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# **A Glance at Work**

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*edited by*  
Vanna Boffo

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## Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION. EDUCATIONAL GLANCES AT WORK <i>Vanna Boffo</i>	7
WORK AND PERSON: SENSE, CARE AND RELATIONSHIPS <i>Vanna Boffo</i>	15
WORK AND PERSON: PLACES OF LABOUR AS A DIVIDED TERRITORY <i>Pietro Causarano</i>	39
MIGRANT JOBS AND HUMAN CULTURES: TRANSFORMATION THROUGH A NEW FORMATION <i>Clara Silva</i>	59
MIGRANT JOBS AND HUMAN CULTURES: TANGIBLE AND INTANGIBLE KNOW-HOW <i>Giovanna Del Gobbo</i>	77
CHILDHOOD AND WORK: PROTECTION AND OBSCURATION <i>Emiliano Macinai</i>	95
YOUNG PEOPLE AND WORK: COMMODIFICATION AND PERCEPTION <i>Stefano Oliviero</i>	115
DIVERSE JOBS: ATYPICAL WORK AND FORMATION TO SUPPORT AN UNSTABLE BALANCE <i>Maria Rita Mancaniello</i>	135
THE AUTHORS	159
NAMES INDEX	163



Vanna Boffo

## Introduction

### Educational Glances at Work

No man is an iland, intire of it selfe;  
every man is a peece of the Con-  
tinent, a part of the maine;  
[...] and therefore never send to  
know for whom the bell tolls;  
it tolls for thee.  
John Donne, *Meditation 17*

*A Glance at Work. Educational Perspectives* is a volume written by a group of authors<sup>1</sup>. It is not just a collection of essays drawn up by some of the scholars – Pietro Causarano, Clara Silva, Giovanna Del Gobbo, Emiliano Macinai, Stefano Oliviero and Maria Rita Mancaniello – who took part in the ‘Seminari sul lavoro’ (Seminars on Work) project. Instead, what I am introducing here is the expression of an *unusual* research path, which has been *groundbreaking* in its development. First of all, the topic can be said to be *groundbreaking* in that it is a route little trodden in present-day pedagogical publications. Our intention was to deal with *work* from the multiple viewpoints that we express as researchers in the pedagogical sphere: we started from the assumption that to deal with education and formation we must not leave out work – a central aspect in the lives of each one of us – from our fields of interest. Second to that was the method adopted, *transversal* and *critico-interpretative* in style, tackling a common path through the range of research methods distinguishing our various fields of professional study.

Therefore, on one hand, the essays collected here revolve around a topic that is *borderline* to the pedagogical sphere; and on the other hand, the manner in which this topic has been explored has seen the *trans-disciplinary* involvement of researchers who, while belonging to various scientific and pedagogical sectors, differ owing to their subjects of interest and methodological approaches. We considered the contamination between topics and methods to be an interesting and distinctive route to follow in order to investigate a topic – *work* – which, from the perspective of the human person, is experiencing a moment of immense unease, owing to the variability in

<sup>1</sup> This book was published in Italian in May 2012. See V. Boffo (edited by), *Di lavoro e non solo. Sguardi pedagogici*, Simplicitissimus Book Farm, Milan, 2012.

contract types and the multiple attacks on the dignity of material living conditions. It is an unease that does not just concern the political and economic structures that have enabled this change to happen, namely a return to the past with regard to the job conditions of millions of workers, it concerns the human condition and its formation in the present day.

Through meetings and the shared research path, we were able to hold a series of seminars in the spring of 2011, from March to May, at the Faculty of Education Sciences at the University of Florence. The series consisted of six meetings, with an audience that was varied but mainly comprised students from the Faculty, focussing on the relationship between work and the various subjects usually dealt with in the researchers' fields of pedagogical study: children, adolescents, migrants, the disabled<sup>2</sup>, adults and the family. Thanks to the series of seminars, the faculty and its students were able to follow the research as it developed, beginning from a simple, but evident question concerning the substantial absence of educational/formative debate on work as a human activity, as an educational emergency, as a cultural production process, and as a means for forming the person.

Therefore, we teamed up around the necessity to perform an educational task: to weave back together the multiple threads of a topic which could help us, in a pedagogical key, to decipher the sense of work in the formative processes of the subjects, individuals and human people whose paths of learning and schooling, educational relationships and formative dimensions, inside both formal and non-formal institutions, concern us by way of tradition and profession. This research process found expression, first of all, through the seminars, during which dialogue and conversation provided the means to open ourselves up to epistemological and didactical comparison.

In this sense, the volume that I am editing is the product of a common path, with shared methodological choices, whose investigation was extended thanks to listening to what the others had to say during the seminars and meetings. Each one of us was free to probe our own research sphere and to do so with the most suitable instruments available. However, we tried to follow the line of reflection given by the open and free, and once again transversal, use of the objects chosen for our single analyses.

Pedagogy, a science among the sciences of education, as such studies the formative process that involves all human beings during their existence, starting from when they assume a mental or physical form for the

<sup>2</sup> The Italian edition contains two additional essays to the English version relating to two topics discussed in the Seminars on Work cycle: the essay by Tamara Zappaterra, *Lavori Diversi: la disabilità adulta e il rafforzamento identitario*, deals with the relationship between work and adult disability, while the essay by Maria Ranieri, *Lavoro e nuove tecnologie: dall'uomo artigiano alla formazione digitale*, is concerned with the digital revolution.



whole of their lifespan. Moreover, in Italy, over the last twenty years pedagogical studies on the category of formation<sup>3</sup> have highlighted how the formative process can be included in the interpretation of the galaxy of education in which every man, but also every environment or institution, finds its own forms of subsistence. Indeed, as the Greek *paideia* had already clearly highlighted, education is the category that permits every man to deal with his own human condition. Societies and communities are constituted through and *with* education; the processes that permit the production and reproduction of cultures and *vital living habits* are educational processes. Inculturation, education, learning and human formation are educational processes that guarantee man's survival in the forms of different life civilisations. As a discipline that deals with the education and formation of man, pedagogy has a particular gaze on the processes of teaching and learning, from that which takes place beginning in the first months of life to that which is structured in formal, non-formal and informal educational institutions. This is the theoretical context in which each of the authors of the essays carried out his or her research activity, an activity that then takes different directions: history of pedagogy, philosophy of education, social pedagogy, child pedagogy, intercultural pedagogy, special pedagogy, teaching new technologies, and marginality and deviance pedagogy. The researchers have dealt with educational processes, but, above all, with the subjects that interpret and live these processes in their daily existence.

So what is the relationship between *pedagogy* and *work*?

Work is seen today as a primary activity of man, alongside learning, inculturation and education: as a 'banally' human and everyday activity. So everyday and obligatory in order to live and survive that it has become necessary to try to understand and reflect upon it, almost break up and plough through it, so as to understand its directions, its multitude of places and meanings for the subjects who *work, act, do jobs* and *professions*, and to head down into dangerous territories, lonely, not trodden by our habitual research. What we are dealing with here is not educational professions which, on the contrary, are a widely debated topic.

Some disciplines traditionally deal with work – namely sociology, economics, political sciences, jurisprudence, medicine, psychology and engineering. Historians have shown much and in-depth interest in the object of our reflection, both in direct and transversal terms. The *Annales* histo-

<sup>3</sup> The category of *formazione* that is investigated in the essays in this book at times has been translated with "formation", at times with "formative process", and at others by "education" and/or "training". Within Italian pedagogical studies, the topic of *formazione* (formation) has been one of the most important in the philosophy of education. Formation is meant as that personal and cultural process referred to by the Greek category of *paideia* and the German *Bildung*, as well as what can be deferred from the tradition of Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy and from the studies of German philosophers, beginning in the eighteenth century.

riographical tradition has also made a broad investigation of the matter, in precisely the same sense. It has dealt with subjects and ways of living, and by doing so, has given us an enlightening cross-section of the centuries and historical eras. Let us think of Philippe Ariès and his text, familiar to everyone in all Italian classrooms: *Centuries of Childhood. A Social History of Family Life*. Philosophy has been concerned with work and very minutely too. Just one of the many philosophers we can cite is Karl Marx, whose *Capital* was a central work for understanding the production processes of the modern and postmodern economies: dominating the Italian cultural scene for several decades, in particular in the 1970s and 80s, it then plunged from view, with no resistance from the many young people who, in his name, had expressed a freedom which they were not able to carry through into everyday adult life. Economics, a relatively young science, has taken charge of analysing just about all of the fields of research inherent to work and marked, in theory and in practice, the developments and processes of work organisation, starting from the production model of the Fordist factory in the twentieth century. However, labour law, occupational medicine, occupational psychology and occupational sociology also come to mind, developing sectors of study which have thus enabled the regulation of work and jobs in order to protect the workers themselves.

The topics of work flexibility, precarious jobs, and the relationship between work, the market and production are, therefore a widely debated subject in the sociological, philosophical, economic, juridical, political and medical fields. It would be important for a science of man, such as pedagogy, to be able to investigate the sense and meaning that these transformations have for the life of every human being. Work is not an abstract concept, but is incorporated into every person who does it and in the relationships linking them to others. Man, his education and human formation provide the pivot around which to perform a pedagogical survey within the universe of “work”, and inside the relationship between the human condition and working/professional life. What sense does work acquire today when we go to observe children, young people, migrants, the new poor and adults in situations of hardship? Namely, what sense does it assume when the abstractness of the economic reports, the figures, meet the people, the problems, the lives marked by fatal accidents in the workplace and the lack of work?

The intention of this volume is to build a seedbed for reflection on the central position assumed by work in the lives of every woman and man, inhabitants of a planet in which the transformation of working activities is imposing radical changes on lifestyles, community-building and societies. The essays intend to spark agile but critical, synchronic and diachronic reflection which, stemming from contextual questions on the meaning of work and on change in the workplace, will proceed to investigate the subjects in their specific lives and existential conditions. The contributions put together do not in any way claim to be exhaustive,

but desire above all to place our students' attention on *different* visions of a determining topic/problem in the formation of every educator and trainer. We were interested in reflection, we could say, from the bottom up, conducted in constant dialogue with various disciplinary sectors, the contamination giving rise to the wealth that always derives from generative communication and mutual listening.

The essays, originating from the seminars, are grouped around some conceptual hinges: *work and person*, *work and migratory processes*, *children/young people and work*, *work and diversity*. The first two texts, *Work and Person: Sense, Care and Relationships* (Vanna Boffo) and *Work and Person: Places of Labour as a Divided Territory* (Pietro Causarano), outline the context of the research path. The relationship between two key categories in the lives of men – work and person – is analysed from a pedagogical-theoretical viewpoint and a historico-educational perspective. On one hand, care for work, and in the workplace, emerges as a paradigm for a new educational perspective that looks to the objects produced by the work, *things* that speak of human bonds, as well as the subjective ethical dimension, so as to respond to the commodification of work and people. On the other hand, through the historico-educational lens, change in the workplace, substantially a change in organisational type, has been taken as the background for a look through the twentieth-century transformations that have accompanied the relationship between the subject's working condition and his alterations; the analysis goes from factories to firms to the single workers, who, many times, have had to suffer these changes.

*Migrant Jobs and Human Cultures: Transformation through a New Formation* (Clara Silva) and *Migrant Jobs and Human Cultures: Tangible and Intangible Know-How* (Giovanna Del Gobbo) deal with an extremely topical subject, which is yet almost totally absent from the range of educational vision. Migrant jobs have a dual face, the present-day face of delocalisation, increasingly implemented by Western firms in countries in the East or South of the world, and that of migrants, forced to leave their countries of origin and seek fortune elsewhere in order to achieve a dignified life. The phenomena of immigration and emigration have always existed. Man is migrant by nature and culture, but globalisation has accentuated and massively intensified migration trends. From another point of view, however, work can also be seen as a cultural product which needs to be recognised so as not to cause mechanisms of exclusion and rejection: this is why it needs to be valorised, from an educational point of view.

*Childhood and Work: Protection and Obscuration* (Emiliano Macinai) and *Young People and Work: Commodification and Perception* (Stefano Oliviero) address two age ranges which, in educational terms, are quite dense, but given less thought in terms of work. Yet, by subtraction, work is present in both cases. What is the cost that the discovery of childhood has inflicted on the social dimension of how children are viewed and how much has this

discovery actually made real children disappear? As Macinai asserts in his essay: «the topic of child work is used as an example in order to illustrate this ambivalent process, in which protection becomes exclusion and the recognition of childhood leads to children's social obscuration». In a specular manner, the problem of young people today concerns their presence, of which we are all too aware, inside the labour market. Short-term contracts, flexibility, rigour, restricted numbers, lack of economic growth and social poverty are all aspects that young people are beginning to consider as not just what happens to their classmates, but as events that are more than likely to happen in their own lives.

*Diverse Jobs: Atypical Work and Formation to Support an Unstable Balance* (Maria Rita Mancaniello) deals with the condition of difference and diversity. Job precariousness is a social emergency that began to spread at the beginning of the 2000s. The Anglo-Saxon economies became familiar with the phenomenon in the 1990s, but it is a precariousness that becomes marginality when there are not suitable conditions of social protection. Where welfare, economic growth support policies, resource redistribution cultures and a balancing-out of unjust pay gaps are lacking, work flexibility becomes a way to create new slaves and to destroy the dignity of citizenship that we had struggled to acquire during the twentieth century.

The education and formation of man, the citizen of democratic civilisations, have an arduous task which, however, cannot be separated from the pursuit of political, economic and social objectives for the common human good. As asserted by Martha Nussbaum, long-term fighter for the civil rights of justice and equality for all the most disadvantaged inhabitants of the earth: «Education turns you around, so that you do not see what you used to see. It also turns you into a free man instead of a servant»<sup>4</sup>. Good practices, political programmes, economic action, attention to work and care for professions come about in cultures worthy of man, lived by every man according to the principles of social justice. But if there is no education or personal formation, that is, of everyone, to these principles, it will be all the more difficult to carry on constructing countries, and then a common world, where justice and solidarity can be distinctive signs of human time.

*Florence, 18 January 2012*

*Vanna Boffo*

<sup>4</sup> M.C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001 (orig. ed. 1986), p. 180.

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Finally, thank you to all the students who followed the seminars, showing us that teamwork is always a source of learning, beyond all expectations.



Vanna Boffo

# Work and Person: Sense, Care and Relationships

## I. An introduction: the relationship between ‘work’ and ‘person’

The proposed essay is positioned at a level strictly adjacent to pedagogy as the science of man’s<sup>1</sup> human formation<sup>2</sup>, and the methodological tools used, as well as the disciplines dealt with in this investigation, are part of that set of knowledge areas which come under the label of educational sciences. The aim of the reflection is to implement a comparison within the pedagogical-educational debate with topics connected to man’s life, such as work, care, professional practices and relationships in work contexts, which are important for all educators and trainers. Indeed, work has increasingly become a distinctive and decisive aspect of people’s lives, characterising both the modern era and, even more so, the postmodern epoch.

In the workplace, we are formed and transformed; employer-employee relations influence the personal growth of the employer- or employee- subjects involved. Work is a determining experience in the life of every young, adult and elderly person, as well as being a very important fact for understanding family well-being. There is a close bond between the study of relationship in the family and in the professional and working conditions of parents, mother-child, father-child and mother-father. Hence, it is upheld that dealing with work is a task which pedagogy, as a science of

<sup>1</sup> Translator’s note: term “man” has been used as the equivalent to the Italian “uomo”. It must be understood that the term, as well as the pronoun ‘he’ for the subject, refers to both men and women.

<sup>2</sup> The concept of “formazione umana dell’uomo”, here translated as *human formation*, expresses the highest meaning of the category of *paideia* and *Bildung*, as attested in the authoritative studies by Werner Jaeger in his *Paideia* from 1933, but also as handed down by Johann Wolfgang Goethe in *Wilhelm Meister* from 1795 and Friedrich Schiller in *Letters Upon the Aesthetic Education of Man* from 1795.

human formation, can and must fulfil. And it should not just look at the learning practices, vocational training or the most efficient training methodologies within professional contexts, but come up with a critical line of thought and reflection on the very topics of the world of work as the place and space for personal and collective transformation. Pedagogy can provide the sciences that have always dealt with work – sociology, economics, law, medicine, psychology and engineering – with a knowledge of man through human formation. It contains a wealth of history, actions, ideas, reflexivity and critical potentiality, but also of ethical and personal knowledge, about the self and the other.

Therefore, to investigate the sense of work through the educational lens is to look at the interstices in a bond – namely, between person and work – which must be brought to the centre of attention of both economic and juridical laws and measures. Spurred by the most destabilising economic crisis since the beginning of the 1990s, that is, the one which began at the end of 2007, becoming much more virulent in the second half of 2011, states and their governments are asking themselves which are the most effective ways to achieve profit and economic advantage. Without true, fundamental awareness not of their own interest, but the common interest, it will not be possible to establish a new policy for the 2010s, a joint policy for economic growth and improved social well-being. The world that we are preparing for our children is not the same one that we inherited from those who helped to rebuild it after the war. Therefore, the significance of being concerned with work lies precisely in the sense of a pedagogical project: «projectuality not meant as the titanic capacity to decide one's fate, but as the commitment to identify and produce sense, and at the same time to take responsibility for making choices, pursue an objective and open up to change»<sup>3</sup>.

