond. May my work be highly controversial, opposed and contentious, but hopefully able to open a debate on antagonism, resistance and refusal in our age of consumerism and apparently triumphant neoliberalism. May my work help and support all the students in Stirling and beyond to rediscover the inner greatness of two “spectres still haunting capitalist world”: rebellion and communism. To Dr. SohaElbatrawy and Mr. Stuart Lindsay for their patience and friendship.

²Jacques Derrida, ‘*Like the Sound of the Sea Deep within a Shell: Paul de Man's War*’, *Critical Inquiry*, 14 (1988), p601.

³Isaiah Berlin, ‘Two Concepts of Liberty’, in *Four Essays on Liberty*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

Blanchot proposes an absolute, unconditioned and unconditional conception of freedom. Beginning with “Littérature et la droit à la mort”, freedom for Maurice Blanchot cannot be represented by a Kantian freedom of the subject, but becomes an ontological freedom of things from the subject’s conceptual grasp: the freedom of non-identity⁴, the freedom within and from the Outside. Blanchot’s conception of an authentic experience of freedom is addressed in this article; its political and ethical significance will be explored in my quest for a New International movement of Global Resistance to neoliberalism and its repressive and authoritarian policies. Sixteen years after the revolutionary events of May 1968 in France (when he was an active member of the *Comité étudiants-écrivains*), Blanchot, replying to Jean-Luc Nancy’s unconvinced reading of Georges Bataille’s pre-war politics, would pursue his continuous thinking of what he thought remained (and still remains) essential to call “the demand of communism” (*l’exigence communiste*)⁵.

In a time of apparently unstoppable neoliberalism, after the crushing “defeat” of the Global Resistance movement between 2010 and 2012, how can we reach an *authentic* freedom from Blanchot’s idea of political activism? What can we learn from him? These questions will be addressed and examined as a response to the political and social events of the last few years across the entire capitalist world. How did the police forces in London, Madrid, Manhattan and Athens succeed in defeating and crushing the rebels, restoring “law and order”? How can the “multitude” organize and develop a successful conception of resistance and antagonism? Addressing these questions, as my paper will show, is essential for new political strategies of the Global Resistance movement. In order to address and explain Maurice Blanchot and his political philosophy, one must try and

⁴ On ontological freedom I will compare Heidegger’s notion of *Gelassenheit*, “Letting-Be”, *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper & Row, 1966). See Fred Dallmayr ‘Ontology of Freedom: Heidegger and Political Philosophy’, *Politics and Praxis: Exercises in Contemporary Political Theory* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984), pp.10432, esp. pp.116-17; and Gerald L. Bruns, ‘Blanchot/Celan: Unterwegssein (On Poetry and Freedom)’, *Maurice Blanchot: The Refusal of Philosophy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), pp. 88-95.

⁵ Maurice Blanchot, *La Communauté inavouable*, (Paris: Minuit, 1983), p9; *The Unavowable Community*, trans. by Pierre Joris (Barrytown: Station Hill, 1988), p1, translation modified.

write as Blanchot himself: in an idiosyncratic and fragmented way; in a style of rupture with literary conventions and rules; in a surrealist manner⁶. It is here where analysis and discourse on Blanchot's communism in writing becomes relevant for future strategies of resistance, and hopefully this work will open a pathway for the Global movement of protest and refusal.

Introduction

There is not a domain of the fundamental. There is, however, a fundamentality for every (real) domain which cannot be regained from within it, so that without the disruption of thought a practice will inevitably remained buried in itself and incapable of shaking off a metaphysical limit, itself the source of various ideological exploitations, of which this practice has only a distant sense, or even no suspicion [...]⁷

It has been argued by contemporary philosophers of politics that the liberal state has rediscovered and rehabilitated its essentially authoritarian and in some aspects fascist foundation⁸, repressing any form of antagonism and resistance through new techniques of "Power" (Negri, 2003) with the advent of what some have called a "liberal" eugenics based on the most

⁶ The first Surrealist manifesto was written by Andre Breton and released to the public in 1924. The document defines Surrealism as a movement dictated by the thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern. The text includes numerous examples of the applications of Surrealism to poetry and literature, but makes it clear that its basic tenets can be applied to any circumstance of life; not merely restricted to the artistic realm. The importance of the dream, as a reservoir of Surrealist inspiration is also highlighted. The manifesto concludes by asserting that Surrealist activity follows no any set plan or conventional pattern, and that Surrealists are ultimately nonconformists. Patrick Waldberg, *Surrealism* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971), pp66-75. There are numerous similarities between the surrealist and Blanchovian politics of political and literary refusal.

⁷ Gérard Granel, *Traditionis Traditio*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), pp12/106-107.

⁸ Antonio Negri, *Time for Revolution* (Cambridge: M.I.T, 2003), pp.121/131.

recent breakthroughs in genetic manipulation and experimentation⁹. Other thinkers have extended these arguments into the description of everyday life in most of our *liberal* democracies¹⁰. In this paper I will show how the extension, expansion and growth of state command appears to represent an inexorable tendency towards the following consequences (Agamben, 2005): the impunity of the State for its crimes, the disintegration and collapse of rights to liberty (particularly evident in Post 9/11 societies and more recently in the suppression of the Global Resistance movement between 2010 and 2012), and the preventative repression of forms of political and social dissensus¹¹ coming from minority groups.

In this authoritarian political framework, as Agamben argues, the law loses its *vis obligandi* or moral force, and “emergency” and “necessity” become the ultimate foundation and the very source of the bourgeois law (Agamben, 2005). This argument has been used many times after 9/11 to justify approvals by parliaments in the Western world of authoritarian and fascist laws: the Patriot Act in USA¹² or anti-terrorism legislation in UK¹³.

Agamben explains this development as the ruthless growth of a political rationality whereby the executive comes to acquire legislative

⁹ With the term Liberal eugenics, I am referring to an ideology which advocates the use of reproductive and genetic technologies where the choice of enhancing human capacities is left to the individual preferences of parents acting as consumers, rather than the public health policies of the state.

¹⁰ Giorgio Agamben, ‘Auctoritas and potestas’, in *Stato di eccezione*, trans. by Kevin Attell, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) p34.

¹¹ I will explain the term “dissensus” as: ‘a dispute over what is given and about the frame within which we sense something is given’. Consensus, on the other hand, shrinks the political space; reducing politics to the police. The word consensus will be examined and compared to the Sartrean conception of literature. Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* Edited and Translated by Steven Corcoran, (London: Continuum, 2010), p230.

¹² USA Patriot ACT enacted by the 107th US Congress and signed into law by President George W. Bush on 26/10/2001.

¹³ Terrorism Act, 2006, Chapter 1, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-terrorism-act-2006> > [accessed 3rd of June 2013].

power by means of decrees that parliaments are only called on to approve or rectify (Constitutional experiences in Italy, France or Germany provide many examples)¹⁴. In *Time for Revolution*, Antonio Negri articulates the extent of this systematic political closure of spaces of dissent and opposition, by drawing attention to the way in which authoritarian arrangements are implemented by Power in order to protect and defend the idea of liberal democracy. In this political framework, we should remember that authoritarianism is constitutional; in the new global society it is not possible to conceive of it as scandal, as deviation from the norm, as exception (Negri, 2003). The *state of exception* becomes the rule (Agamben, 2005). Agamben observes that this process, which historically began during the First World War as a state of emergency, nowadays functions in substitution for the democratic legislation process. For Santi Romano, '[t]he most informed formula is that which establishes the state of emergency in Italian law as an illegal procedure, conforming to a positive unwritten law which is thus juridical and constitutional. The fact that necessity can win over the law derives from its own nature and its original character, both from the logical and the historical point of view.'¹⁵ The integrated bourgeois state-spectacle as created by neoliberal theorists constitutes the extreme point of the evolution of the state form, towards which monarchies and republics, tyrannies and democracies, racist regimes and progressive ones are swiftly and suddenly moving (Agamben, 2005). This global movement tends towards the constitution of a supranational police state, where the

¹⁴Italy and Germany have seen very often, especially between the 1980s and the first decade of the 21st century. Governments of the day legislate under *decreto legge* in order to respond to different possible "terrorist" emergencies.

¹⁵Santi Romano, 1909, quoted by Agamben, 2005, p23.

norms of international law are tacitly abrogated one after the other (Agamben, 2005). In the global neoliberal society, not only has there not been a “declared war” since the beginning of the Second World War (thus realising Schmitt’s prophecy that all wars would become civil wars)¹⁶, but the invasion of a sovereign state can be presented as the execution of an act of internal jurisdiction.¹⁷

Agamben analyses the functioning of decision in the context of the law’s suspension, and observes that even the Fascist and Nazi regimes operated without cancelling their particular constitutions in a model that has been defined as a “dual State”. In Italy the Statute Albertino (the Italian Constitution from 1861 until the fall of the Fascist regime) was only replaced in 1948, three years after the end of the Second World War; a further structure that was not constitutionally formalized within it was added to the constitutional settings by virtue of a state of exception (Agamben, 2005). As Agamben argues, the term “dictatorship” is absolutely inadequate to provide a reason from the legal point of view for these regimes, just as the sharp opposition between democracy and dictatorship is misleading for an analysis of contemporary governmental paradigms (Agamben, 2005). This situation is indicative of a distressing and dangerous shift in political geography. We have moved from the Greek Polis to new and dangerous forms of Auschwitz (Agamben, 2005); the Western political model is now the concentration camp rather than the city state. Agamben argues that we are no longer citizens but all potential *homo sacer*, distinguishable from the

¹⁶ Carl Schmitt quoted by Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p15.

¹⁷ Giorgio Agamben, *Moyens sans fins. Notes sur la politique*, (Paris: Rivage Poche, 2002), p97.

prisoners of Guantanamo or any other high security place within the Empire not by any difference in legal status, but only by the fact that we have not yet transgressed the bourgeois law. In this political framework we are all enemies within the Empire (Wacquant, 1998, p85; Negri, 2000).