The first aspect taken into consideration concerns the contemporary subject's feeling of being lost, a condition which he finds himself experiencing owing to the contingent economic and cultural conditions. And the question asked before this first reflection in fact concerns who the contemporary subject is: a human person understood in his globality as a thinking, feeling being with ethical characteristics. The debate on the concept of person has been rekindled during the last decade, but since the 1930s and Emmanuel Mounier's question about who the person is, it has never stopped producing ideologically opposing positions<sup>4</sup>.

The second aspect concerns the idea of work drawn up in Western societies in the twentieth century; an idea that comes from a very dis-

<sup>3</sup> M. Contini, *Elogio dello scarto e della resistenza. Pensieri ed emozioni di filosofia dell'educazione*, Clueb, Bologna, 2009, pp. 19-20, own translation.

<sup>4</sup> See P. Ricoeur, *The Self and the Moral Norm*, in *Oneself as Another*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1992, pp. 203-221; P. Ricoeur, *Lectures 2. La contrée des philosophes. La personne*, Seuil, Paris, 1992.



tant past and has produced a transformation in the very sense of human identity. Regarding this aspect, one can agree with the idea asserted by Alain Caillé, and previously put forward by Marcel Mauss and Karl Polanyi, that:

The human being has not always been an economic animal, a machine made for calculating the costs and benefits, pleasures and pains of his every action. The 'substantive' economy is not structured, as the dogma of economic free trade repeats, by the market on the basis of the variability of prices, but by reciprocity. In order to satisfy material needs, it obeys the logic of the gift and counter-gift, set out by Mauss, or the logic of redistribution<sup>5</sup>.

The third aspect concerns the perspective of personal and social action: what to do with one's own pedagogical-educational means, when and why to act, according precisely to a horizon of meaning, in order to escape the inexorable decline of living with responsibility and a sense of community. Therefore, at this point it becomes important to analyse the notions of care and empathy as alternative and new paths, and the notions of rejecting and resisting<sup>6</sup> the market societies where work becomes a good and where, above all, man is submitted to flexible and precarious work, which is commodified and made into an obligation for damaged lives. Here Fistetti makes his own the same question that Caillé posed around thirty years ago, in order to break off from the ideology of *homo oeconomicus*, rehashing it as such:

Is it the destiny of the planet to become a great and single market society or [...] is it possible to reinvent and rethink the paths so that the economy can become "re-embedded" in society and human societies can exercise forms of democratic self-control on the economic and financial dynamics?<sup>7</sup>

The problem at the basis of the question corresponds with the choice to take a different slant to economic science which, by referring to the anthropological and philosophical conception of utilitarianism, intended to use an all-reaching 'economic model' to interpret not only what happens on markets with the exchanges of goods and money, but every form of human action, every moral, political, educational, religious and also professional act. Rational action theory by the economist Friedrich von Hayek, winner of the Nobel Prize for Economics in 1992, was meant to explain every form of human life and every aspect of man. Neoliberalist ideology<sup>8</sup>,

<sup>5</sup> F. Fistetti, *Introduzione. Il paradigma ibrido del dono tra scienze sociali e filosofia. Alain Caillé e la "Revue du Mauss"*, in A. Caillé, *Critica dell'uomo economico. Per una teoria anti-utilitarista dell'azione*, Il Nuovo Melangolo, Genoa, 2009, p. 8, own translation.

<sup>6</sup> See M. Contini.

<sup>7</sup> F. Fistetti, cit., p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> *Ivi*, p. 10.

which dominates in the strongest Western countries, has led democracies into globalisation, but has also opened the way for a financial, economic, cultural and social crisis without precedent.

It is worth reflecting on political alternatives, but above all it is necessary to understand the meaning that the social reality has for man and to understand how, through work, it is possible to reweave an ethical and moral fabric in which every human being is not a prisoner of the technological world of the fleeting and virtual, and power and money are not always the idols upon which to build one's life plans.

## 2. Daily life and work

Feeling lost and losing points of reference are the characteristic traits of the postmodern condition: as Lyotard asserts in the now highly renowned classic from 1979, *The Postmodern Condition*<sup>9</sup>, we are in an epoch – the age starting from the end of the Second World War – in which the great narratives, of the Enlightenment, Marxism and Idealism, have ended once and for all, leaving the way for the survival of the technological. As Lyotard states, it is the communication and profit-making capabilities of companies and enterprises, and not of the nation-states, that will have to trace the route to social evolution and economic and cultural survival.

From another viewpoint, however, we can hypothesise, along with the «Revue du Mauss» theorists<sup>10</sup>, that concealed behind the pursuit of the best future for the human species is the ghost of the reproduction of a utilitarian principle, *à la* Bentham. The problem of maximising the common good, or the pursuit of happiness for everyone, *maximum happiness for the maximum number of people*, or the Benthamian utilitarianism principle, lies in the capability of governments to manage to guarantee both individual and community interests. The failed application of such a principle enabled Alain Caillé to assert an *antinomy of utilitarian reason* that can be seen in the contradiction between the pursuit of individual interest, happiness or utility for every person, and the assertion that the most just and desirable actions are those that contribute to the happiness and well-being, if not of everyone, of the largest number of citizens<sup>11</sup>.

The problem of man's happiness, as Salvatore Natoli has us clearly and effectively note in his interesting book *Il buon uso del mondo*<sup>12</sup>, is a topic

<sup>9</sup> See J.-F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition. A Report on Knowledge*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1984.

<sup>10</sup> The «Revue du Mauss» was founded in 1981, in France, and its most authoritative exponents are Alain Caillé and Serge Latouche. The «Revue du Mauss» is the journal of the Anti-Utilitarian Movement which was established in the wake of the theories by Marcel Mauss, the famous French anthropologist who lived between 1872 and 1950, and author of the well-known volume *The Gift*, and of the theories by Karl Polanyi, author of the famous text *The Great Transformation*.

<sup>11</sup> F. Fistetti, cit., p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> S. Natoli, *Il buon uso del mondo. Agire nell'età del rischio*, Mondadori, Milan, 2010, pp. 51-53.

that goes back to the most ancient of times, reflected on and coherently expressed by Aristotle first of all, and then by the Greek and Latin Hellenistic Schools. There is a harmonic and indissoluble relationship between happiness, money and work. In an effective summary, Natoli states:

Preliminarily – and in the manner of Aristotle – I assume that happiness is men's ultimate end. And this is so because one desires it for oneself. The reason and function of the rest is only as a means. For Aristotle, men tend by nature towards happiness. [...] But, Aristotelian exegesis apart, yes man is thought, but he also has various other dispositions or 'capabilities'. He is also body and desire. Happiness cannot, therefore, be resolved in the realisation of just one of his inclinations and possibilities, but on the contrary it resides in the realisation of them all, in the best possible way<sup>13</sup>.

Therefore, happiness resides in fulfilling every sphere of the human being<sup>14</sup>, whether it pertains to the intellect or body, the affections or spirit. The pursuit of happiness thus implies the pursuit of the full realisation of human life. When one speaks of man and his sense, therefore, everything contributes to the realisation of life. Today, for man's life, work is a means, but also an end. Work can be associated with happiness because it is currently a decisive aspect in every human life: for adults, and for children too. It has not always been so, but in our current world, we cannot pretend not to notice that around the topics of precarious work, exploitation, vilifying and discontented work, the game of Western man's very existence is being played out.

For this reason, I consider it important, decisive almost for a pedagogical analysis of the human condition, to take into consideration the meaning that work holds for the life of not just Western, but global *postmodern* man. Indeed, today, reflecting on man's formation can no longer mean only taking into account his various facets, which may be epochal, but are necessarily parts of a whole, namely, the new categories of global man, planetary man, liquid man or even *homo oeconomicus*, *homo technologicus* or *homo videns*<sup>15</sup>. The many views of man give us fragmentary states of a subject who is 'lost' in the face of the invasion of new modes of living. Work represents

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, own translation.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>15</sup> Each of these labels refers to reflections of a sociological, philosophical or psychological nature: think of the works by Zygmunt Bauman or Edgar Morin, or those by Giovanni Sartori. Each definition of *homo* (man) is associated with a manner of his education and training and a consideration of the importance of formation in human development. The texts referred to for the notion of man's human formation are: F. Cambi, *Filosofia dell'educazione*, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 2000; F. Cambi, *Abitare il disincanto. Una filosofia per il postmoderno*, UTET, Turin, 2006; J. Dewey, *Democracy and Education. An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*, MacMillan Company, New York, 1916; M. Gennari, *Filosofia della formazione dell'uomo*, Bompiani, Milan, 2001; M. Gennari, *Filosofia del pensiero*, Il Nuovo Melangolo, Genoa, 2007.

the sense, but also the place and time of a radical transformation to which the category of formation has submitted and which now requires observation, analysis and comprehension.

Man is what he is in his own usual everyday life; he is a past, a present and also a future. In order to understand the future and interpret the uncertain paths of what is to come, we need to understand the thousand faces that each subject interprets, today. So to understand the meaning of the unsettling experience of globalisation and the sense of the transformation that has gripped the Western world over the last twenty years at least of technological revolution, we have to start from the aspects most intrinsic to human action. Work is, among these aspects, what strongly characterises every adult man and woman in civil societies.

There is a beautiful passage in a sociological text by Paolo Jedlowski, *Un giorno dopo l'altro. La vita quotidiana fra esperienza e routine*, in which the author quotes Ernesto De Martino, perhaps one of the most interesting anthropologists in the aftermath of the Second World War, who lived in Italy between 1908 and 1965. The very famous piece is taken from the book *La fine del mondo*. De Martino narrates an episode which he experienced himself in a village in Calabria in the 1950s, when he and his friend were in a car and they asked for directions from an old shepherd. Since his explanation was not very clear, they got him to get into the car so that he could accompany them to the next junction. After some initial diffidence, the old man got in:

But his diffidence was slowly changing into anxiety because now, from the window he was constantly looking out of, he had lost sight of the bell tower of Marcellinara, the point of reference for his domestic space. Because that bell tower had disappeared, the poor old man felt completely lost: and it was hard work to take him as far as the right junction and find out what we needed to know. Then we took him back, hastily, as we had agreed: and all the time he had his head out of the window, scanning the horizon, to see if Marcellinara's bell tower had reappeared: until, when he finally saw it, his face relaxed and his old heart was calmed, as if he had reconquered a lost fatherland<sup>16</sup>.

In the case of the old shepherd, the "presence" had come into crisis, he had overstepped the threshold of the boundary of risk, he had lost his usual existential references, his thoughts and feelings were looking out over nothingness. As Jedlowski continues, the loss of sure points of reference is a trait of our current condition. Feeling lost is the experience that each of us is living. Max Weber called it disenchantment. Feeling lost is the human

<sup>16</sup> P. Jedlowski, *Un giorno dopo l'altro. La vita quotidiana fra esperienza e routine*, il Mulino, Bologna, 2005, p. 17, own translation.

condition that, at a metatheoretical level, produces the world's disenchantment. The opposite of feeling lost is feeling at home<sup>17</sup>, that pleasant feeling when we live within the horizon where things and the world of things are where they should be, and can be taken for granted; a bit like the affections which, when they are certain and secure, are almost the backdrop to living. The relationships that we live and the actions that we do are undisputed; they are not touched by a sense of criticism. They are certainties.

Instead, the current problem concerns the very fact that our capability, our ability, our possibility to take the world for granted no longer exists: it has been weakened<sup>18</sup> and, let me add, today, following the financial crisis that has been affecting the whole Western world since the end of 2007, has been lost. We have uncertain, very uncertain points of reference, and we no longer trust our possibility to interpret things. We live in the doubt generated by uncertainty which, in turn, generates fear and dread for the future<sup>19</sup>. Indeed, today's young people are futureless, they dare not dream. The fact of living the postmodern condition<sup>20</sup> does not prevent us from living. However, it does prevent us from being creative, it prevents us from being like flying machines, according to Luigi Cancrini's wonderful metaphor from the end of the 1980s: we can fly no more.

Risk and uncertainty, categories of present-day existence, envelop the sense of human life at every latitude and they are also dimensions that characterise man's *operari* at every age. In the very epoch in which the most steps have been taken to *free* man from the yoke of a work linked to the imponderable of the seasons and manual toil, the sense of work has been changed by flexible, technological and knowledge work and, at the same time, the destinies altered of thousands of men and women who have surrendered the very sense of living to work. The empirical evidence for what is asserted here emerges from the data sent, pitilessly, by the markets. One exemplary document is that of AlmaLaurea, presented in March 2011, on the employment conditions of Italian graduates one, three and five years after graduating. It is a clear demonstration of a condition of unemployment which the statistics show is getting worse every day.

The crisis doesn't stop hurting. Even for those like graduates who possess more cultural and professional tools to react to the changes. The numbers speak clearly. Wages continue to lose their buying power, the chances of finding a job are dropping further and precarious contracts are now routine. Two other alarm bells are also ringing: illegal work is doubling and social

<sup>17</sup> *Ivi*, p. 18.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>19</sup> See E. Pulcini, *Care of the World. Fear and Responsibility in the Global Age*, Springer Netherlands, Houten, 2012.

<sup>20</sup> See F. Cambi, *Abitare il disincanto. Una pedagogia per il postmoderno*, cit.

class hasn't stopped conditioning young people's chances. So much so that the 'children' are carrying forward the differences and inequalities experienced by the 'fathers', even when they can no longer be justified. Both in terms of euros earned and recognition and identification in their work<sup>21</sup>.

Work is becoming the metaphor of the society of risk and uncertainty, with the difference, however, that the risk really is converting into an unemployment that shows no sign of changing tack.

Today [March 2011] 16.2 per cent of those with 3-year bachelor degrees are unemployed one year after graduating. In 2008 the number was 11 per cent. The number for those with masters isn't any better. If anything, the regression is even more noticeable: this year the unemployed account for 17.7 per cent (the figure was 10.8 per cent). [...] Anyhow, the survey says, the share of graduates in employment five years after qualifying also decreases. In this case the observed sample concerns people who graduated prior to the reform (Decree no. 509/99). Between 2005 and 2010 the reduction was almost five per cent. Five years ago 90.3% had managed to find work. Today that number is 85.6%<sup>22</sup>.

Uncertainty is the impossibility to achieve a stable contract. Precarious work, cash-in-hand jobs, backward salaries and social immobility are all social factors that, however, have a decisive effect on the construction of the adult self in the passage from study to work. The human condition evolves constantly throughout life and social and cultural dimensions also have a decisive effect on the perception of our inner self<sup>23</sup>. Training and education, as well as learning and schooling, are processes that carry on throughout the lives of every subject, making each individual's life worthy of being lived. At every age and place in life these processes reproduce and transform the subject himself. Even upon entry to work and the workplace, the processes of education and training and human formation mould the different subjects. Hence the relationship between work and human forma-

<sup>21</sup> F. Pace, *Laureati alle prese con la crisi. Bassi stipendi e più precarietà*, <www.repubblica.it> (8 March 2011), own translation. The article sums up the data from a survey carried out by AlmaLaurea on the employment conditions of 400,000 Italian university graduates during the period 2008-2010. See *Graduates' Employment Conditions. Survey of 2010*, Consorzio AlmaLaurea, Bologna, <<http://www.alma laurea.it/en/universita/occupazione/occupazione09/>> (6 August 2011); A. Cammelli, *13th AlmaLaurea Graduate Employment Record. Summary. Graduates and the Job Market: The Crisis Persists*, Consorzio AlmaLaurea, Bologna, <[http://www.alma laurea.it/en/universita/occupazione/occupazione09/The\\_Crisis\\_Persists.pdf](http://www.alma laurea.it/en/universita/occupazione/occupazione09/The_Crisis_Persists.pdf)> (6 August 2011); European Commission, *Europe 2020. A European Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth*, European Commission, Strasbourg, 2010. The reform referred to is Italian University Reform no. 509/99, which introduced the 3+2-year two-level degree format.

<sup>22</sup> F. Pace, cit., own translation.

<sup>23</sup> See H. Gardner, *Five Minds for the Future*, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, 2006.

tion is a particularly fertile area to investigate. This relationship is one of the clearest lenses through which to observe the sense that work has taken on in building the postmodern subject.

### 3. Making and working

To look at work from a pedagogical perspective, with pedagogical sense, is to observe it as a human activity, a life engagement, not just as a place where works and goods are produced for the single person's survival. Work does not only have a relationship with *making*, meant as a manufacturing or production activity. Work has a direct and intrinsic relationship with *action*, with the higher level, according to Hannah Arendt, of human development, namely, as we would say today, the political action of building a democratic citizenship.

During the twentieth century the relationship between *otium* and *negotium* was concretized and clarified, the Latin terms referring to a contrast between the search for one's inner dimension as a higher human activity and the necessity to produce *works* for survival. In a certain sense, the distinction also refers to the one between theory and practice, which is still referred to within research on know-how. The history of the relationship between *otium* and *negotium* is part of the history of pedagogy, it inevitably interweaves with the concepts of *paideia* and *Bildung*.

The most important representatives of modern pedagogy, from Comenius to Rousseau, highlighted the importance of a working activity meant as exercising a reflexive praxis for the body and soul. Rousseau himself asserted that work is a necessary act for social man, it is a citizen's duty to think like a philosopher and work like an artisan<sup>24</sup>. Before Rousseau, Locke had ratified the importance of work in establishing a person's property through the labour of the body and work of the hands<sup>25</sup>.

In this way, the Greek, Platonic and Aristotelian idea of a separation between work of the hands and action of the mind that had dominated in the ancient world and, therefore, also of *paideia* meant as man's human formation, was brought down. It must not be forgotten that this conception of work, as an instrumental act separate from the final action, was reproduced in the Christian world through the superiority of contemplative life over life lived by way of material sustenance. While on one hand *ora et labora* was a maxim that accompanied the production and reproduction of practical know-how, enabling education to fully develop as a process to transmit the arts and crafts, on the other hand, contemplation, meant as

<sup>24</sup> See G. Bocca, *Pedagogia del lavoro*, La Scuola, Brescia, 1998.

<sup>25</sup> F. Totaro, *Il lavoro nella ricchezza dell'umano*, «Spazio Filosofico», 1, 2011, pp. 25-34, <[http://www.spaziofilosofico.it/numero\\_01/542/542/](http://www.spaziofilosofico.it/numero_01/542/542/)> (13 August 2011); see F. Totaro, *Non di solo lavoro. Ontologia della persona ed etica del lavoro nel passaggio di civiltà*, Vita e Pensiero, Milan, 1999.

prayer, meditation and reflection on the holy texts, has always been seen as the means to achieve formation at its highest level.

As indicated by the studies that have dealt with rebuilding the category of work's path through history, Western culture has produced two lines of reflection on the subject<sup>26</sup>. The first perspective regarded a separation between instrumental action and the action of thought: work was interpreted as an instrumental process, the place of life lived with toil, separate from the very purpose of living, which, instead, was always considered as achieving the highest level of elaboration of thought. The second perspective opened with the reflection of Karl Marx, which separated the subject who produces from the object produced.

After the Industrial Revolution, the social and instrumental changes were such that the urgency of the question concerning the sense of work for human life changed tack. Both in Adam Smith and Karl Marx work became the production of material goods and consumption, in particular *owing to* and *in order for* the affirmation of scientific progress and technological discoveries, which structurally changed working conditions, the production of goods, and the transformation of the end product into goods. Francesco Totaro states:

While with Hegel the integration of ends and means into work may have received its conceptual fulfilment, to the point that the Marx of the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 would merit him with having grasped the essence of 'real man', it is in the wake of the same Marx that we can examine the second split which work has suffered over time: that between the producer subject and the result of the production, that is, between the subject who produces and the object produced. This is because, after overcoming the *a priori* discrimination between men freed from work (and its end users) and unfree men subject to work (and forced to stay close to its means), the true inequality came into play between the subjects only possessing manpower and those possessing capital<sup>27</sup>.

And the subjects possessing capital were those who possess the production tools, amongst which, *par excellence*, the tool of manpower, or man's work. The transformation of human work into goods ratified the separation between the process and result of work. «The process itself became alien to those who did it and it was not susceptible to being governed»<sup>28</sup>. There was no longer a bond between he who worked and the object made and, in this context, work was also separate from he who produced it: whenever a

<sup>26</sup> See M.P. Chirinos, *Il lavoro come categoria antropologica*, «Iustum Aequum Salutare», 4, 2008, pp. 7-20; F. Totaro, *Il lavoro nella ricchezza dell'umano*, cit.

<sup>27</sup> F. Totaro, *Il lavoro nella ricchezza dell'umano*, cit., p. 29, own translation.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, own translation.



machine could be used, man was no longer of any use<sup>29</sup>. Moreover, the social character of work was delegated to the moment in which products, or rather goods, were exchanged, and this is where the relationship between goods, money and more goods began to take shape:

Relationships between men therefore came to depend on the relationship between goods according to their exchange value mediated by money. At the basis of the abstraction of the money-goods-money system, capable of subjugating all human relationship, was therefore the same abstract figure of work, separate from social activity and life relations. The denunciation of the split of work from the person, who suffered both the alienation of his own activity and the alienation of its result, and the misconception of work as a social relationship remain the most valid aspects of Marxian reflection. The thinker from Trier achieved a matchless focus on the alienation that the human undergoes in work<sup>30</sup>.

In Karl Marx there is a strong call for man to educate himself as well as to be educated, in every side of his being. His youthful analysis capacitates work as the place for human formation; however, he underlines how work is no longer, with the advent of capitalism, a place *for* the human.

A careful revision of the Marxian conceptions and at the same time a new transcription of the importance of *labour* and *doing* meant as the highest level for the construction of human action is conducted by Hannah Arendt, to whom twentieth-century philosophical and political thought is greatly indebted. In 1958 a text came out in the United States, today considered a classic in philosophical literature and political thought, which went unnoticed in Italy, where it was only translated in 1964. The essay, *The Human Condition*<sup>31</sup>, brought the attention of Western culture to *doing* meant in its multiform aspects of *labour*, *work* and *action*. Arendt asserts:

“What we are doing” is indeed the central theme of this book. It deals only with the most elementary articulations of the human condition, with those activities that traditionally, as well as according to current opinion, are within the range of every human being. For this and other reasons, the highest and perhaps purest activity of which men are capable, the activity of thinking, is left out of these present considerations. [...] I confine myself, on the one hand, to an analysis of those general human capacities which grow out of the human condition and are permanent, that is, which cannot be irretrievably lost so long as the human condition itself is not changed<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> M.P. Chirinos, cit., p. 8.

<sup>30</sup> F. Totaro, *Il lavoro nella ricchezza dell'umano*, cit., p. 29, own translation.

<sup>31</sup> H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1998<sup>2</sup> (orig. ed. 1958).

<sup>32</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 5-6.

What is *vita activa*? With this term, Arendt designates three fundamental human activities: labour, work and action. Each of them is important since it corresponds with the basic conditions of man's life on earth<sup>33</sup>.

Labor is the activity which corresponds to the biological process of the human body, whose spontaneous growth, metabolism, and eventual decay are bound to the vital necessities produced and fed into the life process by labor. The human condition of labor is life itself.

Work is the activity which corresponds to the unnaturalness of human existence, which is not imbedded in, and whose mortality is not compensated by, the species' ever-recurring life cycle. Work provides an "artificial" world of things, distinctly different from all natural surroundings. [...] The human condition of work is worldliness.

Action, the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter, corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world. [...] this plurality is specifically *the* condition – not only the *conditio sine qua non*, but the *conditio per quam* – of all political life<sup>34</sup>.

Arendt takes Aristotle's theses on the *polis* and goes over the distinctions that have allowed, until the present day, *vita activa* to be interpreted as *vita contemplativa*. Nevertheless, Arendt's proposal moves along different lines, showing that political action is the ultimate end of the *vita activa*. She does not rehabilitate action to the detriment of doing or thinking or contemplating, but welcomes to the notion the plurality of subjects who do it. Action always reveals the subject who fulfils it and thus exposes him to the presence and gaze of the other, enabling us to understand that *vita activa* is the life lived by working with sense and a direction of meaning. The man who acts is *homo faber*, the creator and worker of culture, distinct from *animal laborans* who consumes what he produces with no other end than biological survival. However, there is a further reflection worthy of note and it concerns the distinction between *labour* and *work*, terms that Hannah Arendt uses to define work as the process to produce a product<sup>35</sup>.

The term *labour* indicates the labour of the body, not the finished product, but the act with which one takes care of the necessities of life; it does not require thought, it does not require critical and human action, it does not imply production, but physical effort without an objective.

The term *labour* includes all the activities between the production of goods up to their consumption (nourishment, preparation of foodstuffs, care for

<sup>33</sup> *Ivi*, p. 7.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>35</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 79-93.

needs, treatment of illnesses, breathing, etc.). Thus defined *labour* corresponds to the Marxist proposal of labour, according to which he who works and consumes what he produces, proceeds by following metabolic rules without freedom [...] The man who does these deeds falls into the category of what is defined as *animal laborans*, and Arendt denounces his presence everywhere where consumerism prevails in our society. The private realm has invaded the public realm and the boundaries between private and public no longer exist<sup>36</sup>.

Work meant as *labour* can be assimilated with productive work, even though it always engages man in satisfying vital necessities. Nevertheless, what is interesting is the second term that Arendt uses – *work* – to designate craft, that is, handiwork. The latter is the fruit of the creative effort of the artisan who labours to make the finished product, objects made through labour, meant as the work that creates culture. The subject who labours to this end is *homo faber*, a free and creative man, capable of using his own thought to implement a concrete and useful practical dimension.

The third aspect, towards which Arendt finalises her reflection on the human condition, concerns work as action. In this case, we are not dealing with a productive dimension, but with action for the common good, for the other and not for oneself. Action is the purpose of civil and public life, the highest purpose, which modern men have relinquished, setting aside democratic endeavour, putting the very meaning of life within brackets. What can we learn from Arendt's lesson?

First of all, the reflection that the stateless philosopher proposes centres around a vision of the world and man in which action holds the same central position as thinking – behind every action there is a thought, and what is more, every thought is inherent in the action that it produces. Making a projection onto the present day, we can deduce from this that there is no separation and action is the hinge to the condition of living. The topic of *homo faber* is linked to that of labour as work which prefigures a product, which can be tangible, and intangible too. *Operari* leads to knowledge, action is a reflective application of shared knowledge.

However, we can also read the centrality for man's life of an action that creates, not just produces, that shares, that labours, not just for the end of labour itself, but for the end of man. Action is for man. Work de-humanises when it becomes production *for* consumption. *Homo laborans* is slave to his own necessities, he is not free, he is subject to the power of production. *Homo faber* acts for himself and for the other, he goes beyond necessity and opens himself up, through action, to the world of an understood and created life. It is not just the product that is interesting, however. We need to go further:

<sup>36</sup> M.P. Chirinos, cit., p. 16, own translation.

When in work the product is highlighted, the work is identified with the result of the activities performed by man and it is difficult to release it from material or economic values. Instead, when man transforms into the protagonist of the working activity, the work becomes the means for which he acquires *internal goods*, [...] which perfect him insofar as he is man<sup>37</sup>.

However, when work becomes the means to care for fragility and pain, when it becomes akin to care for suffering, or when it becomes a necessary act for education and formation in childhood and youth, when it is the means for social ascesis towards a vital well-being through schooling and learning, then work, and also manual work, becomes a vehicle for ideas, knowledge, at the highest level of formation. In manual work too, knowledge and capacity require a practical reason with a circular nature, so as to correct and correct *itself*, to sense, through experience, a knowledge first of all acted and then thought<sup>38</sup>.

In contrast to the dominating reason of Modernity, manual work to satisfy the basic necessities of life presupposes a growth in acquired skills, through repetition (*craft*), as well as a knowledge of what happens in nature. [...] These new competences or 'crafts' are a plus in the man who dominates his trade and, therefore, constitute other inner goods obtained through work. Thus a form of experience is developed – the result of contemplation of the particular and material – which man transforms into a non-encyclopaedic human culture<sup>39</sup>.

This is also the thesis of Richard Sennett who, in his volume *The Craftsman*<sup>40</sup>, provides a definite exaltation of manual work, and also of intangible work, in short, of work well done.

In the very epoch that has exalted work and made it the central engine of the human condition, it becomes important to assert that the carpenter, in the same way as the lab technician and the orchestra conductor are all craftsmen, to whom work well done is of utmost importance, not owing to the product itself, but to their personal engagement<sup>41</sup>.

#### 4. Care for work

The proposal put forward, in a pedagogical perspective, is that work must become the means to exercise a humanity that knows care and is able to put it into practice. To this end, it will be interesting to analyse a singu-

<sup>37</sup> *Ivi*, p. 17, own translation.

<sup>38</sup> *Ivi*, p. 18.

<sup>39</sup> *Ivi*, p. 19, own translation.

<sup>40</sup> See R. Sennett, *The Craftsman*, Yale University Press, New Haven-London, 2008.

<sup>41</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 19-21.

lar, but emblematic case study of the possibility to exercise formative care at the highest levels of production organisation.

In the 1960s, at Olivetti in Ivrea a radical transformation took shape in the Taylor-Fordist work model, since the early twentieth century dominant at organisational level in medium-sized and large factories all over the world. Federico Butera and Giovanni de Witt recount the story in a volume with the illustrative title, *Valorizzare il lavoro per rilanciare l'impresa (Setting Value by Work to Relaunch the Company)*, which has an even more eloquent subtitle, *La storia delle isole di produzione alla Olivetti negli anni '70 (The Story of the Production Islands at Olivetti in the 1970s)*<sup>42</sup>. The story of the transformation of the production system at Olivetti is interesting and engaging, and unique in the Italian industrial panorama of those and subsequent years. It is a complex story, and rereading it, in light of present-day vicissitudes, teaches and makes for illuminating reflection on the organisation of factory work and interpersonal relationship in the workplace. As Federico Butera asserts:

In order to fully understand the nature and process of change in the production system at Olivetti we need to dwell preliminarily on one question: did Olivetti express a specific enterprise model which supported preservation of the company's identity even in the event of a radical change in production technologies? The answer is yes, it did<sup>43</sup>.

Olivetti was, therefore, already a distinctive production reality before the technological revolution imposed the transformation from mechanics to electronics. Taylorism, introduced to the factory in the 1930s, had meant that «the tacit knowledge of semi-professional workers was transformed into explicit knowledge of rules, procedures, times and measures»<sup>44</sup>. In the work discipline, timing and movements were regulated. In addition, this discipline enabled an increase in productivity per worker and the growth of a new class of reference for the company, comprising technicians, managers and supervisors. It created «a rationality and integration without precedent along the whole of the company's production chain»<sup>45</sup>. The advent of electronics and the radical transformation of production would slot into a context where change was the main work engine.

The features of the new organisation were the production and assembly islands and the integrated assembly units. Coming into being at the beginning of the 1970s, they introduced a new way of working, of building

<sup>42</sup> See F. Butera, G. de Witt, *Valorizzare il lavoro per rilanciare l'impresa. La storia delle isole di produzione alla Olivetti negli anni '70*, il Mulino, Bologna, 2011.

<sup>43</sup> *Ivi*, 24, own translation.

<sup>44</sup> *Ivi*, 18, own translation.

<sup>45</sup> *Ivi*, 19, own translation.

knowledge through application, of creating professional and workplace relations that backed up better productivity.

[This was] a model in which the work cycles were put back together in much longer phases and were entrusted to single workers or work teams with the responsibility for checks, programming, and maintenance, which before had been separate. It seemed that the tiny pieces with manual labour had been broken down into could in part be put back together. But the technical and organisational functions were also repositioned and an innovation process was set into motion<sup>46</sup>.

The reason why I have, albeit briefly, illustrated the Olivetti case concerns the central position assumed in this enterprise model by care for the people, in which setting value by the whole person, the human person, was the most precious resource. Indeed, the company also stood out thanks to the social services, health services, schools and libraries that it had built in Ivrea in Piedmont. It was the most important machine tool company in the world in the 1950s, and its strength lay in the totality of the work, in a conception that the fruit of the work was not the accumulation of capital, but community redistribution in terms of assets and services for the citizens.

The care for the people ensured by infirmaries, social services and libraries, was nothing but a completion of the care for the quality of working life, protection and development of the person's physical, psychological, social and professional integrity. For young people Ivrea's appeal was immense. The town which they left Rome, Naples or Milan for was really poor [...]. Nevertheless it abounded in the 3 Ts [...]: talent (Olivetti hired one person out of 100 on the basis of their creativity and curiosity rather than on restricted technical skills); technology [...] (it was bubbling with technology of all kinds); and tolerance (upon hiring no distinctions were made between southern and northern Italians, men and women, they didn't ask which party they voted for or their sexual preferences, while authoritarian characters without a dream were discarded; at the cultural evenings you could meet Moravia, Pasolini or other 'scandalous' intellectuals of the times)<sup>47</sup>.

So, care for work is care for people. Between work and person there is a bridge that joins care for work of the hands and intellect with care over man's formation. To take care of work is to do it good. It may seem *out of time, out of this particular period of time* to underline that care of man's for-

<sup>46</sup> *Ivi*, p. 20, own translation. The UMI (integrated assembly units) are an organisational production model centred around flexibility, the ability to modify processes and individual responsibility, in which the work team follows the product manufacturing process from start to finish.

<sup>47</sup> *Ivi*, p. 28, own translation.

mation is also care of the profession and the work produced. In this sense, there is no difference between manual labour or intellectual work, between labour of the body or work of the mind. There are no differences in level between man's works if they are carried out with expertise and professionalism, or with craftsmanship.

In manual labour there is knowledge, know-how regarding the materials and people, competence in the process, in order to achieve a good product or a truly solidaristic action. The difference lies in the care with which a job is carried out. Caring for a process, and also a job, is like a sequence of actions: it means caring for the person who does that process.

The category of care is ancient, it dates back to Socrates and the Greek and Latin Stoics of the first century BC<sup>48</sup>. We have to thank Michel Foucault<sup>49</sup> for rehabilitating the category of care of the self, central for the formation of the contemporary subject. Indeed, care can be understood as man's capacity to build his own life path, aiming towards responsibility rather than technical suitability. Care is an ethical dimension, in last instance, because it commits the person to make *himself* in a certain way, according to particular rules and strategies, we could say to use contemporary jargon. These tools are communication, interpersonal dialogue, listening, self-meditation, vigilance and attention, reflection and self-displacement. Care is not just a personal and interior dimension, but the construction of a process of communitarian existence that requires a great responsibility towards oneself and towards others. Care is a profound dimension of human life: indeed Martin Heidegger claims that care *is* man's authentic existence. To care for *oneself* is to give oneself a form or to form oneself. To care for the other is to recognise him in his humanity, whoever the other person who consults him is. Care is the same matter with which every subject moulds his life, hence care indicates the very sense that we give to our human lives.