Rebels within the Empire

The movement of capital in its accomplished form has managed to pulverize the people in the countries of the “centre” [...] There are no longer any people; there is nothing in its place [...] No future.¹⁸

In Britain, since the coalition government came to power three years ago, the country has seen multiple student protests, occupations of dozens of universities, several strikes, a trade union march half a million strong, and social unrest on the streets of the capital (preceded by clashes with Bristol police in Stokes Croft earlier in 2011). Each of these events was sparked by a different cause; nevertheless, all took place against a backdrop of brutal cuts and ruthless austerity measures¹⁹. When people protested in Tottenham, Edmonton, Brixton and elsewhere in 2011, the government began a sustained and serious confrontation with students and workers: the rebels within the Empire opposed to its neoliberal rulers were attempting to create a platform of resistance and antagonism. The policies of the past few years and recent, incessant challenges to ordinary working class people may have

¹⁸ Gérard Granel, *Appeal à tous ceux qui ont affaire avec l'université* (Mauzevin: Trans-Europ-Repress, 1982), pp75/96.

¹⁹I am here discussing the British political and social situation, however, as I said, the Global Protest movement was active across the whole capitalist world.

clarified the division between the entitled and the dispossessed in extreme terms, but the context for social unrest cuts much deeper. The fatal shooting of Mark Duggan at the beginning of August 2011, where it appears, contrary to initial accounts, that exclusively police bullets were fired, is another tragic event in a longer history of the Metropolitan police's treatment of ordinary Londoners, especially those from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, the singling out of specific areas and individuals for monitoring through "stop and search" tactics and daily harassment. If we combine comprehensible suspicion and resentment towards the police based on experience and memory with high poverty and large unemployment, the reasons why people took to the streets become clear²⁰. Those condemning the events of August 2011 in north London and elsewhere (Rome, Lisbon, Athens, Madrid), would do well to take a step back and consider the bigger picture of exploitation and brutal repression coming from most of the Western world; countries in which the richest ten per cent are now more than one hundred times better off than the poorest²¹ and where consumerism predicated on personal debt has been pushed for years as the solution to a faltering economy can only create platforms of rebellion and resistance through a rediscovered Blanchovian politics of refusal and contestation.

Images of burning buildings, cars aflame and stripped-out shops may provide impressive nourishment for a restless and controlled media, ever-hungry for new stories and fresh groups to demonise, but we will understand

²⁰ In May 2012 Antonio Negri self-published (with Michael Hardt) an electronic pamphlet on the encampment movements of 2011/2012 called *Declaration* that argues the movement explores new forms of democracy. The introduction was published at Jacobin under the title "Take up the Baton". I am arguing that the only political strategy for the Global Resistance movement is explained by Negri in this pamphlet.

²¹ Amelia Gentleman and Helene Mulholland, 'Unequal Britain: richest 10% are now 100 times better off than the poorest', *The Guardian*, 27 January 2010.

nothing of these events if we ignore the history and context in which they occurred. In the end, however, why were police forces in Britain, Greece, Portugal, Spain and Italy able to control the legitimate protests of the multitude and restore the “democratic order”?

What went wrong with the Global Protest movement? This article will provide an answer to these questions, examining and proposing to the resistance movement Maurice Blanchot’s conception of freedom and political engagement as a possible way forward for future resistance and rebellion.

Neo-liberal Freedom

In liberal political philosophy, beginning with Immanuel Kant, freedom is often identified within a persistent form of subjective mastery²². This identification of freedom with mastery, I argue, encourages political and social exploitation, emphasizes the dangerous prerogatives of capitalist authority and oppression, and strengthens the extreme resilience of phallogocentric domination. In 1958, Isaiah Berlin wrote his famous essay ‘Two Concepts of Liberty’ (Berlin, 1969). From the hundreds of senses of the words liberty and freedom that historians of political ideas have studied

²² Immanuel Kant: *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Paul Guyer, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). *In the Critique of Pure Reason*, especially in the Third Antinomy, Kant offers arguments for a solution to the problem of freedom and necessity which apparently seem to do justice to the claims of libertarianism and determinism. It has been argued that Kant’s theory of freedom is a failure. Ralph Walker says on this: ‘unfortunately Kant’s attempt to reconcile noumenal freedom with the systematic determinism of the phenomenal world is a hopeless failure...’ and he concludes ‘his account of freedom is not a success’. Ralph Walker, *Kant*, (London: Routledge, 1978), p148.

and explained, Berlin selects two for his political and philosophical analysis: positive and negative liberty. Positive liberty can be simply described as freedom to be the most one can be. If we discover our true interests coincide with the general will, then we may find ourselves in the inquisitive position of being forced to be positively free. If, in a Marxist perspective, we find our true interests to be determined by our nature as species beings, then achieving positive liberty consists in achieving absolute equality such that each gives according to his or her abilities and receives according to his or her needs. Finally, if, following Nazi ideology, we hold our authentic interests to lie with the continuous expansion and rise to power of the *Volk* (nation), then we may experience our freedom only in the life and death struggle for *Lebensraum* (Living Space). Positive liberty denotes a freedom to do. Berlin therefore identifies positive liberty with an act of self-mastery. Historically, Berlin notes, the quest for positive liberty has therefore led humanity to a “prescribed form of life” that often serves as ‘[...] a false masquerade for brutal tyranny’ (Berlin, 1969) p131.

Negative liberty can be simply explained as freedom from constraint. It signifies the social and political space accorded the individual to pursue his or her own desires and goals unconstrained by the impositions of others. Negative liberty denotes the individual's unconstrained power over his or her immediate environment, enabling the exclusion of others from its trespassing. Berlin explains negative liberty as the real core of classical political liberalism in all its historical forms. Such theoretical distinctions, Berlin argues, have significant political effects and

consequences (Berlin, 1969)²³. Berlin, it comes as no surprise, opts for negative freedom. My intent here is not to add any further comment to the intellectual, political and academic debate surrounding Berlin's important work²⁴. Rather, my academic and political purpose remains to show the continuous importance of Blanchot's idea of freedom as he expressed throughout his works as the only possible alternative to empty and meaningless discussions on how to achieve freedom and promote Internationalist politics of resistance and antagonism. I am arguing that what was missing in the recent Global Protest movement in Europe and the USA was the idea of *communism* as the engine of any revolutionary uprising. Therefore, if the Global Resistance movement between 2010 and 2012 failed, how can we avoid new defeats in the future? It will be through Maurice Blanchot and Martin Heidegger²⁵, in their analysis of freedom and enabling power, that my work will find an answer to these questions. It will be through them that I propose a way forward to the multitude in its strife against the inner brutality of neoliberal forces.

Blanchot, Communism and Resistance

On the contrary, this subjectum was inscribed by Marx under the figure of Capital and by Heidegger under that of the essence of modern technology.²⁶

²³ Negative freedom became the iconic symbol of the 'Thatcher/Reagan' policies.

²⁴ Michael Garnett, 'Ignorance, Incompetence and the Concept of Liberty', *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 15, (2007), pp428–46.

²⁵ Maurice Blanchot was greatly influenced by Martin Heidegger in his early years.

²⁶ Gérard Granel, *WHO COMES AFTER THE SUBJECT?* edited by E. Cadava, P. Connor, J.L. Nancy, (London: Routledge, 1991), pp.148-157.

Blanchot, as a member of the *Comité étudiants-écrivains* in the midst of the revolutionary events of May 1968, thought that the authentic political question to be addressed was: ‘[h]ow to be several (*être à plusieurs*), not in order to achieve something, but with no other reason than to make plurality exist by giving it new meaning?’²⁷ In his political, ethical and social engagement with the events of May 1968 in France and in the common authorship with Dionys Mascolo and Jean Schuster of the frequently referred and described “Declaration des 121”, Blanchot remained constantly dedicated in creating a new political and literary International Movement of resistance and antagonism. Today, the apparent triumph of liberal democracy has not made one of the key questions behind those highly political and revolutionary acts superfluous: is liberal democracy different from capitalism or an unconscious and unaware vehicle for capitalism and political repression of dissensus? It appears manifest in this time of political, ethical and theocratic threat that liberal democracy, in its ruthless domination of technological apparatuses, represents an element of capitalist hegemony and domination; this situation creates an inner need to rediscover the ideas of communism: the only possible way forward for Global Resistance policies (Blanchot, 1969).

²⁷Maurice Blanchot, ‘The Infinite Conversation’, translated by Susan Hanson, (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p409; translation modified.

Human Equality, Impersonality and the New International

Communism is here necessarily in quotation marks: one does not belong to communism and communism does not let itself be designated by what names it.²⁸

If Maurice Blanchot is known in the Anglophone world at all, it is as a literary critic. The author of *The Space of Literature* and *Literature and the Right to Death*, whose reputation has perhaps been concealed by those whom he influenced: Georges Bataille, Emmanuel Levinas, Michel Foucault, Giles Deleuze, Felix Guattari and Jacques Derrida. However, what I want to discuss in this article is related to his political philosophy, his idea of communism and his conception of absolute freedom as possible responses and future strategies for the Global Protest movement²⁹. Can Blanchot's idea of freedom and political engagement help us understand where and why the Global Protest movement between 2010 and 2012 failed? Can Blanchot's engagement with the problem of freedom help us to reach the replacement of all modes of capitalist Power in a New International movement of protest, resistance and antagonism³⁰? What surfaces behind these questions is basically a negative conception of the classical idea of liberal freedom and of politics in general: a conception

²⁸Maurice Blanchot, *Friendship*, translated by Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p295.

²⁹"The advent of communism": Blanchot uses this expression in an untitled foreword to his monumental *The Infinite Conversation*. A certain writing, he affirms, "passes through the advent of communism, recognised as the ultimate affirmation—communism being still always beyond an official and real communism."

³⁰ What went wrong with the Old International? Why did it fail in its ideals of liberation and freedom? The New International will be the place, the Platonic Khora, where the subaltern, the damned of the earth—students: the unemployed, workers, gay and transgender, will be able to be heard, where absolute and authentic freedom will stand together.

according to which Power always coincides with exploitation and repression by phallogocentrism and thus stands in antithesis to freedom by which it will be finally conquered. What is freedom for Maurice Blanchot?