What is the relationship between care and work? And between care, work and the human person? I will try to illustrate it by referring to the interpretation given to care by Joan Tronto in her volume *Moral Boundaries*<sup>50</sup>.

Care is both a practice and a personal disposition, it is deemed to be intrinsic to work well done, and to be inherent in work of the hands and mind in order to identify a 'good behaviour' towards oneself and others. Care can be considered, in the wake of Joan Tronto's thought, as a «species activity

<sup>48</sup> See F. Cambi, *La cura di sé come processo formativo*, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 2010; L. Mortari, *La pratica dell'aver cura*, Bruno Mondadori, Milan, 2006.

<sup>49</sup> See M. Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1986 (orig. ed. 1984).

<sup>50</sup> See J.C. Tronto, *Moral Boundaries. A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* Routledge, London-New York, 1995. While on one hand studies of care of the self, from those by Michel Foucault to Luigina Mortari, concern the individual/person, on the other hand, Joan Tronto's studies on care carry a political value and extend so far as to make care a proposal for the government of democratic states. Her studies stem from the feminist works on care from the 1970s and 80s, but go further, causing care to depart from its closed analysis as an inclination in women's thinking.

that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair our “world” so that we can live in it as well as possible»<sup>51</sup>. The world of which we speak is the one that includes everything which concerns human subjects, bodies, emotions, sentiments and actions, crafts and work. In last analysis, both Richard Sennett and Donald Schön<sup>52</sup> put the notion of care at the centre of their analysis on the professions, albeit using a different term: Schön labels it reflexivity, while instead Sennett speaks of concentration. Between care and care of the self, the inclination is definitely towards an ethical dimension of care which, however, does not only concern attitudes pertaining to female care work, from which Joan Tronto’s thinking stems. The relationship between care and work goes from the reflexive dimension which Donald Schön recalls, to build a professional figure who knows how to orient his technical skills and direct them towards critical and reflexive capacities.

The care needed for every job is a renewed human dimension that can combine the acquisition of tools with technical skills and the social responsibility that every *craft* and human action requires of the contemporary subject. Along these lines, it is necessary that education and formation take place over the whole lifespan, not just in the period of development, but also at the moment of career guidance and in the workplace.

Joan Tronto identifies an ongoing process underlying the construction of a disposition for and the activity of care, divided into four stages: ‘caring about’, ‘taking care of’, ‘care-giving’ and ‘care-receiving’. Each of these stages – the actions – are associated with as many moral dispositions, thus underlining the indissoluble bond implied between the formation towards care in work and in the workplace, and the dimensions of ethics and virtue, which it is important to acquire.

To ‘care about’ is to recognise the necessity of care, that care needs to be given. To ‘care about’ in the workplace is to pay *attention*. Now attention does not come about from a particular predisposition or a specific personal capability. Attention is the same disposition as vigilance, it can be learnt and it can be taught, it is an action that differs depending on the work carried out, but it is also a disposition of the soul. The person who works, however, is also a human being who feels, thinks, desires, who needs a sense. Sennett uses the term ‘concentration’ to refer to attention: that of the conductor when conducting the orchestra, that of the teacher when teaching, that of the doctor when making a diagnosis. There could be countless examples. To pay attention is to care for the person and the action that he performs. Attention is the first movement in acting with care.

To ‘take care of’ is to take responsibility for the action necessary to meet the demonstrated need, but it is also to partake in the work that one is do-

<sup>51</sup> *Ivi*, p. 103.

<sup>52</sup> See D.A. Schön, *The Reflexive Practitioner. How Professionals Think in Action*, Basic Books, New York, 1983; D.A. Schön, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 1987.



ing with a sense of responsibility. This should be present, as a moral guideline, in every profession. A responsible disposition can also be taught and learnt at school, at university, through the example of governors and politicians, if only it could be seen in present-day conduct. Schön underlines the importance of the sense of responsibility by making constant reference to reflexive and critical investigation. What does to act reflexively mean? Well, it means undertaking to find solutions, as has already been observed in the case of Olivetti.

'Care-giving' effectively means satisfying the need for care. This third passage equates to the work to be carried out, so it requires the technical skills to do it. The doctor who analyses a record, the joiner who glues together a broken plank, the teacher who imparts the rules of a new language, the mother who listens to her child telling her what he did at school that day, are various examples of how 'care-giving' is hidden in the recesses of ordinary everyday life and yet is decisive for the growth, development and life of every child, adolescent and man.

'Care-receiving' is the last stage in the care process and it recognises that the recipient must and can be part of the process. His response will guide the path taken by the care and point it in a certain direction. It is not possible to perform care individually, because there is always the care-giver and the care-receiver. The care-receiver will necessarily respond through reaction, but I may assert that this response is given in the feedback, which gives rise to a circular and dialogic movement.

Care is a personal way of being and it gives every human action a relational connotation. There is no care without the other. The workplace, but above all training and vocational learning, must be *flooded* by the resources of care which can relieve us from a state of disinterest towards the human world and its manifestations.

## 5. In conclusion: work and human relationships

Work forms those who perform it; no procedure or organisation in the workplace is neutral with respect to the subjects, hence it is necessary to take care of the people and the interpersonal and educational relationships. In a dimension where *homo faber* is at the same time he who knows, he who produces and he who thinks, the relationship between the subjects, the disinterestedness of the bonds, the achievement of an end are aspects that are worth pursuing, it being clear that the failure to achieve these human objectives implies a loss of future. A country's development comes about from the human culture that it cultivates and makes use of. The purpose of work is not the worker's survival or economic profit. Work, as has been underlined several times, has the precise aim of the cultural growth of the subjects who perform it and who know how to make it a way of living. Work is also made of human relationships that make it grow or depress it.

The relationships I am referring to engage those who perform them in listening attentively and exercising careful empathetic communication, aspects inherent in and transversal to the most global dimension of care. Instead, professional relations are often characterised by the individualism into which man is compelled by the forms of work. Indeed, there is a close correlation between the actual form of work, the model, and the interpersonal relationship formed in the workplace, in the family and in society in general.

Among all the relational aspects, the most interesting is to learn to feel or to empathise as a way of life in the workplace. This is the most complex aspect of the whole care process. Empathy is the way to most intensely approach how other people feel. Would it be possible to imagine human relationships without a shade of emotion which is, in the end, just empathy's outer coating? How far are these considerations from what is requested in the workplace and being experienced in the present-day's precarious working conditions?

In fact, the market considers work as a good, and that is not all. The history of work, in Italy, in the first decade of the twenty-first century illustrates this clearly. Precariousness, flexibility, fixed-term contracts, short-term contracts, project-based contracts: there are a whole list of names/words that indicate the various forms of work possible today. Indeed, thousands of young and not-so-young people live in total uncertainty as to the future, in the impossibility of knowing if next month they will have a job or not<sup>53</sup>.

Looking at the problem from the pedagogical point of view, the question does not just concern the material survival of those who see their entry to work denied, or of those who see the possibility of getting a suitable job deferred, the problem concerns the form, the formation of each young person or adult in search of work. However, it also concerns a generation of adults who have decided to break up work, to offer it on a temporary basis or not to offer it at all. I uphold that it is also a problem of care since it is in the first place a problem of ethics and the ethics of responsibility. The problem to which 'care-free' policies cannot give an answer is that of having a heightened sense of institutions and the community in order to have full awareness and full respect towards the many young people who do not have a job or do not study; towards the women who are no longer looking for work; towards those who, while seeking work, see themselves being proposed the umpteenth short-term contract.

To paraphrase the final remark in the volume by Martha Nussbaum, *Not for Profit*, it could be said that if we do not stress the fundamental value of culture given by care for work, in the same way as we do a thorough schooling in classical and scientific studies, the attention, respect, empathy, responsibility and dignity of the person will of course be marginal, perhaps

<sup>53</sup> See L. Gallino, *Il lavoro non è una merce. Contro la flessibilità*, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 2007.

tenuous, aspects in comparison with what instead produces money. Yet these aspects are useful in order to build something much more precious:

[They] make a world that is worth living in, people who are able to see other human beings as full people, with thoughts and feelings of their own that deserve respect and empathy, and nations that are able to overcome fear and suspicion in favor of sympathetic and reasoned debate<sup>54</sup>.

Can the response of an ethics of care be enough in the case of phenomena which the state does not know how to face up to? This response requires very great personal engagement. It will be up to each person to follow the path of human formation in order to care for the self, the other and the world.

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<sup>54</sup> M.C. Nussbaum, *Not for Profit. Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2010, p. 143.

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Pietro  
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## Work and Person: Places of Labour as a Divided Territory

### I. The affliction of work: places of labour

My essay acts as an introductory and preparatory contribution to this publication and, to a certain extent, reflects that of Vanna Boffo on the «sense» connecting work and person in a pedagogical key. The aim is to offer a framework that takes into account the afflictive nature of work, its less consoling and pacifying aspect, more linked to the seemingly endless conflicts and tensions in this sphere of existence, which, however, are undergoing profound changes in both their perception and representation, and also finding cultural and ideological antidotes within themselves. Among these antidotes, one of the most powerful and at times most illusory – today above all – consists precisely of training and education<sup>1</sup>.

In 1984, in a special issue of an anthropological journal devoted to *Il lavoro e le sue rappresentazioni* (*Work and its Representations*), Mario Alinei, a controversial glottologist and socio-linguist, dwelled on the origin of the traditionally negative proto-historic and historic meaning inherent in many words meant to represent work<sup>2</sup>. Their «etymographic contents», in his opinion, in most cases are strongly circumscribed by the servile condition of work, as particularly highlighted in Classical Antiquity with regard to crafts and trades (*ars et negotium*). Only the terms linked to free work (e.g. the soldier-peasant of Antiquity, the Germanic warrior tradition, or the medieval craftsman) and then to civic service (in the ancient *πόλις*, and then in the medieval commune) would take on a positive significance from inside the first forms of «classist society», as the legacy linked to un-

<sup>1</sup> See A. Accornero, *Il lavoro come ideologia*, il Mulino, Bologna, 1980.

<sup>2</sup> M. Alinei, *Lavoro classista e preclassista. Gli sviluppi etimografici di alcune lingue europee*, «La ricerca folklorica», V (1984), 9, pp. 71-80.

divided archaic communities. Human formative experience would only legitimately be connected to these. Besides, it is well known that the Greek word *σκολή* (from which our school derives, through the Latin *schola*), was a synonym for the Latin *otium*, and had a positive meaning connected to the state of freedom and the availability of time to devote to the common good and forming the personality. It is a word that has tellingly never been placed alongside work as personal employment or alongside the state of necessity (by negation, definable as *ασκολία*, *negotium*).

In other words, the terms meant to identify subordinate, above all manual work, and its sphere of activity as the transformation of nature, but in general also all work connected to material needs, have recurrently (and at length) conjured up a meaning that has become sedimented deep in the consciousness as negative, as privation, toil, suffering, exploitation. To a large extent, this meaning has come down to us intact, also and above all in dialect, jargon and vernacular expressions, in more popular and less high-brow turns of phrase. Furthermore, a similar problematic and dialectic outline emerges historically in many of the reflections and speculations on work itself and on its subsequent meanings. And it is no coincidence that in the European languages of the Christian era an incredible range of etymons and meanings have been used to deal with this ambivalence of value, from the Middle Ages through the modern era until today<sup>3</sup>.

In his studies, Antonio Santoni Rugiu has moreover recalled the long-term effects in modern Europe that the late-medieval polarisation between «minor» (know-how) and «major» (knowledge) guilds had in terms of the transformation of vocational education and training processes and cultural identification in work: and, therefore, also with regard to the perception of one's work as positive or negative in relation to its position in the social stratification, depending on whether it was of a manual or intellectual nature<sup>4</sup>. By analogy, again after industrialisation, one can see that the historico-cultural identities linked to manual work at times show the same ambivalence in value insofar as they link work to the socialising dimension of the places where it is lived out and narrated and to the organisational and technological forms in which it is performed: to these places and not others, for example, the factory rather than the craftsman's workshop, the city rather than the country, etc.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> A. Negri, *Per una storia del concetto di lavoro nella cultura filosofica ed economica occidentale*, in S. Zaninelli, M. Taccolini (edited by), *Il lavoro come fattore produttivo e come risorsa nella storia economica italiana*, Vita & Pensiero, Milan, 2002, in particular pp. XXIX-XXXI.

<sup>4</sup> See A. Santoni Rugiu, *Nostalgia del maestro artigiano*, Manzuoli, Florence, 1988.

<sup>5</sup> H. Zwahr, *Class Formation and Labor Movement as a Subject of Dialectic Social History*, in M. van der Linden (edited by), *The End of Labour History?*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993, pp. 85-104; S. Musso (edited by), *Tra fabbrica e società*, «Annali Fondazione Feltrinelli», Feltrinelli, Milan, XXXIII (1999); F. Dei, *Antropologia e culture operaie: un incontro mancato*, in P. Causarano, L. Falossi, P. Giovannini (edited by), *Mondi operai, culture del lavoro e identità sindacali*, Ediesse, Rome, 2008, pp. 133-145.



Edward P. Thompson, as early 1963 with his *The Making of the English Working Class*, but also in the following year Eric J. Hobsbawm in *Labouring Men* (albeit from a different approach), use almost a historico-anthropological lens to read the cultures of industrial work and the class languages that single out the distinctive origins of the English working class, its forms of resistance and adaptation in the passage from the artisan past to the reality of manufacturing and then factories<sup>6</sup>. Starting in the modern era, the projection and introjection of the positive nature of work became quite strong, also thanks to the Reform and the Protestant ethic: an example of this is the success of the topic of working class “decorum” in relation to the middle class attitude, or workers’ “productivism” in relation to the entrepreneurial idea of production, namely those common grounds that are to be understood as a real and proper “patriotism” of the quality recalled by Joseph Roth<sup>7</sup>. Nevertheless, all this does not manage to hide the effects of privation and subordination which are equally as strong (if not stronger) than those of liberation or at least of integration in the transition represented by the Industrial Revolution. And this is so also in a case like that of Britain where social conflict has never had the politico-ideological radicality of other situations in continental and southern Europe, but where, nevertheless, the issue of the working class and its cultural and conflictual identity had long occupied a central position<sup>8</sup>.

Therefore, if seen from the viewpoint of a place of labour (the field, workshop, plant, office, etc.), work often overlaps with fatigue and toil: the place as the metre by which to measure them. But that is not all: it is also through place (and the relationships that physically and morally define it as a human territory, also in differential and conflictual terms) that historically the ambivalence of value reappears (and at times is healed), and so those who labour try to give a positive meaning and sense and therefore a dignity to the tiring work. Delocalising work, in analysis as well as in action, that is, decontextualising it (both functionally and geographically), in many ways serves to deprive or nevertheless change its sense. It serves to try to dehistoricise work at the same time we would like to deterritorialise it, by making it abstract in theory as well as in organisational practice. And, compared to previous epochs, this is one of the most slippery cultural challenges in the current phase of globalisation, since it rehashes «the dialectic between capitalism and territorialism» both at the economic and social lev-

<sup>6</sup> E. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Gollancz Ltd., London, 1963; E. Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1964.

<sup>7</sup> J. Roth, *Flight without End*, Peter Owen, London, 1977 (orig. ed. 1927), pp. 14-16; in general, G. McLennan, “The Labour Aristocracy” and “Incorporation”. *Notes on Some Terms in the Social History of the Working Class*, «Social History», VI (1981), 1, pp. 71-81.

<sup>8</sup> G. Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983; in general, R. Bendix, *Work and Authority in Industry: Managerial Ideologies in the Course of Industrialization*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, NJ, 1956.

el; but – on a smaller scale – it is so also owing to the economic reticulation of firms, to the outsourcing of functions, to the new (not just flexible, but also precarious) «moving boundaries» of jobs and services and the contexts in which they are provided and regulated<sup>9</sup>.

The topic that I must expand on in this essay is, therefore, that of the «place» in which work and person meet and construct (or deconstruct) the sense of labour. And I would like to point out first of all, without however undervaluing its weight and importance, that the viewpoint from which I begin is not the economic perspective of the labour market and the historical processes of insourcing/outsourcing in business and its institutionalisation/de-institutionalisation in terms of «transaction costs»<sup>10</sup>. To speak of person and work in relation to place and formative experience is a perspective that could be defined – if not too rhetorical – of social humanism<sup>11</sup>. This slant of analysis is, therefore, conscious that the human cannot be reduced to profitable work. Nevertheless, it is forced to realistically face up to the fact that, ever since the nineteenth century, the workplace has increasingly and essentially become the place of its organisation and subordination to economic profitability. For those who deal with contemporary history, work is not just divided (in a conflictual and/or cooperative form), but is above all organised regardless of the economic market relations or cultural projections and personal investments that concern it; work is not just an individual or collective fact, it is a social institution that at times almost seems separate from the people who have or do not have it<sup>12</sup>. Therefore, I need to make some short preliminary considerations on how space and time are considered in this essay.