Blanchot and the Experience of May 1968

Maurice Blanchot remained enthusiastically involved during the events of May 1968 in France.³¹ What was he really doing and planning to achieve by protesting alongside the students rebelling against the authoritarian regime of General De Gaulle³²? Could he not see his political engagement would apparently lead nowhere? Blanchot was on the streets as a demonstrator: what was his role during May 1968, which he later called '[...] the most significant political event in the last 20 years' (Blanchot, 1997, p295)? Why are those events still so important in order to address and understand Blanchot's conception of freedom? What can we learn from them? Early May 1968 saw in France (but not only there) the first occupations and expulsions: the first demonstrations of the *rebels* against the *Imperial* forces. Blanchot was staying with the Antelmes in Paris, and it was with their joint friends Jean Schuster, Dionys Mascolo and Marguerite Duras, who had known each other for ten years by this time, that he worked against French colonialism in Algeria, drafting the 'Manifesto of the 121' (French full title: *Déclaration sur le droit à l'insoumission dans la guerre d'Algérie*, or

³¹ Christopher Bident, *Partenaire Invisible* (Paris: Champ Vallon, 1998).

³² From 1958 to 1968 General Charles De Gaulle tried to create in France an authoritarian political and social regime as Petain from 1940 to 1944 in Vichy, *International Socialist Review*, Vol. 19, N.3 p.67-72, Summer 1958

Declaration on the right of insubordination in the Algerian War. This was a political document, an open letter signed by 121 intellectuals (including Klossowski, Sartre, Sarraute, Lefebvre)³³ and published in Paris on 6 September 1960, calling on public opinion and the French government, headed by the Gaullist Michel Debre, to recognise the Algerian War as a legitimate struggle for freedom and independence, denouncing the use of torture by the French Army and calling for French conscientious objectors to the conflict to be respected by the authorities. Blanchot was also present on the first night of the barricades, from 10 to 11 May, and participated in the march of 13 May. He was there at Stade Charléty to hear former Prime Minister Mendès-France offer his protection to the movement and at the protests at the Renault factory at Flin on 10 June, which saw a young militant chased into a river by riot police and drown³⁴. Furthermore, Blanchot was present at the end of the march, protesting after demonstrations had been banned and was therefore at risk more than ever of police violence and political repression. But above all, Blanchot was actively involved in the Students and Writers Action Committee, created on 20 May, whose participants initially included Michel Butor and Jacques Roubaud, Nathalie Sarraute and Claude Roy (Blanchot, 1997, p295). There were writers, journalists, students and television reporters present on the first day of the protest, though their numbers quickly diminished. Blanchot

³³ I explicitly refer here to his co-drafting of the manifesto supporting those who participated in the struggle for Algerian independence that led to his arrest and interrogation in 1960 and his participation in the *événements* of May 1968 and his membership of the 'Students and Workers Action Committee'. See Leslie Hill, *Blanchot – Extreme Contemporary* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997) p230.

³⁴The "explosive community" of participants of May 1968 are presented as bound by ties of fraternity. See Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, translated by Pierre Joris (Barrytown: Station Hill Press, 1988), pp29–32.

remained with Duras and Antelmes until the end of August 1968 (Blanchot, 1997). The Committee was responsible for many posters and bulletins, which were the result of a collective and authentically Internationalist labour³⁵. However, above all, they were not to be read as representing what happened at the events, supplementing the accounts of May 1968 that were already being published, but to continue their movement in its innermost radical force. The writing on the walls, the articles distributed in the street and posters were composed by disorderly and idiosyncratic words (Blanchot's "communism in writing"), free of classical bourgeois ideas of discourse; transitory, they appeared and suddenly disappeared³⁶. What matters is not what they said, the form of signification they would maintain, nor the idea that something might be said about what was happening, but that something could be said, affirmed beyond any form of control. They were there only to affirm an essential break, a politics of refusal and contestation, whether their message was apparently lost or passed on. They were there to affirm a new idea of communism, a "communism in writing", and a political break with the Power that exists, therefore with the bourgeois notion of Power³⁷ that predominates. This obviously applies to the concept of the University, to the idea of knowledge, to the language relations to be found in teaching, in learning, perhaps to all language, but it also applies

³⁵ All of these political elements were missing during the Events of 2010-2012.

³⁶ A certain writing, he affirms, 'passes through the advent of communism, recognised as the ultimate affirmation...' See Maurice Blanchot, 1993.

³⁷ Antonio Negri's analysis of Spinoza suggests that recognizing a distinction and antagonism between alternative forms of power is an important key to evaluate the contemporary relevance of Spinoza's political thought. This proposition, however, poses a complicated translation problem: while the Latin terms used by Spinoza, potestas and potentia, have distinct terms in most European languages, English provides only a single term, power. Negri's argument transports this terminological distinction to a political environment ignoring any sort of translation problem. He contends that Spinoza provides us not only with a critique of Power but also with a theoretical construction of power. See Antonio Negri, 2003.

even more to our own conception of opposition to the political and economic Powers that exist, each time such opposition constitutes itself to become a new bourgeois party in power. In the incidents across France from February 1968 onwards, students demanded an authentic³⁸ freedom of speech and movement. There came the occupations (at Nanterre by the so-called 'Movement of 22 March' and at the Sorbonne on 13 May, after the suspension of courses there), the day of the national strike, and the battles in the Latin Quarter between students and the police which saw paving stones and metal grilles wrenched from the street and barricades spontaneously thrown (Leslie Hill, 1997, p230). Beyond the university, in a movement that was continuous with that of the student revolt, factories were occupied and strikes planned. By 16 May, fifty factories were occupied, including the six main plants at Renault; the ports of Le Havre and Marseilles were closed; by 17 May, 200,000 workers were on strike all across France, and by 18 May, 2,000,000. Then there was a general strike of 10,000,000 people (Leslie Hill, 1997). Barricades, sit-downs, refusals to disperse, battles with the police, the *tricoloeur* set aflame: each time it was the whole of capitalist society that was being brought into question in a radical movement of resistance and refusal.

Remembering the events of 1968 in 1983, Blanchot wrote that they were not even a question of overthrowing an old world; what mattered was to let a possibility manifest itself, the possibility beyond any utilitarian gain

³⁸ Erich Fromm in *The Fear of Freedom* gives a relevant conception of authenticity; (Routledge & Kegan Paul 1942). A Frommean authentic individual may behave consistently in a manner that accord with cultural norms, for the reason that those norms appear on consideration to be appropriate, rather than simply in the interest of conforming to current norms. Fromm thus considers authenticity to be a positive outcome of enlightened and informed motivation rather than a negative outcome of rejection of the expectations of others.

of a being together that gave back to all the right to equality in fraternity through a freedom of speech that conquered everyone. Everybody had something to say, and, at times, to write (on the walls); what exactly, mattered little. Saying it was more important and more revolutionary than what was said (Blanchot, 1988). A being-together, a community, a communism in which, as he says in another text, it became ‘[...] almost easy to forget all particularity, and impossible to distinguish between young and old, the unknown and the very well known’ (Blanchot, 1988). Despite the incessant disputes and differences, debates and controversies, Blanchot says, ‘[...] each person recognized himself in the anonymous words inscribed on the walls’ (Blanchot, 1988); like the posters, the graffiti ‘[...] never declared themselves the words of an author, being of all and for all, in their contradictory formulation’ (Blanchot, 1988). What was happening belonged to everyone in a radical act of refusal, contestation and rebellion.

It is to this kind of freedom of speech and more broadly this absolute freedom that Blanchot looks; it is quite the opposite of the speech of the engaged professional intellectual, of the thinker who would speak on behalf of everyone else. The movement needed no political representation, neither through established channels like the French Communist Party (which repeatedly condemned the student left, even as it sought to associate itself with the movement) nor the various trade unions (which sought, in the main, to use the Events merely to bolster their bargaining position); they needed no one to speak on their behalf (Blanchot, 1988).

Blanchot, remembering the street demonstrations between 1996 and 1997, said ‘[t]here were no friends, only comrades who immediately

addressed each other without formality and accepted neither age differences nor the recognition due to prior celebrity' (Blanchot, 1988). Then the role of the action committees was merely to answer to and uphold the freedom of speech in the same manner as the collective and anonymous writings of the Students' and Writers' Action Committee, creating a process of "rupture" with the past in a renewed quest for communism. Freedom was a freedom to say everything, a limitless movement of reason, freedom from conventional social bourgeois structures that kept apart students and workers, and workers within an organization: the shop steward from cheap immigrant labour. Freedom must remain limitless in order to achieve its radical goals of antagonism, rebellion and communism (Blanchot, 1993). There was in May 1968 and still is present, an incessant demand for freedom from the ordering of speech and language by the University, the system of knowledge, and more generally, culture at large. During the Events of May 1968, speech always remained collective without being subordinated to a unitary source of power or bourgeois values. It was enough that anyone could speak, and that speaking, thereby, was withdrawn from the familiar channels in which language was organized.

Here, then, is Blanchovian freedom, a freedom of speech that manifests itself in the immense common powerlessness of the crowd and escapes all kinds of political, social and religious organisation. A freedom that, for Blanchot, becomes possible only in a *change of epoch* for whose signs he searches in many of his essays from late 1950 onwards, where he refused old nationalisms and racisms and old forms of Heideggerian enrootedness or attachments to places. A speech that belongs to the man or

the woman of the street, free from allegiance to a particular homeland, a people or a flag, and, as must be made clearer today, from a bourgeois separatism that dissolves any sense of the collective, any idea of Internationalism (Blanchot, 1993). The crowd must remain, for Blanchot, disorganized and unorganisable in order to achieve freedom, an authentic and absolute idea of freedom (Blanchot, 1993). If the action committees took on some of the responsibilities of civil administration, then they in no way formed an alternative centre of government. They were only pretending to organize an “absolute disorganization” while respecting the multitude, says Blanchot (Blanchot, 1993); they did not distinguish themselves from the anonymous crowd (multitude), from the people demonstrating. The committees did not represent the movement of resistance, articulating the interests of the men and women of the street, but allowed them to speak freely and thereby give voice to the generic power to speak, confirming a new way of being together, of being-in-common, of speech, even in their enthusiastic debates: an ethical and renewed communism beyond the *real* idea of communism. It is this quest for a new and renewed communism that was missing between the “multitude” during the Events between 2010 and 2012. The Global Protest movement was without any Internationalist project; the segments of this movement were exclusively seeking to resolve local issues without any global conception of a “rupture” from and with the past³⁹. Any successful rebellion needs a complete rupture, refusal and