## 2. Place, places: the historical dimension in the territory of work

In Aristotle's view, space is placed in relation to the passing of time. That is, banally, the perception of space is connected to movement (change of state) and, therefore, with the time needed for this; what is more, time cannot be outside a space. In other words, every history has its (material and symbolic) geography, just as every geography has its history. Space, and the time that defines it, together propose the historical dimension in the analysis, in the exact same way as time does in the space in which it passes like a physical movement and change of state. This is also the case of work:

<sup>9</sup> M. Regini, *Confini mobili*, il Mulino, Bologna, 1991; G. Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century*, Verso, London-New York, 1994; J. Lucassen (edited by), *Global Labour History*, Peter Lang, Bern, 2008; B. Silver, *Forces of Labor: Workers' Movements and Globalization since 1870*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003.

<sup>10</sup> See O. Williamson, *The Economic Institutions of Capitalism*, The Free Press, New York, 1985.

<sup>11</sup> See M. Nussbaum, *Not for Profit. Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2010.

<sup>12</sup> P. Giovannini, *Tra conflitto e solidarietà*, Cedam, Padua, 1987; G. Bonazzi, *Come studiare le organizzazioni*, il Mulino, Bologna, 2006.

namely, it is possible to approach the topic of work through its chronological (historic and day-to-day) processuality, through the dynamic, concrete, non-metaphysical nature of the nexus that links, in time and in space, the labouring man with his activity and with the sense of his work. Place thus also becomes the territory for constructing a space of identity which accepts work itself and the labour involved, as well as the structure of society. This is all the more true where for a large part of human experience work has been movement and the control of movement – whether corporeal or mechanical – in space. Place as territory: thus, through the temporal management of movement and the social relations in it, the physical space of work acquires different meanings at the historical level because it takes in different territories.

All this is true more generally if we think of a geography which, insofar as it is human, is historical<sup>13</sup>. Taking a look at a map of Canada, alongside the federal states one will note the so-called Northwest Territories, places of wild and practically uninhabited spaces, nameless, but not so much as not to take on a human and not only physical geographical meaning: however, the territory today has a different sense from that same territory when it was a place only inhabited by the indigenous peoples or in the first phases of colonisation; indeed, it is true that in time it has undergone a profound process of erosion. The places are more or less the same, but the territories are not. The same can be said of the Web today: a virtual space, a non-physical place, which becomes a global territory of human relationships and gives new sense to the places from which one accesses the Net. These physical places change their original physiognomy of historical territories the moment in which they encounter the virtual territory of the Web<sup>14</sup>. Hence, it is also possible to read work and its transformations through place as a truly changing figuration, if meant as a territory elaborated by man.

Furthermore, through place, the category of work is subject to contextualisation on one hand and relativisation on the other. In this case to relativise means precisely to contextualise. Which job in which epoch and in which place? Which person at work in which epoch and in which place? But also: which time and which space of work in relation to which person and to which job? That is, what are the territories of work in space and in time? Work, almost by constitution, was thus broken down into real, concrete jobs a long time before it became fashionable for this evocative formula to mark the breakdown of the big twentieth-century meanings – the «Work» with a capital «W» of industrial society – which has characterised recent decades<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> See L. Gambi, *Una geografia per la storia*, Einaudi, Turin, 1973.

<sup>14</sup> See J. Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place: the Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985.

<sup>15</sup> See A. Accornero, *Era il secolo del Lavoro*, il Mulino, Bologna, 1997.

From another point of view, and this aspect concerns us in particular, work relates in a different way to the formative and educational processes insofar as the workplace(s) historically constitute(s) an unresolved problematic area with regard to pedagogy and its normative intents, if referred to work. And this is precisely owing to the same tendency also shared by pedagogy to build big meanings on the basis of that original ambivalent dichotomy of value referred to at the beginning; meanings that are nevertheless difficult to make interact with the many elliptic forms of real social processes. The socialisation of work (and socialisation at work) is a form of implicit social education, which builds its own territories, which, however, is not necessarily dominated by the pedagogical discourse, or its paradigms, at least in the world of real processes. While pedagogy may deal with formative experience from the viewpoint of personal relationships and subjectivity, in the field of work it reads this experience on its own epistemological terrain (its own territory and own canons) and thus fatally clashes with – or rather verifies how much these relations and this subjectivity are conditioned by – the educational indifference of the social and economic (organisational) descriptions of work, that is, by what appears as the first territory of work, or at least has done since the Industrial Revolution<sup>16</sup>.

The series of seminars, whose texts follow in this book, confirm that it is an exemplary approach to aim to contextualise and relativise work from a pedagogical viewpoint. In other words, despite prevalently being centred around the present and oriented towards figures and moments that are not canonical in the public discourse on work, in many cases these texts deal with the otherness of work to the standard, giving a processual (if not exactly historical) depth to the phenomena investigated: geographical-cultural otherness, individual otherness, otherness from the dominant models, the «other» at work and, therefore, in some cases its anomie, etc. The plural points of view on work, and the formative processes that affect or intersect with it, displayed by the essays in this book, thus confirm the necessity to relativise it at the same time as contextualising it, by crossing through places constituted as different, decentred physical and mental territories.

An additional difficulty is also posed by the fact that the same categories of space and time, as hinted, are built socially as cultural elaborations and practices and, therefore, they have a historical depth since they are not natural: tellingly, in this case, place is also and above all a territory, that is, a cultural space of human relations. From this point of view, time – in that it both orders and orients – contributes to institutionalising and specialising not only the organisation of life and work but also of space, according

<sup>16</sup> R. Simon, D. Diplo, A. Schenke (edited by), *Learning Work*, Bergin & Garvey, New York, 1991; P. Federighi, *Le teorie critiche sui processi formativi in età adulta: tendenze e aspetti problematici nei principali orientamenti contemporanei*, in P. Orefice (edited by), *Formazione e processo formativo*, FrancoAngeli, Milan, 2001, pp. 29-58.

to that complementarity well highlighted by scholars such as Norbert Elias and Michel Foucault concerning European modernisation and civilisation and the phenomena of power reallocation that characterise them<sup>17</sup>.

The secularisation of time and construction of the economic space in the modern age are upheld symbolically and justified technically by the invention of the modern mechanical clock, untied from other elements of sense except for its intrinsic and autonomous technological perfection: abstract regulation and self-regulation overlap perfectly in a cultural game of mirrors with the transformations of work and social life<sup>18</sup>. And today clocks are a constant characteristic in the workplaces of modernity, almost becoming a constitutive and significant as well as recurrent iconographical element owing to the fact that it is itself a machine and an archetype of the perfection inherent in industrial mechanisation<sup>19</sup>. Besides, to be precise, the same also happens for school, the physical space and phase of life increasingly devoted to education, schooling and training alone, with no regard for work because it organises the time devoted to it in a separate manner<sup>20</sup>. Abstract, mechanical time, therefore, increasingly becomes the regulator of the space of life, its unit of measurement; and the unit of measurement of labour in the workplace.

### 3. Work as localised figuration: forms and contents

Work can be seen as a «figuration», in the meaning that Nobert Elias gave to this category in his works, namely, in the terms of a network of relationships and interdependences between individuals which go to make up a dense web, not just a network, sometimes until it possesses such importance as to be defined as a social institution (and therefore capable of occupying a physical and mental territory). At the same time, it is dynamic, not just in the processual space-time dimension, but also in the cognitive and cultural dimension that rereads and interprets it with its own languages<sup>21</sup>.

The forms and contents of work are, therefore, a good example of figuration and help make the workplace a territory not just in economic, but

<sup>17</sup> A. Perulli, *Il tempo da oggetto a risorsa*, FrancoAngeli, Milan, 1996, pp. 23-66; A. Mariani, *La civilizzazione tra governo, disciplinamento, razionalizzazione e conformazione: un'ipotesi di rilettura*, in F. Cambi, C. Fratini, G. Trebisacce (edited by), *La ricerca pedagogica e le sue frontiere*, ETS, Pisa, 2008, pp. 267-79.

<sup>18</sup> L. Mumford, *Technics and Civilization*, Harcourt Brace, New York, 1934, p. 15; in general, C. Cipolla, *Clocks and Culture, 1300-1700*, Norton, New York, 1978, and J. Le Goff, *Time, Work and Culture in the Middle Ages*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1980 (orig. ed. 1977).

<sup>19</sup> D. Landes, *Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of the Modern World*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1983.

<sup>20</sup> See D. Ragazzini, *Tempi di scuola e tempi di vita*, Bruno Mondadori, Milan, 1997.

<sup>21</sup> N. Elias, *Essays III. On Sociology and the Humanities*, vol. 16 of R. Kilminster and S. Mennell (edited by), *Collected Works*, University College Dublin Press, Dublin, 2009, pp. 1-3, pp. 9-39.

also in cultural and social – and therefore historical – terms<sup>22</sup>. These connotations outline the space-time dimension in which the people who start work and learn it find themselves involved. I shall ignore the effect brought about by differences in culture, gender and age. But at the same time these forms and contents have to do with how much every person brings to work and how much they take from it both in material and in moral and symbolic terms. The work forms pertain to the procedures, to how the work is done. Its contents pertain to what is done, to the product made or the service provided. Both are brought back together in where it is done and it is there that work is expressed fully as a historically identifiable figuration, all the more so when it assumes the character of a true social institution. Technique and technology are the expressive mediation carried out in that place which has become a territory, rather than in another place or another time, that is, in other territories; tellingly, over time, technique and technology have been subject to ambivalent attitudes too<sup>23</sup>.

The combination of forms and contents in different territories can occur inside a unit of time (for example, the present), but through the pluralism of places; and we may also come across it in a unit of place (for example, a factory) but through different eras and, therefore, with profoundly different meanings. The same can be said about the recordings that statistics and socio-economic analysis make, in terms of latitudinal differentiation in space, between the various sectors of the economy, that is, by hypostatizing the traditional categories of the political economy and the market with relation to the social (and if we will, also the international) division of work, on the basis, therefore, of the functional place: those working in the extraction sector or producing raw materials (miners, farmers), those who transform and manipulate them (craftsmen, manual workers), those in the service industry (in terms of functions, the most expansive sector in time). Other divisions that denote different combinations of figurations – interdependent with the others but which can also be read by themselves – and instead refer to geographical places, are instead the more traditional contrast between city and country or, today, between the North and South of the world or, as Giovanni Gozzini says, the *West* in relation to the *Rest*<sup>24</sup>. On the other hand, these same great divisions also show us the longitudinal differentiation at the temporal level. The conceptual categories that we use today – this «tracing of boundaries» so typical of social life – do not have the same meaning if seen in different moments, even in the same geographical or functional place, given that forms and contents giving sense

<sup>22</sup> P. Causarano, *Forme e contenuti del lavoro nel '900. Il caso dell'industria*, in L. Falossi (edited by), *Il '900, alcune istruzioni per l'uso*, ABB-Giuntina, Florence, 2006, pp. 25-44.

<sup>23</sup> M. Bloch, *Land and Work in Medieval Europe*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967 (orig. ed. 1966); C. Littler (edited by), *The Experience of Work*, Gower-The Open University, Aldershot, 1985; G.A. Gilli, *Origini dell'eguaglianza*, Einaudi, Turin, 1988.

<sup>24</sup> See G. Gozzini, *Un'idea di giustizia*, Bollati Boringhieri, Turin, 2010.

to that place combine in a different manner in other epochs. The territories change, namely the historical sense of the places where the figurations of work come into being: just think of the dimensional parameter with which economic and social institutions are normally circumscribed<sup>25</sup>.

Therefore, the figurations are different, as are the perceptions and the way with which single people come into contact with them and take part in them. In the passage from the nineteenth to the twentieth century an example is the linguistic codification of the professional figures (think of the changing meaning in time of manual worker) and of the types of work (what is industrial work today with respect to a century ago?) or the places themselves (from manufactory to the mechanised factory). The distinctive processuality of work also involves a sort of natural selection: new types of work replace jobs that have disappeared as emerges from the statistical classification of professional figures, a true form of institutionalisation caused by this economic Darwinism; the result being that the figuration of forms and contents is particularly mobile and transitory in the industrial age. Territories of work disappear, others appear: today, just think of the insertion in the space of market exchange of those traditionally communitarian services centred around solidarity and reciprocity, such as the case of care work. Even non-work changes, if we are to think of the invention of the category of the unemployed in the nineteenth century or, on the other hand, of the modern notion of free time<sup>26</sup>.

#### **4. Not necessarily coinciding territories: organised places and labour cultures**

The space-time and cultural dimension that defines one figuration in a different key from others, if applied to work, does not only relate to chronological distances in time (today with respect to the past) or geographical distances in space (here and not elsewhere), or therefore to different sensitivities (and mentalities); in reality this dimension is intrinsic to work itself, intended as a territory for the experimentation of practices and models of its organisation, at least since the industrialisation process. Industry was not always factories in the Modern Age (think of homeworking or manufactories), in the same way as today factories and business do not al-

<sup>25</sup> The social arbitrariness of «tracing boundaries» is constitutive of the fact that «without distinctions we would have a great deal of difficulties in recognising [...] reality» (G.P. Cella, *Tracciare confini*, il Mulino, Bologna, 2006, p. 15, own translation); in other words, boundaries serve to make comprehensible (and governable) a reality which, otherwise, in its unitarity would risk escaping us. Obviously, however, it is not a neutral social process: e.g. to classify is also to include or exclude places, defining them as territories either included or not in certain types of protection (in work, in the market, in credit).

<sup>26</sup> R. Salais, N. Beverez, B. Reynaud, *L'invention du chômage*, Puf, Paris, 1986; H. Nowotny, *Time: the Modern and Postmodern Experience*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1994 (orig. ed. 1989).

ways correspond completely (indeed in the developed world it is rarely the case), since the social importance of industry as a production organisation has decreased drastically.

The division of work, from a historical point of view, combines the social and market dimensions – the subject of classic economic theories and sociology which was already coming into being in the nineteenth century – with the dimension planned by twentieth-century politics through either totalitarian or democratic state intervention. But, in the workplace, the division of labour (and its jobs) is also expressed in what as a rule is called the «technical» dimension of work, which the economist Michele Salvati considers more appropriate to define as «organisational», and which obviously interweaves and overlaps with all the former dimensions<sup>27</sup>. In this sense, the workplace as the changing figuration of the functional and geographical territoriality of work is particularly significant with regard to the capacity of suggestion and figurations to overlap. Just think of the debate on the organisational and social alternatives to mass production in market economics, between vertical, hierarchical integration in the big businesses such as industrial corporations, and horizontal, reticular and flexible integration in the industrial districts meant as local systems of firms or in modern, decentred lean production<sup>28</sup>. Industrial labour cultures are obviously present in both cases but the figurations that characterise them – the territories in which they live and which circumscribe and define them – do not correspond, as is also the case for the social relations and languages that those work cultures express. Not only is the work's business culture different, the workers' culture is also different, even though they remain inside the common and convergent panorama of industrial production, with different combinations of forms and contents of the work. Obviously one could pinpoint countless cases and examples of this.

According to Alain Touraine, the organisation of work is incorporated knowledge, and the social conflicts that have marked the history of the workers movement between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are indeed cultural conflicts, namely concerning control of the knowledge resources applied to production through techniques, technologies and the organisational capacities typical of industry and its pervasive social model<sup>29</sup>. The changeable combination of the relationship between space and time, as

<sup>27</sup> M. Salvati, *Divisione del lavoro*, «Stato e mercato», 35, 1992, pp. 167-209.

<sup>28</sup> A. Chandler, *Strategy and Structure: Chapters in the History of the American Industrial Enterprise*, Mit Press, Cambridge, MA, 1962; M. Piore, C. Sabel, *The Second Industrial Divide*, Basic Books, New York, 1984; C. Sabel, J. Zeitlin, *Historical Alternatives to Mass Production: Politics, Markets and Technology in Nineteenth-Century Industrialization*, «Past and Present», 1985, 108, pp. 133-176.

<sup>29</sup> A. Touraine, M. Wieviorka, F. Dubet, *The Working-Class Movement*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987 (orig. ed. 1984); in general, D. Landes, *The Unbound Prometheus. Technological Change and Industrial Development in Western Europe from 1750 to Present*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1969.



the applicative field of organised knowledge – namely, one of the Schumpeterian qualities of business innovation in a competitive market – is found in the way in which the forms and contents of work blend in a workplace with a changing territorial physiognomy, meant in the sense used here. For example, the craftsman's workshop as a household economy was not and still is not a territory which can coincide with manufacturing that is decentralised (household economy with widespread but centrally organised homeworking) or centralised in a factory system; and then both are difficult to compare with the factory territory as the system organised around the mechanisation of production, followed by automation, owing to the type and size of the tangible and intangible relationships<sup>30</sup>, and so on.

Work discipline meant as the discipline of bodies and their movement in space through controlling time, which Michel Foucault masterfully rediscovered in the eighteenth-century illustration given by Bentham in his *Panopticon*, while reducing the margins of organisational uncertainty, enables the incorporation – we could say the territorialisation – of specific figurations of work forms and contents in the workplace through the organisational control of knowledge (technique and technology): the power of knowledge as power over time and over space. With regard to this aspect and referring precisely to Foucault, Germano Maifreda has recently reinterpreted the whole strategy of asserting a «divided» work discipline that is at the same time the self-regulation of and social control over the worker and his labour<sup>31</sup>.

These figurations are valid there and so long as they are profitable at the economic level or nevertheless do not hinder the imposed or induced social consensus; that is, so long as self-control and control are complementary and efficient. Otherwise they can change, be subject to innovation, be delocalised, in particular when the consensus disappears. The great clash on culture and society at the end of the 1960s is a good example, at several levels, of this crisis of consensus in a model of economic and social development, and we are still experiencing its consequences today: the dispute (and then the restoration) of capitalistic control over knowledge as the hierarchical expression of power over work as well as other things; the crisis and revolution in relationships between the sexes; the discovery of the social and environmental limits to exploitation and the golden rule of profit (non-productive against productive dissipation), etc.<sup>32</sup>

With the 1960s we see the end of a historical cycle which began at the beginning of the twentieth century, but whose roots go back further. Be-

<sup>30</sup> P. Kriedte, H. Medick, J. Schlumbohm, *Industrialization before Industrialization: Rural Industry in the Genesis of Capitalism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981 (orig. ed. 1977); G. Friedmann, *Industrial Society. The Emergence of the Human Problems of Automation*, The Free Press, New York, 1955 (orig. ed. 1946).

<sup>31</sup> See G. Maifreda, *La disciplina del lavoro*, Bruno Mondadori, Milan, 2007.

<sup>32</sup> See M. Revelli, *Oltre il Novecento*, Einaudi, Turin, 2000.

tween the modern age and the nineteenth century, straddling the French Revolution, we see the definitive – both economic and social – unhinging of the traditional protection provided by the guilds (control of knowledge, control of access, control of exchanges). Liberalisation of the labour market, the result of a more general liberalisation of the individual filtered by economic rationality, led to a long period of a lack of norms protecting work and its cultures which had been provided for, at least until the end of the nineteenth century, by the guilds, and the establishment of the modern trade union movements and workers' parties: namely, when the social question was actively brought out, but in a new form by its victims, who became the leading players since they expressed new labour cultures, marked by the new territories<sup>33</sup>.

In particular, this period of regulatory void enabled the demolition of the craftsmen's traditional control over the knowledge of the forms and contents of work, a capacity summed up in the typical production techniques of that place which was the territory of free craftsmanship: the workshop. The transition first of all to the manufactory and then the factory was then nothing but a more or less gradual, but always traumatic and enforced transfer of this control to outside the professional figure involved and its incorporation into the organisational structure (the firm's historical territory, whatever its configurations may be, its physical places)<sup>34</sup>.

The break-up of the organic unity of the craftsman's work (and its vocational education and training processes) meant the transfer of knowledge and control to the organisation of work and the entrepreneur's organisational skills a long time before the diffusion of machinery, mechanisation and automation<sup>35</sup>. The organisation of work, which, before the advent of industry was prevalently the craftsman's mental division of his jobs and tasks (all in the mind of the artisan as well as, to a greater or lesser degree, of his apprentices), afterwards, already with the manufactory and its hierarchical structure, shifted outside the subject, to become a physically perceptible social institution in space and time: it was business and management in their concrete form, the workplace (manufactory, factory), that defined the territory of work and helped to build, in a differential (and therefore conflictual) manner, the figurations in which work operates. From the craftsman's autonomy (and «autocephaly»), we went to the growing heteronomy that characterises manual work and marked the whole of the twentieth century with its conflicts: with the twentieth century, control of time and space became one of the main territories of the social conflict, leading to that «deg-

<sup>33</sup> R. Castel, *From Manual Workers to Wage Laborers: Transformation of the Social Question*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, NJ, 2003 (orig. ed. 1955); J.-L. Robert, F. Boll, A. Prost, *L'invention des syndicalismes*, Éditions de la Sorbonne, Paris, 1997.

<sup>34</sup> See G. Sapelli, *L'impresa come soggetto storico*, Il Saggiatore, Milan, 1990.

<sup>35</sup> G. Angioni, *Tecnica e sapere tecnico nel lavoro pre-industriale*, «La ricerca folklorica», V (1984), 9, pp. 61-69; A. Santoni Rugiu, cit., pp. 144-149.

radation» of the professional quality of work which later, after the Second World War, would go on to constitute a widely debated topic<sup>36</sup>.

### **5. Work and education, divided (and distant) territories? Brief final considerations**

The control of know-how passed through analysis of its functions, the decomposition of work forms and contents into measurable and classifiable movements that could be set out in space, subordinate to organisation, and then to that powerful factor of its scientific legitimisation: technology. Work went «*en miettes*», into pieces<sup>37</sup>. In the first half of the twentieth century, work tended to be reduced to a job and this did not occur in abstract but in physical, concrete places which became work's specific, new territories. The decomposition of work into its single – more and more simple and elementary – tasks was already present in the famous example of the technical and organisational division of labour in pin manufacturing put forward by Adam Smith at the end of the eighteenth century in his *Wealth of Nations*, before being methodologically and theoretically perfected by the engineer Frederick W. Taylor at the dawn of the twentieth century. It was the idea, then widely expanded while also seeking mitigation at the human level, that it was possible to scientifically organise work and that the worker was necessarily subordinate to this economic rationality since it was the work organisation (the management of labour in the firms) that made the labour market and established the prerequisites for entry. At this point entry depended less and less on the skills really possessed by the subject, and more and more on those requested by the preset organisational context into which the subject was introduced at work<sup>38</sup>.

For the whole of the twentieth century, corresponding to the tendency to standardise the production process (and the products), and the new mechanised and then automatised industrial set-up of organised (and divided) work that transformed forms and contents, was a growing reduction in the specific features of these same production processes and the skills needed to make them. Therefore, in terms of job supply, that natural economic selection came into being which affected the obsolete professional figures mentioned earlier. This was accompanied, in terms of demand, by a substantial redefinition of the necessary qualities required to enter the labour market. In the meantime, products and production methods, insofar

<sup>36</sup> F. Guedj, G. Vindt, *Le temps de travail*, La Découverte-Syros, Paris, 1997. In general, G. Friedmann, *Industrial Society*, cit., pp. 191-274, and H. Braverman, *Labour and Monopoly Capital: the Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, Monthly Review Press, New York-London, 1974.

<sup>37</sup> G. Friedmann, *Anatomy of Work. Labor Leisure and the Implications of Automation*, The Free Press, New York, 1961 (orig. ed. 1956).

<sup>38</sup> P. Causarano, *La professionalità contesa*, «Studi sulla formazione», 1, 1999, pp. 141-148; in general, G. Bonazzi, *Storia del pensiero organizzativo*, FrancoAngeli, Milan, 1989.

as they were goods, were universalised as well as, therefore, their forms and contents, the upshot being that these forms and contents became simpler in terms of the job done, and in proportion to the increased complication of the management side of the work organisation. For the individual, work was fragmented into jobs, whose skills were more and more elementary also with regard to their acquisition: and so also the transmission of the necessary knowledge, competences and skills lost its specificity, became universalised, homogenised, transferred to the organisational dimension which incorporated them through new combinations of forms and contents, namely new localised figurations.

Tellingly, after the Second World War, for example, the technical institutes and vocational schools became much more akin horizontally in the different school systems of the industrialised nations (in what they transmitted and how they did it) than they had been within the same country fifty or sixty years before: in a complementary form they became standardised too. During the twentieth century there was a tendential convergence and homogenisation, albeit with important differences, in the definition of the professional figures who carried out standard jobs. For a long time the reality of tacit skills, that is, implicit, relational, not formalised or normalised capacities, was relegated to the sidelines both in the recognition given to them in corporate and contractual professional classification systems and in training qualifications and career guidance. Obviously, the phenomenon was very evident at the lower levels of executive professional ranking, but it became generalised over several levels; and above all it was a phenomenon that only came to light clearly, because it was disputed, after the crisis of the late 1960s<sup>39</sup>.

In the first half of the twentieth century, corresponding to the segmentation of work and its organisational fragmentation which enabled increasingly explicit other-directed control was the definitive «*démembrement de l'éducation*»<sup>40</sup>, that is, the slow and gradual expulsion and outsourcing of vocational education and training from the workplace, a phenomenon that affected both spatial differentiation (of the functions) and temporal differentiation (school before working age or, during working age, outside working hours). Or rather, in the face of the growing universalisation and standardisation of the formative practices and their definitive specialisation and institutionalisation, the workplace turned out to be increasingly less a territory formally charged with intentional training processes and at most the space for external actions (internships, on-the-job training, etc.), originating from other territories not directly intrinsic to work, and at times compensating for the failures of the labour market. From this viewpoint, the parable of apprenticeships or enterprise and trade schools is ex-

<sup>39</sup> G.-R. Horn, *The Working-Class Dimension of 1968*, in G.-R. Horn, P. Kenney (edited by), *Transnational Moments of Change*, Rowman & Littlefield Pbs., Lanham, 2004, pp. 95-118.

<sup>40</sup> See P. Naville, *La formation professionnelle et l'école*, Puf, Paris, 1948.

emplary, their spaces cut more and more in favour of external vocational schools, as can be seen clearly in the case of Italy<sup>41</sup>.

Nevertheless, at the same time, in the twentieth century the vocational training increasingly transferred outside the workplace, and schooling before entry to work (and often outside the work space), was not followed by real cultural and social acknowledgement. Already in the 1920s and 30s, this phenomenon led to a two-track polarisation of the institutions in the European school systems, the typical example of which is the German dual system which drastically opposes the line of general cultural (and also technical) formation with that of vocational training for subordinate and middle management jobs. But similar elements can also be seen in Anglo-Saxon vocational education or, in different forms, in the French model<sup>42</sup>. It is that typical polarisation between higher education/profession and vocational training and education/trade inherited from the older polarisation between the major and minor guilds which is mirrored in the structure of the school system and even reproduced in the not – just – etymological distinction of the professional figures involved in the same function of teaching: that is, the Latin *professor* (secondary school teacher, the teachers in the school where one learns by studying) and *magister* (primary school teachers, the teachers in the school where one learns through practical experience). In other words, the school system itself contributes to the dismembering of education which Naville spoke of, indeed it almost becomes the leading actor in the process<sup>43</sup>.

Education's exit from the very territory of work – as well as clearly explaining the current embarrassing lack of a pedagogy of work – also marks the compensatory role that the diffusion, already increasingly requested in the 1960s, of transversal, non-specific skills and competences has assumed at the historical level. Therefore, it also explains why their acquisition has been transferred – en masse – to the public sphere of the social economy, where, tellingly, spending for education has become one of the largest items in the state budget of industrialised nations<sup>44</sup>. No longer directly profitable in the workplace, because they are more and more non-specific and trans-

<sup>41</sup> P. Causarano, *La enseñanza profesional entre sociedad e instituciones: una primera síntesis para Italia (hasta la República)*, in S. Castillo, M. Pigenet, F. Soubiran-Paillet (edited by), *Estados y relaciones de trabajo en la Europa del siglo XX*, Ediciones Cinca-Fundación Largo Caballero, Madrid, 2007, pp. 85-103.

<sup>42</sup> B. Charlot, M. Figéat, *Histoire de la formation des ouvriers*, Minerve, Paris, 1985; A. McClure, J. Chrisman and P. Mock, *Education for Work*, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, Rutherford, NJ, 1985; W.-D. Greinert, *The "German System" of Vocational Education*, Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, Baden-Baden, 1994; in general, M. Galfré, *L'enseignement secondaire, une modernisation conservatrice? Italie, France et Allemagne*, «Histoire & Sociétés», I (2002), 1, pp. 83-92.

<sup>43</sup> P. Causarano, *Mestiere, professione o funzione? Gli insegnanti*, in P. Causarano, L. Falossi and P. Giovannini (edited by), *Mondi operai, culture del lavoro e identità sindacali*, Ediesse, Rome, 2008, pp. 183-202.

<sup>44</sup> See V. Tanzi, L. Schuknecht, *La spesa pubblica nel XX secolo*, Firenze University Press, Florence, 2007.

ferable to other work contexts, these basic and transversal skills, these new forms of functional and social literacy at the cognitive and relational level, become something different from work, despite being fundamental in order to gain entry to it.

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Clara Silva

## Migrant Jobs and Human Cultures: Transformation through a New Formation

This paper examines the two faces of the topic of migrant work: *jobs that migrate*, that is, the delocalisation of work, meant in the form of production activities that are moved from one country to another, and *migrants' jobs*, namely the range of activities performed by those people who move from economically poorer areas to ones which are richer or offer greater opportunities. These two phenomena, on the increase in the present day, are dealt with in various disciplines, first of all economics, sociology and law. Pedagogy has only approached the issue of work recently and as yet in reference to just a few of its aspects. In this paper, I shall take an intercultural pedagogical viewpoint, starting from a twofold question: *What conception of man is at the basis of the world economic-productive system and therefore of work today? What work culture should distinguish production activities, including those carried out by migrants?*

They are difficult questions, which cry out for an eclectic analysis. Therefore, I do not claim to provide exhaustive answers. Nevertheless, by asking them, I intend to cast a pedagogical gaze on a dimension – work – that possesses an existential and symbolic value which is central to all people's lives and, as a result, also to those of migrants.

### **I. Migrant work and the world economic system**

The current economic and productive system is denoted, owing to globalisation, on one hand by a greater interdependence among markets, and on the other by an increase in the movement of production from the richer countries to those areas of the planet where labour costs less. Low pay for local personnel and tax incentives are among the reasons that encourage single people and enterprises from Western countries to set up profitable activities in the countries of the economic South of the world. The migra-

tion of work, that is, the transfer of production activities in order to exploit low-cost labour, is by no means a new phenomenon: the West has been marked by the processing or semi-processing of raw materials in distant geographical areas through the political, administrative and economic device of colonialism ever since the conquest of America. The model just sketched, which is widespread today, came into being after the end of colonialism, namely around the middle of the twentieth century.

In the Italian context, the first important experiments in delocalising production date from 45 years ago, and the construction of the FIAT production plants in Togliatti (also known as Togliattigrad, in the former USSR). But just think that the first FIAT production plant in Poland was created in Warsaw, in the second half of the 1930s. Furthermore, Piaggio, the well-known motorcycle company from Pontedera, has owned plants in Brazil and India since the 1960s.

The delocalisation phenomenon has also touched on medium-sized and medium-small companies, the latter grouped together in consortia or production zones. To remain with Tuscany, the small and medium-sized manufacturing firms began the delocalisation process (for hides, footwear and mid-quality fabrics) thirty years ago. Today this region has transferred a large part of its mid-quality footwear production to Tunisia and Morocco, as well as all of its low-quality manufacturing.

90% of the delocalisation by small and medium-sized firms has taken place thanks to the system called OPT (outward processing traffic), which consists of exporting raw materials or semi-processed goods (for example the uppers and soles of shoes for assembly), with the guarantee that they will be bought back and therefore the finished product reimported if the product has been made correctly<sup>1</sup>.

Again in reference to the Tuscan situation, when we think of the textile district in the Empoli or Prato areas, revitalised by the Chinese, we should consider that the local people's abandonment of certain activities is connected to that very same phenomenon of delocalisation which has made it economically more profitable to move certain activities abroad to countries like China itself.

In Italy the delocalisation of production has also been encouraged by a recent law: law no. 57/2001 promotes participation in mixed companies that are set up abroad by increasing the incentives to internationalise in particular for medium-sized and small firms, while laws no. 56 and no. 80 from 2005 increase the aid granted to delocalise production to countries that are not part of the European Union. However, the last of the laws

<sup>1</sup> See M. Giusti, *L'esperienza italiana di delocalizzazione produttiva all'estero tra incentivi e dissuasioni*, in *Annuario del Dipartimento di Diritto Pubblico*, Università degli Studi di Pisa, Pisa, 2007, p. 3, <[http://joomla.ddp.unipi.it/documenti/pisarum\\_joe/appendici/giusti/Delocalizzazione.pdf](http://joomla.ddp.unipi.it/documenti/pisarum_joe/appendici/giusti/Delocalizzazione.pdf)> (18 July 2011).

quoted – whose direction seems to have been dictated in part by a foreboding of the future economic crisis, still underway now – contains legislative devices that discourage companies from moving management, research activities and a large part of production activities abroad, and in addition gives incentives to companies that have invested abroad, with the intention to re-invest in Italy<sup>2</sup>.

The phenomenon of the extraterritoriality of capital is certainly one of the faces of liberalism, which is nourished by deregulation, market liberalisation, flexible working practices and the simplification of transactions on the financial, real estate and labour markets. Not only that, the economic model underlying market liberalism only brings big advantages to the investors, who are mainly from Western countries. It is, alas, a model that, in new forms and a changed scenario, rehashes a format of economic relations and power typical of the colonial era.

This kind of capitalist imperialism risks becoming a trap not only for the inhabitants of the poorest areas of the world, but for the whole of humankind. Today, whether they live in rich countries or the poorest areas of the planet, people are increasingly distracted by the phantasmagoria of goods and overwhelmed by the continuous invitations to consume contained in the advertising messages that invade homes all over the world, messages that anaesthetise consciences and weaken the subject's capacity to think of his existence in terms of plans and collective expectations.

## 2. Immigrants' work: between supply and demand

The reality of migrant workers is equally as multifaceted, and is widely analysed above all by the sociology of work and migration disciplines, but also by economists and demographers<sup>3</sup>. The factors that lead a particular nation to turn to immigrant labour change according to the historical era, in the same way that the reasons pushing people to abandon their places of origin to go to a foreign country are different and can change<sup>4</sup>.