³⁹ In May 2012 Antonio Negri self-published (with Michael Hardt) an electronic pamphlet on the encampment movements of 2011/2012 called *Declaration* that argues the movement explores new forms of democracy. The introduction was published at Jacobin under the title “Take up the Baton”. I am arguing that the only political strategy for the Global Resistance movement is explained by Negri in this pamphlet. See Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Declaration*, (Kindle Edition: Argo-Navis, 2012).

contestation of the present and the past; any radical event needs a renewed approach and study of communism as an engine for change; any rebellion needs an authentic Heideggerian analysis and critique of neoliberal Power.

Heidegger, Freedom and Enabling Power

In Hermann Morchen's view, the issue of Power is not merely 'a special topic but rather essential, though previously [a] virtually neglected essential element in Heidegger's political thought.'⁴⁰ Starting from *Being and Time*, Heidegger's entire opus is permeated by a persistent critique of neoliberal ideas of domination⁴¹, a critique which, though directed against repressive constraints, does not simply negate Power understood as an enabling potency or empowerment. As an answer to this predominance – which is closely linked with the “dictatorship” of “the They” (Man) and the “spell” of chatter – the study mobilizes the counterforce of “conscience” as well as the category of “care” or “solicitude” which is claimed to “govern” human Dasein⁴² (Heidegger, 1962, p50). In the domain of human intersubjectivity (Mitsein), *Being and Time* replaces a repressive type of care, domineering solicitude, with a more generous and enabling mode styled as pure emancipatory care; is this the Heideggerian response to our quest for a New

⁴⁰ Hermann Morchen, *Power and Domination in the Thought of Heidegger and Adorno* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981) p15/51.

⁴¹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* translation by John Macquarrie, (Norwich: SCM Press, 1962).

⁴² Heidegger uses the expression *Dasein* to refer to the “experience” of “being” that is peculiar to human beings. Thus it is a form of being that is aware of and must confront such issues as personhood, mortality and the paradox of living in relationship with other humans while being ultimately alone with oneself.

International movement of resistance? Can Heideggerian political philosophy help us to understand the failures of the resistance movement of 2010 to 2012?

In the first case (neoliberal constitutional framework), Heidegger notes that the fellow-being is reduced to a 'dependent and dominated individual', even though domination is silent or covert and undetected by its victim. By contrast, the second type does not so much meddle or interfere in the other's life as it seeks to anticipate his 'existential possibility of being with the aim not of relieving him of care but of properly handing it over to him' (Heidegger, 1962, p5/20). This latter type, which, Heidegger adds, is 'genuine care in that it involves the other's existence and not merely a particular topic of worry', basically helps the fellow-being 'to acquire self-transparency and thus to become free for the solicitation of care' (Heidegger, 1962, p22). The notion of the 'counter force' of conscience and care, it is important to note, points to an ontological kind of potency which, as gift of Being, is not simply available to human manipulation and thus may also be described (in human terms) as a mode of powerlessness or 'non-power' (Morchen, 1980); an ontological and limitless freedom. Can a Heideggerian critique of Power also help us to understand why the Global Protest movement between 2010 and 2012 failed? How can we use these two authors in their political thinking as a possible way forward for new forms of antagonism?

Concluding Remarks

This paper has attempted to propose two possible different ideas of political engagement as a feasible response to the failures of the Global Protest movement of 2010 to 2012. My main purpose is to open a debate on what went wrong between 2010 and 2012 in the Global Protest movement. I proposed two authors, Blanchot and Heidegger, as theorists for a new beginning of a New International movement of resistance and antagonism⁴³. There is an incessant demand for rebellion in our cities, states, communities, but we appear to recognize and accept all the neoliberal rules of domination and oppression as inevitable. Why did the Global Protest movement fail in the last few years? As Maurice Blanchot wrote in his novel *The Most High*, we live in an oppressive state of “the end of history”⁴⁴ in which people accept neoliberal rules of control and surveillance as *inevitable*; savage cuts to welfare and education as unavoidable⁴⁵. Why, in states where unemployment is over thirty per cent, are we, the active population, not able to create “spaces” of resistance and antagonism? How can we re-start this

⁴³ These authors, among many others, try to show what they term “Heideggerian Marxism”.

⁴⁴ Alexandre Kojève was responsible for the serious introduction of Hegel into 20th Century French philosophy, influencing many leading French intellectuals who attended his seminars on *The Phenomenology of Spirit* in Paris in the 30s, among the others Bataille and Maurice Blanchot. He focused on Hegel’s philosophy of history and is best known for his theory of ‘the end of history’ and for initiating ‘existential Marxism.’ Kojève arrives at what is generally considered a truly original interpretation by reading Hegel through the twin lenses of Marx’s materialism and Heidegger’s ontology of freedom.