No doubt there are macrosocial factors at the basis of the current emigration: economic differences among countries, demographic pressure, relations of political domination, bonds generated by growing globalisation. Various hypotheses have been put forward to respond to this quite complex reality, now forming real and proper theoretical models of interpretation. For example, the structuralist perspective, which sees the gap in economic and social conditions between the countries of origin and

<sup>2</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>3</sup> See for example, M. Ambrosini, *La fatica di integrarsi. Immigrati e lavoro in Italia*, il Mulino, Bologna, 2001; E. Pugliese, *Immigrazione, lavoro e diritti di cittadinanza*, «Giornale di diritto del lavoro e di relazioni industriali», 102(2), 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Caritas Migrantes, *Mercato occupazionale e immigrazione, Terzo rapporto EMN/Italia*, IDOS, Rome, 2010.

destination as a determining factor in the decision to emigrate, reads the migration phenomenon essentially as an escape from underdevelopment, oppression and poverty.

The economic and social differences between the places of departure and destination are nevertheless not sufficient to explain the decision to emigrate, since only some people migrate while others remain in the country of origin. Again according to the structuralist perspective, what also determines emigration is the great demand for low qualified labour in the more developed countries. From this slant, foreign immigrants take over from internal immigration when this source has run dry or, thanks to improvements in the economic conditions in their context, native people are no longer willing to move. In some cases, and in reference to certain groups, the immigrants that come from abroad go to replace other groups of foreign origin, whose basins have dried up owing to the relative economic and social improvement in their nations of origin (think of the Italians, Poles, Spaniards and Belgians in France, substituted after the war until the middle of the 1970s by the Portuguese and North Africans before making way for other groups). Nevertheless, the structuralist perspective gives just a partial explanation of the phenomenon, also because it does not explain why only particular types of people emigrate whereas others, despite being in the same conditions, remain in the country of origin, or why certain groups of immigrants are more successful than others.

The functionalist and individualist theories instead stress the role of individual decisions and see the main cause of emigration as microsocial factors. From this viewpoint, immigration is the fruit of a choice made on the basis of a calculation that weighs up costs and benefits. In other words, only those who think they have a good chance of success decide to emigrate abroad. It is a choice intended not only to increase income but also influenced by other factors such as the possibility to provide children with a better education or to enjoy greater protection in old age, perhaps as part of a family strategy. As a result, in an only apparently paradoxical manner, relatively more substantial resources in the fatherland make emigration more feasible. Therefore, according to this theory, it is not the poorest who emigrate, as they do not have the means to protect or make the journey, but people who have the resources needed to put the migration into practice.

These second types of theory also leave various issues in the background, such as the role played by the single individuals' personal motivations as well as the consequence of the migratory policies of the countries involved which, as we know, can favour or hinder migratory movements.

Hence, the network theory has been introduced in order to obviate the limits of both the structuralist explanations and the theories based on individual decisions. According to this theory, migrations are seen as an effect of the action of networks of interpersonal relationships between im-

migrants and potential migrants. In this way migrations for work reasons have the possibility of becoming family migrations. It is a theory that recognises the migrants' active potential to put together a project that includes family reunion, driven by the expectations and economic and social goals that they mean to achieve. In the era of globalisation, the migrants' networks take on a transnational appearance, showing how migrants are able to develop social networks and lifestyles and cultural models that reflect the characteristics both of the society they immigrate to and that of origin.

The network theory, however, does not explain how migratory chains start off. Therefore, it is associated with institutional migration theory, which takes into consideration the structures that mediate between the individuals and the receiving society, such as migrant associations, systems of family relations, governmental and non-governmental agencies and intermediation professionals (who can also be illegal, such as people smugglers, etc.).

The two theories then need to be integrated with national legislation theory, which introduces the variable of the migratory policies that can influence single people's decisions and group dynamics. The policies can aim to attract a very precise type of migrant – qualified or, on the contrary, unqualified – they can favour family reunions or try to discourage them, they can aim at seasonal or permanent migration, and they can therefore explain why the flows move from one country to another<sup>5</sup>.

In an article on globalised work which appeared in *Le Monde diplomatique* around ten years ago, Saskia Sassen offered a complex explanation of the reasons that push people to emigrate. According to the scholar, the emigration phenomenon cannot be put down to a simple consequence of poverty or to the mere result of people's individual choices. It needs to be linked with other events, such as migratory policies: the choices of the more developed countries that import labour to build bonds uniting the countries of emigration with those of immigration. In the same way, the emigration phenomenon is also caused by the globalisation of the agricultural products market which pushes many emerging countries to develop agriculture for export.

This choice reduces the chances of the small local landowners' survival, so they become workers on the big estates, often moving from one to another. Once they have entered this cycle of regional (sometimes seasonal) migrations, the workers become the main candidates for international emigration. In the same way, when the big Western companies created factories and assembly plants in the countries with a low-cost labour force, hiring local workers helped to destabilise the traditional rural economies in which

<sup>5</sup> See M. Ambrosini, cit. pp. 31-45.

young women performed an essential role in the production. So the men follow the women, first to the towns, then abroad<sup>6</sup>.

Potential migrants thus single out where to emigrate through the relationships that have already made them closer to Western enterprises in the country of origin. Owing to the contacts that these companies have with the countries where the capital invested in them comes from, the subjective distance between the future migrants and the range of countries where they can migrate is reduced. It also needs to be considered that the managers of the delocalised companies, often multinationals in the manufacturing field, train the workers not only in the specific skills for their assigned job, but also in the conduct to respect in the workplace. Hence these kinds of worker find that they have developed a sort of preparation for the working conditions that they would presumably find if they emigrated to the West.

In sum, as highlighted by a recent survey on *The Employment Market and Immigration* carried out by the Caritas Migrantes foundation for the European Migration Network<sup>7</sup>, today immigrants' work is profoundly connected with the employment market on the whole, a market characterised by strong competition and a global dimension.

### 3. Immigrant workers: the Italian case

Ever since prehistory, men have moved in groups towards far-off lands in search of activities that could allow them to improve their living conditions. Even though it has always been a recurring experience in the history of humankind and an important factor in the development of the societies involved, the migratory phenomenon has never taken on similar numerical proportions to the present. Since the Second World War, migratory movements have reached such great proportions that they involve every continent and every nation, either as countries of immigration or as destinations for those who emigrate, or as countries of emigration and immigration at the same time. The delocalisation of production, which – as we have seen above – has increased over the last fifty years, has in no way reduced the migratory flows; instead in various countries, including Italy, they have grown significantly.

In Italy, the number of immigrants has increased tenfold in the last 20 years, reaching almost five million people, that is, 7% of the resident population<sup>8</sup>. The around two million immigrant workers with a regular work contract at present account for 10% of all the employed and contribute 11%

<sup>6</sup> S. Sassen, *Mais pourquoi emigrent-ils?*, «Le Monde diplomatique», 11, 2000, <<http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2000/11/SASSEN/14478>> (18 July 2011), own translation.

<sup>7</sup> Caritas Migrantes, *Mercato occupazionale e immigrazione*, cit.

<sup>8</sup> See Caritas Migrantes, *Immigrazione. Dossier Statistico 2010. XX Rapporto*, IDOS, Rome, 2010.



to the production of national wealth. Furthermore, their input to the tax and social security system is notable, since in 2010 they declared no less than 33 billion euros to the tax authorities and paid 7.5 billion in social security contributions. Since for the moment the number of immigrants who retire every year is small, as it is a young population with just 2.2% aged over 65, the social security contributions that they pay are a further benefit to the Italian economic system. Today one immigrant out of 30 reaches retirement age, while among the Italians the figure is one out of four. This is not a situation that will last forever, but, in critical circumstances such as the present crisis, it has allowed the social security institution's books to balance<sup>9</sup>.

Even though immigrants are an indispensable social and economic resource for Italy, a widespread culture of narrow-mindedness towards them has persisted or even got worse over the years. It is an attitude that is shown in various forms and at several levels in national and local policies: restrictive laws that slow down the migrants' integration process, institutional racism, differential treatment for Italians and immigrants such as in the case of the so-called 'baby bonus', repeatedly limited to Italian families, or the barriers that prevent immigrants and their children from acquiring Italian citizenship<sup>10</sup>.

The state spends for immigrants in the same way as for Italian nationals, but the «comparison between social expenditure in favour of immigrants and the taxes and contributions that they pay is to the benefit of the state coffers: we are talking a credit of at least one billion euros each year, which would definitely be much more if we were to go from simply sharing social expenses per capita to the calculation method based on additional or marginal costs»<sup>11</sup>.

#### 4. Immigrant workers in Italy between necessity and exclusion

If we observe the Italian case closer up, we see that in the regions in the north there is a demand for work that cannot be satisfied by the local workforce because, owing to the falling birth rate, the number of young people of working age available on the labour market is progressively dropping. As far as the migratory flows towards these regions are concerned, traditional factors of attraction (jobs in industry) add to the motives pushing migrants to leave. The types of work performed by migrants in the centre and north of Italy vary, ranging from employment in industry to work in the myriad of jobs in the service industry, a large part of which are concentrat-

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>11</sup> F. Pittau, presentation of the *Dossier Statistico sull'immigrazione 2010*, Rome, Teatro Orione 26 October 2010, <[http://www.caritasitaliana.it/materiali/Pubblicazioni/Libri\\_2010/dossier\\_immigrazione2010/pittau.pdf](http://www.caritasitaliana.it/materiali/Pubblicazioni/Libri_2010/dossier_immigrazione2010/pittau.pdf)> (18 July 2011), own translation.

ed in the large metropolitan areas, and care work, the demand for which, moreover, is present to varying degrees in all the regions in the country.

On the contrary, in the regions in the south, the labour supply coexists with a high rate of unemployment: here migrants find work in those jobs that the local people refuse, because the latter's employment expectations have risen notably over the years. Traditional seasonal and precarious work is in fact refused by the Italian nationals and instead accepted by the immigrants. This phenomenon is explained by the segmentation of the labour market: «the segments that make up the labour demand do not correspond to the segments that make up the supply»<sup>12</sup>. The latter is a phenomenon that has marked the economies of the countries with an older immigration tradition for a long time; in countries such as France it began to break down during the 1990s also thanks to the pressure of second and third generations and the rights conquered by the immigrant workers<sup>13</sup>.

The increase in the concentration of immigrants in the northern regions of the country is explained by the stability of its labour market. The establishment of the immigrants there, who at times move from the regions in the south to settle in the north, is due to the prospect of stable work which increases their chance of social integration and of realising their expectations (amongst which being reunited with the family members who remained in the home country, which can only happen with a stable job, a certain income level and suitable housing).

Information of this kind is sufficient to debunk the myth according to which immigrants are an economic burden for Italy and to build a realistic image of the migrants' employment situation. In this connection, we need to go beyond the common and extremely harmful image that sees immigrants as only washing windcreens or paints them as people who live by their wits. The quite widespread idea that immigrants take work from Italians is also struggling to disappear despite data from labour market research casting light on a completely different situation. Immigrants, on the contrary, have rekindled several production activities which Italians had discarded and perform many jobs that Italian nationals no longer intend to do, either because they are tiring or because they are harmful for the health or because they do not pay very well. Here are some examples given by the entrepreneur Radwan Khawatmi in his presentation of the Caritas 2010 statistical dossier on immigration: in the tanneries, 80% of the workforce is immigrant, in steelworks the figure is 60%, in building 55%, while in crop picking immigrants account for almost all of the workers. Khawatmi

<sup>12</sup> E. Pugliese, *Immigrazione e mercato del lavoro in Italia*, in Comune di Firenze-ANCI Toscana, *Lavoro migrante*, «Quaderni di Percorsi di cittadinanza», 2, 2003, p. 11, own translation.

<sup>13</sup> See J.-L. Richard, M. Tripier, *Les travailleurs immigrés en France, des trente glorieuses à la crise*, in P. Dewitte (edited by), *Immigration et intégration. L'état des savoirs*, La Découverte, Paris, 1999, p. 180.

also reminds that immigrants have revived the farmhouses abandoned by peasants in Emilia Romagna and thanks to Indian workers the farms in the areas are now flourishing. At the same time carpenters retiring in Bergamo have been replaced by Albanian craftsmen. Not to speak of service companies, the majority of which are run by so-called “new Italians”. And that is not all: many crafts, after years of abandonment, are enjoying a phase of great expansion thanks to immigrants<sup>14</sup>.

These same examples show how immigrant workers in Italy, as well as in various other countries above all in the south of Europe, are employed in activities that do not require any professional qualifications. This is one of the factors that is a heavy burden on the immigrants’ social exclusion, because being employed in the lowest sectors of the production system leads to enormous difficulties in job and economic mobility and it also relegates them to the hardest activities with exhausting hours. These are elements that have an effect on the quality of life, not just of individuals but also of these workers’ families.

The so-called “ethnicisation of the labour market” is another mechanism of work and cultural exclusion which, what is more, helps to reinforce stereotypes about migrants. It is a process encouraged by the economic system, which favours the creation on an ethnic basis of separate labour demand basins for the various sectors. This gives rise to real “job stereotypes”, according to which people from a particular place are thought to be particularly “cut out” for a certain job, while those who come from a different country or geographical area are more suited to other jobs, and so on. Why indeed should a Senegalese be more suited than others to tanning leather or a Philippine to working in the home?

Therefore, together with a whole range of other normative and social provisions, the ethnicisation of the labour market, which immigrants bow down to out of necessity and not out of a cultural disposition, helps to produce or reinforce migrant exclusion. This process leads to the failure by the labour market to take into account the baggage of experience and competences brought by the immigrants from their countries of origin, which results at the existential level in a real and proper split forcing the migrant to live the pre- and post-migration phases in a separate – and therefore traumatic – way.

It is a failure which, albeit certainly more visible in the sphere of work, at the psychological level corresponds to the sensation of a void and annulment of the lives lived prior to migration. As a result, the migrants are forced to live their working lives in an alienated and split manner. They are thus led to perceive themselves – and at the same time to be perceived by

<sup>14</sup> R. Khawatmi, presentation of the *Dossier Statistico sull’immigrazione 2010*, Teatro Orione, Rome, 26 October 2010, <[http://www.caritasroma.it/Portals/3/Dossier2010\\_Khawatmi.pdf](http://www.caritasroma.it/Portals/3/Dossier2010_Khawatmi.pdf)> (18 July 2011).

the receiving society – as just cogs in a large mechanism, replaceable at any moment by other workers of the same level and qualifications. Hence the migrants' subjectivity assumes a negligible value in company calculations, especially when they are of a medium to large size.

Workers in small companies, so-called family-run businesses, paradoxically have more possibilities of making their skills or knowledge more valued. In these companies the type of relationships that are established with the employers can evolve positively over time. However, the flipside is that in this type of company job mobility is minimum, if not inexistent.

Becoming self-employed is a possible way to exit this stalemate, although it presents various difficulties, from bureaucratic obstacles to all types of cultural resistance in a labour market that is firmly anchored to the ethnicisation model. Nevertheless, it is a path trodden every year by a growing number of immigrants who, however, to be successful are forced to remain within quite small margins. Hence the development of Albanian and Romanian building firms, Indian and Chinese restaurants, or the flourishing of fast food outlets run by Turks and people from other Middle Eastern countries, etc.. But difficulties and adversities are always around the corner for those immigrant workers who dare to take the step into creating their own business, as documented in a tragically ironic manner in the film *Cous Cous (La Graine et le Mulet)* written and directed by the Tunisian director Abdellatif Kechiche, which was filmed and came out in France in 2007<sup>15</sup>.

The condition of professional disqualification that migrant workers find themselves in, therefore, tends to reinforce the exclusion to which the employment, but also the normative system (which reserves a series of careers or jobs to Italian nationals only) confine them upon arrival. As a result, we get a vicious circle from which migrants struggle to find their way out.

## 5. "They wanted workers, they got people"

With this effective title, taking a famous phrase by Max Frisch on the reception of migrant workers in Switzerland after the war, in an article published in «Il Manifesto» around ten years ago Enrico Pugliese referred to the egoistical attitude shown by the countries of immigration towards immigrant workers<sup>16</sup>. With his article, Pugliese intended to denounce the proposal by Tito Boeri for a disposable immigrant workforce thanks to «temporary immigration programmes» which were to attract two types of workers: «highly qualified workers» and «workers with low qualifications who want to perform those jobs (for example tanning leather) that are

<sup>15</sup> See the summary and review in French: <<http://www.cahiersducinema.com/Evenement-La-Graine-et-le-mulet.html>> (18 July 2011).

<sup>16</sup> E. Pugliese, *Vogliono braccia, arrivano persone*, «Il Manifesto», 19 April 2001, <[http://www.cestim.it/rassegna%20stampa/01/04/19/lavoro\\_pugliese.htm](http://www.cestim.it/rassegna%20stampa/01/04/19/lavoro_pugliese.htm)> (18 July 2011).

no longer appealing for EU citizens»<sup>17</sup>. Referring to Marxist thought, Pugliese highlighted an undisputable and seemingly also slightly obvious fact which is, however, all too often forgotten. Namely that:

The labour force, that is, working capacity is the only commodity that cannot be separated from its owner. If you buy my manpower [...] you take responsibility for dealing with me as a person, as a human being. In short, the labour force is a particular type of commodity. Then along came the Engineering Workers Federation which underlined that it is a “commodity that thinks”. And then the works by feminist scholars of economics reminding us that they are a “commodity that loves”, while also making reference to care work.<sup>18</sup>

And while the material necessities and the desire for a dignified life may be determining in pushing migrants to leave their countries, as Abdelmalek Sayad has clearly underlined, however, the economic earnings obtained in the country of immigration do not always make up for the psychological costs caused by the distance from their homeland and loved ones<sup>19</sup>. These costs are further compounded by the spectre of having an illegal status, as has happened in Italy in the last ten years following the introduction of the immigration regulations set out in the so-called Bossi-Fini Law. By making stay permit renewal dependent on the possession of a work contract and allowing unemployed immigrants only a short period of time to find a new job, this piece of legislation has pushed or driven numerous immigrants back into an illegal position.