⁴⁵ *The Most High* is a first-person narrative by Henri Sorge, a 25 year old bureaucrat working at the registry office of City Hall in “the State.” This Hegelian State has reached the end of history: there will be no more substantive events, no more real wars. By treating Sorge as an embodiment of the Law, and Truth of the State, the novel transforms the theoretical concerns of freedom and action considered in “Literature and the Right to Death” into premises for an engagement of narration with the absolute erasure of human freedom and with an ironic and also radical undoing of the world that it postulates. See Maurice Blanchot, *The Most High*, translation of *Le Très-Haut* by Allan Stoekl (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996).

antagonistic movement? The revolution, the hopes and dreams coming from the Global Protest movement between 2010 and 2012 failed for a combination of different factors: lack of Internationalism, lack of leadership and absence of communist ideals. This, its demise, on Blanchot's account, should not surprise us. A movement that shows an absolute *absence of reaction* to already constituted powers leaves it completely vulnerable to those powers.

From past experience, the only demonstrable historical tendency is for capital to expand and intensify (with all the historical contradictions that entails). Capitalism will always try to crush movements of resistance and rebellion, will always try to dominate and establish inequalities using the phantom of "negative freedom"⁴⁶. Capitalism and the multitude (the Global Protest movement) cannot enter in any kind of political, philosophical or social dialogue⁴⁷. The experiences coming from the failures of the Global Protest movement show us that the only way forward for the Global Protest and Resistance movement must be "refusal", an authentic and limitless process of refusal of neoliberal rules in their oppressive structure. And it is up to us, the multitude, using our power of resistance in defeating the true evils, the Empire and its mercenaries, by establishing a new authentic movement of Global Resistance through a rediscovered reading and understanding of Blanchot's communism and Heideggerian enabling power.

A spectre is haunting liberal democracies. Its name is refusal. It lives in a space of contestation and communicates through a "communism in writing".

⁴⁶ Antonio Negri, *Time for Revolution*, Cambridge, M.I.T, p.121/131

⁴⁷ Maurice Blanchot in his experience during the Events of May 1968 never looked for a dialogue with the old and discredited Gaullist regime.

Selected Bibliography

Agamben, G., 2005. Auctoritas and potestas. In *Stato di eccezione*, trans. by Attell, K. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Agamben, G., 1998. *Homo Sacer*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Agamben, G., 2002. *Moyens sans fins. Notes sur la politique*. Paris: Rivage Poche.

Berlin, I., 1969. Two Concepts of Liberty. In *Four Essays on Liberty*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bident, C., 1998. *Partenaire Invisible*. Paris: Champ Vallon.

Blanchot, M., 1996. *The Most High*. trans. by Stoekl, A. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Blanchot, M., 1982. *L'Espace littéraire*. trans. by Smock, A. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Blanchot, M., 1993. *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. by Hanson, S. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.

Blanchot, M., 1997. *Friendship*. translated by Rottenberg, E. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Blanchot, M., 1997. *The Unavowable Community*, trans. by Joris, P. Barrytown: Station Hill.

Fromm, E., 1942. *The Fear of Freedom*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Granel, G., 1972. *Traditionis Traditio*. Paris: Gallimard.

Granel, G., 1991. *WHO COMES AFTER THE SUBJECT?* edited by E. Cadava, P. Connor, J.L. Nancy, London: Routledge.

Granel, G., 1982. *Appeal à tous ceux qui ont affaire avec l'université*. Mauzevin: Trans-Europ-Repress.

Heidegger, M., 1962. *Being and Time*. trans by Macquarie, J. Norwich: SCM Press.

Heidegger, M., 1990. *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Hill, L., 1997. *Blanchot—Extreme Contemporary*. London and New York: Routledge.

Negri, N., 2003.*Time for Revolution*. Cambridge: M.I.T.

Kant, I., 1998.*Critique of Pure Reason*. trans by Guyer, P. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Heidegger, M., 1991. *The Principle of Reason*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press.

Morchen, M., 1981.*Power and Domination in the Thought of Heidegger and Adorno*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.

Rancière, J., 2010.*Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. trans by Corcoran, S. London: Continuum.

Waldberg, P., 1971. *Surrealism*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Walker, R., 1978.*Kant*. London: Routledge.

Journal Articles

Derrida, J., 1988. *Like the Sound of the Sea Deep within a Shell: Paul de Man's War*. *Critical Inquiry*, 14(3), pp590-962.

Garnett, M., 2007. Ignorance, Incompetence and the Concept of Liberty. *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 15(4), pp428-446.

Online Resources

Terrorism Act, 2006, Chapter 1, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-terrorism-act-2006> [accessed 3rd of June 2013].

Gentlemen, A., Mulholland, H., 2010, 27th Jan. 'Unequal Britain: richest 10% are now 100 times better off than the poorest', *The Guardian*

Negri, A., Hardt, A., 2012.*Declaration*. Kindle Edition: Argo-Navis.