Thus a scenario is created that fits the distinctive features of the Italian labour market, marked by a high share of illegal or cash-in-hand work and a request for labour with low qualifications for an employment circuit dominated by temporary and seasonal work as well as frequent reductions and increases in numbers which lead to easy firing and equally as easy hiring. If we consider the specific condition of migrant workers, for whom the possession of a stay permit and therefore a legal and stable job are unavoidable requirements in order to access a series of basic services and fundamental rights, it is easy to understand how the current labour market, characterised by deregulation and undeclared employment, contributes towards keeping immigrants in a servile and in some ways subhuman condition, making them what Alessandro Dal Lago has defined as “non-persons”<sup>20</sup>.

Under the Damocles’ sword of permanent instability, dominated by a lack of satisfaction with their working condition, downtrodden by a very

<sup>17</sup> T. Boeri, *Puntare su immigrati ‘a tempo’*, «Il Sole 24 ore», 17 April 2001, own translation.

<sup>18</sup> E. Pugliese, *Vogliono braccia, arrivano persone*, cit., own translation.

<sup>19</sup> A. Sayad, *The Suffering of the Immigrant*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2004 (orig. ed. 1999).

<sup>20</sup> See A. Dal Lago, *Non-persons: the exclusion of migrants in a global society*, IPOC, Vimodrome, 2009.

much ungratifying routine in which often their competences are neither put to use nor their aspirations met, the migrants try to make everyday life less burdensome by imagining a better future for themselves in their country of origin, thanks to accumulating a certain sum of money for an investment in their homeland, or a return after retirement in conditions of relative well-being. It is a dream fostered by many migrants and only realised by a certain number of them. However, it carries the risk that they will find themselves strangers in their own land after years of living and working abroad, seized by a sense of estrangement owing to the long void lived in the country of immigration as well as the lack of communication not only with those who remained in the country of origin, but also, and above all, with their own children who have grown up in a context that they experienced as alien. It is a condition of alienation upon returning to the homeland that is masterfully described by the writer of Moroccan origin, Tahar Ben Jelloun, in his novel *A Palace in the Old Village*<sup>21</sup>.

## 6. What human culture?

The condition of migrant workers, linked to the ongoing conception of immigrants as exploitable manpower, is a macroscopic example of a work culture based on the commodification of production relations, on the individual workers' anonymity, therefore on what Marx defined as the alienation of work. It seems that, with respect to a century and a half ago, in substance the capitalist system has not changed, even though the standard working conditions of the average manual worker have definitely improved a great deal, the working hours are less exhausting and the salaries more acceptable.

Migrant workers, however, and in particular those of them who for various reasons find themselves in conditions of greater vulnerability, live in a situation of grave precariousness, which jeopardises their very health and safety. They find themselves exposed to situations of a lack of safety at work, as the news reports unfortunately testify, in a country like Italy in which there is still a lot to do at the level of safety in the workplace. Very often those who pay for this shortcoming are precisely those immigrant workers who, being easier to blackmail, are forced to accept subcontract work, interim jobs and the likes. The statistical data confirms this: «compared to Italian workers an around 1.5 per cent higher relative quota are in temporary employment and around 4.5 per cent more are in part-time work»; at the same time, «immigrants [...] continue to show a higher rate of injuries compared to their Italian colleagues: 44 cases denounced by the

<sup>21</sup> T. Ben Jelloun, *A Palace in the Old Village*, Arcadia, London, 2011 (orig. ed. 2009).

National Institute for Industrial Accident Insurance for every one thousand workers against 39 workers born in Italy»<sup>22</sup>.

Certainly, compared to the times of Marx and Engels, what has not changed much is the value given to the person in relation to the work that he produces, in other words the stress placed on the production of goods and maintaining particular levels of well-being at any price. At the same time a certain, unfortunately minority, working culture, which puts the person before work or rather puts the person in the centre and sets out the sphere of work around him, is sacrificed.

In order to bear fruit, the struggles for the recognition of workers' rights must rest on a culture that makes the person the centre of every economic, social and cultural strategy for development and progress. In reality, for a few decades we have been seeing a progressive erosion of the workers' rights that we had sweated to attain. Today the main victims of this are precisely those migrant workers, as they are more exposed and liable to blackmail owing to the situation of social marginality into which the system tends to thrust them.

Like other fragile subjects at the employment level – who are the theme of other essays in this book – migrants fit a into system that does not deal with their individuality or specificity, which does not aim at widespread well-being, but at maintaining particular rates of production to fuel precise levels of consumption. It is a system that justifies the cynicism of certain choices in the name of the apparently virtuous circle of more production = more jobs = more consumption = more wealth and well-being for all. Yet in reality the lack of mechanisms regulating the labour market is increasing the gap between rich and poor, between an elite of super-consumers and a mass of under-consumers who are increasingly at risk of falling into poverty and marginalisation.

So it is not a case of counterpoising other human and work cultures to the Western or European one or of forcefully importing models from the outside, but of making it a priority to re-gauge our human culture on man himself, to overcome the split between protection of the person and market sacredness. It is a split that has created an evident schizophrenia between the culture of man's rights – of which we proudly claim to be the fathers and declare to be its main supporters, although, upon taking a closer look, it needs to be reviewed/taken up again in an intercultural perspective<sup>23</sup> – and a work culture that heads in the opposite direction to those rights, systematically denying man's centrality in the employment system and in the very conception of the economy and relations of production.

<sup>22</sup> Ministero dell'Interno, *L'immigrazione in Italia tra identità e pluralismo culturale*, Paper presented at the Second National Conference on Immigration, 25-26 September, Milan, 2009, p. 168, pp. 181-182.

<sup>23</sup> See C. Silva, *Pedagogia, intercultura, diritti umani*, Carocci, Rome, 2008.

So long as this schizophrenia is not overcome, migrant workers will be one of the fronts on which, more than others, we will be able to see the cultural impoverishment staining postmodernity and the globalised world.

## 7. For a formation that transforms

The topic of the education and training of immigrants in Italy is complex and as yet not sufficiently researched, although the reports from national and local studies on the evolution of the migratory phenomenon in Italy, which, moreover, have increased in number over recent years, show interesting data on the matter. The references range from the immigrants' education levels, which prove on the whole to be higher than those of the native population, to their rate of participation in vocational training, which, however, continues to be quite low even though there has been a remarkable increase in the specific training offered to adult immigrants.

Regarding the first, the number of immigrants possessing a qualification up to middle school level exceeds that of Italians by 2.5 per cent, those with a diploma by 0.5 per cent, while those who have a degree count less than the Italians in percentage terms, with a difference of 2.9 points<sup>24</sup>. However, we have to take account of the fact that a very high number of people obtained qualifications in their country of origin, but they are not recognised in Italy, except in the presence of bilateral agreements or special regulations that allow them to be equated. Therefore, as Francesco Carchedi sums up, we are in the presence of a «schooled workforce [...], with high but not recognised qualifications, placed in the most unqualified jobs with no – or only very rare – possibilities to climb the ladder»<sup>25</sup>.

Regarding the second topic, namely immigrants' participation in training, the data is unfortunately little and in many cases only refers to circumstances limited to a regional or provincial scale, or often a particular sector only. For the construction sector we possess national data of a certain level of standardisation relating to 2007. From this it results that a third of the pupils on training courses for manual workers were foreigners, while the number of immigrants who followed technical courses in that year was very low. Furthermore, again for this sector, the number of foreigners participating in training for employed people, such as voca-

<sup>24</sup> ISTAT (Italian National Institute for Statistics) data referring to 2009 on the foreign and Italian population in the 15-64 age group: <[http://noi-italia.istat.it/fileadmin/user\\_upload/allegati/25.pdf](http://noi-italia.istat.it/fileadmin/user_upload/allegati/25.pdf)> (18 July 2011). Compared to 2006, immigrants' education levels have risen slightly: see the data contained in Ministero dell'Interno, *L'immigrazione in Italia tra identità e pluralismo culturale*, cit., pp. 84-85.

<sup>25</sup> F. Carchedi, *Immigrazione e formazione professionale*, «Osservatorio Isfol», 2, 2011, p. 56, own translation.



tional apprenticeships or ongoing training, was quite a lot higher, while it was very low for courses for the unemployed<sup>26</sup>.

Certainly, analysing the education and training of immigrants in Italy is a delicate issue, and in this connection simplistic generalisations need to be avoided, both owing to the great variety of countries of origin and the array of training statuses and levels of education. The migratory flows over the last decade, marked by a great increase in immigrants from eastern countries which have recently become part of the European Union – so much so that today they represent more than 50% of the whole foreign population in Italy – have boosted this level in that many of them possess high levels of qualifications. All the same, however, as we have seen, the level of education of immigrants in Italy makes no or very little difference to their working conditions, therefore it is by no means a source of greater material or psychological well-being for the workers. The reasons for this reside, as I have said, in the static and rigid nature of the regulations and the narrow-mindedness of immigration policies which chain migrants to unskilled, discontinuous jobs and hence precarious working and existential conditions. In this framework, training struggles to create credible routes to qualification or professional development, but more in general risks becoming party to a system that tends to prevent immigrants' access to technical and managerial professions, when instead the signal coming from the new Italians on the whole seems to be quite encouraging, with school leavers achieving excellent grades, and widespread aspirations amongst second generations to obtain a degree.

While owing to a lack of space I will postpone an in-depth reflection on the topic of the relationship between immigrants' work and their human formation to another occasion, here I will restrict myself to hypothesizing that intercultural pedagogy could help come up with a new formation that not only has an effect on migrants' work but also on their existential and human condition. The education and training offered to immigrants needs to have a pedagogical orientation, based on the active conception of the *emigré* as a person capable of performing an important role in the target society.

It must be a formative process that does not shirk from valuing the immigrants' qualifications, their past work experience, vocational skills and cultural knowledge. To use the words of Paulo Freire, it acts as «consciousness raising»<sup>27</sup> and not only aims at increasing linguistic, cultural or vocational knowledge and skills, but leads the immigrants to reflect on their expectations and, therefore, on the very reasons for their departure; expectations that, once the destination has been reached, seem unrealisable. Therefore, it must be education that allows the immigrants to focus

<sup>26</sup> *Ivi*, p. 57.

<sup>27</sup> See P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Continuum, New York-London, 1970 (orig. ed. 1968).

on their potentialities and use them in order to integrate better into the new society and really achieve their migratory plans. The training offered could be in the form of either career guidance or shadowing, or vocational courses, depending on the various cases and situations: the great array of situations within the immigrant population, the different long-held dreams, and above all the consideration that it is not just workers who emigrate, but men, women and children. These are real people who, along with the emigration, are forced to re-plan a new existence, for which they need to use their own individual resources and overcome the fragility and vulnerability that the condition of immigrants involves, at least at the outset.

This education and training should not just be aimed at increasing productivity or earnings, but give people the tools to deal with the new roles and tasks that they come to perform in the country of immigration, from that of parent, husband or wife, to that of worker and citizen. It must be a formation that transforms, since it should provide individuals with the elements needed to link their past experiences with those lived in the new context, thus helping them to overcome the split state that often characterises those who have had to pass from one cultural shore to another without a safety net, as is the case of many immigrants. If it aims at these objectives, the training and education – whether vocational, linguistic or cultural, or in the shape of guidance, empowerment or counselling – can really offer a road towards the inclusion of immigrants in Italian society.

At the same time we are talking formation meant as deconstruction, sensitising and a knowledge tool, for Italian citizens, so that they may remove stereotypes and prejudices; formation to fight the general idea that still stains the less learned part of the Italian population who, as a recent survey highlighted, for this very reason continue to feel diffidence towards immigrants, and perceive them as a threat<sup>28</sup>. Nevertheless, this formation needs policies that are forward-looking, which, instead of using immigrants as tools for political propaganda, help the population welcome the new Italians, who doggedly make progress, albeit at times with difficulty. The same goes for many of the immigrants' children who, like their indigenous peers, harbour the dream to lay claim to a different future to that of their parents.<sup>29</sup> Finally, the formative process must be a route towards real citizenship, that is, it must aim to put the immigrants in the condition to participate in the social and civil life of the country in which they live, no matter what their legal citizenship.

<sup>28</sup> Ministero dell'Interno, *L'immigrazione in Italia tra identità e pluralismo culturale*, Paper presented at the Second National Conference on Immigration, 25-26 September, Milan, 2009.

<sup>29</sup> See G. Dalla Zuanna, P. Farina, S. Strozza, *Nuovi italiani. I giovani immigrati cambieranno il nostro paese?*, il Mulino, Bologna, 2009.

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# Migrant Jobs and Human Cultures: Tangible and Intangible Know-How

## I. The complex glance of pedagogy

Migrant jobs and human cultures: the pairing almost seems to zoom in directly on two critical dimensions of the present day, work and cultural diversity. Two complex and intricate phenomena, their treatment could lead to a potentially endless, and hence also ambiguous and 'slippery', analysis. If not dealt with properly, the necessary interweaving of different disciplinary points of view risks losing specificity in order to fall into generalisations. The terms themselves – *work* and *culture* – are polysemic and conjure up broad lines of argument, with different ways of thinking stratified in time. The choices of acceptance upon which to base the analysis may also seem weak. The situation is complicated if we add the interpretative category of *migrating*: which is not necessarily a reference to socio-historical contingencies, but an inevitable condition of present-day living, and more. If the work-culture pairing appertains to the idea of work as the expression of a culture and at the same time the process for producing culture, the *trio* of work, culture and migration appertains to the meeting between *products* and *producers*, in their turn the expression of *cultural diversities* which encounter or clash, integrating or excluding each other.

The need to overcome a cultural ethnocentrism, and the possibility to make use of perhaps *unconsidered*<sup>1</sup> categories such as exclusion and recognition, can be keys to accessing a pedagogical investigation of the relationship between work, culture and migration. In this hermeneutic operation, social pedagogy as the «educational know-how of contemporaneity»<sup>2</sup>, the

<sup>1</sup> See A. Mariani, *La decostruzione in pedagogia. Una frontiera teorico-educativa della postmodernità*, Armando, Rome, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> V. Sarracino, *Pedagogia e educazione sociale. Fondamenti, Processi, Strumenti*, ETS, Pisa, 2011, p. 9.

expression of a pedagogical discipline seen as a complex synthesis of the educational sciences<sup>3</sup>, can make an interpretative contribution through its ability to dialogue with the anthro-cultural, social and economic aspects of life. It will help to overcome the individual-context dualism that could also characterise the treatment of the relationship between work, culture and migration. Nevertheless, the approach needs to be focussed on further in order to understand from which perspective to interpret the relationship between individual and context. Social pedagogy, as Paolo Orefice upholds, has accomplished a transdisciplinary approach to education that enables the legitimate introduction of a 'third element'<sup>4</sup> with which we can conjugate and clarify the correlation between individual and society, balancing their relationship from the outside. This third element is given by *know-how*: know-how is the 'subject matter' upon which education 'works' in order to accompany and 'shape' the subjects' personal development and the development of society. Education through know-how, insofar as it comprises individual and collective forms of knowledge, has the possibility to intervene on the transformation of personal know-how and on the transformations of society.

The way to create this reciprocal relationship exists: it is given by the 'formative power' (whether it be positive or negative) of the tangible and intangible forms of know-how, which simultaneously permeate the subject in his interpretation of society so as to find his collocation in it, and society in its indication to the subject of how he should move in it in order to guarantee his development; but they also involve subject and context in the responsibility of reciprocal change<sup>5</sup>.

Tangible and intangible know-how, therefore, distinguishes individuality and collectivity, and the reference to the social dimension implies consideration of the cultural component (in its diversity of expression). Furthermore, social pedagogy, insofar as it is a theory of the formative process, is engaged by its scientific charter in investigating and accompanying, through the educational operation, that process through which every human being gradually takes on his particular shape in a social context<sup>6</sup>: in this sense, it cannot *not* also deal with work. To take up – almost as a provocation – the words of an anthropologist, Giulio Angioni, work can be understood «as a distinctly human activity which characterises the species and explains the manners and outcomes of its formation process»<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> See P. Orefice, *Pedagogia Scientifica. Un approccio complesso al cambiamento formativo*, Editori Riuniti, Rome, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> P. Orefice, *Pedagogia Sociale. L'educazione tra saperi e società*, Bruno Mondadori, Milan, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> *Ivi*, p. XV, own translation.

<sup>6</sup> P. Orefice, *Pedagogia Scientifica. Un approccio complesso al cambiamento formativo*, cit.

<sup>7</sup> G. Angioni, *Il sapere della mano*, Sellerio, Palermo, 1986, p. 17.

If one tries to problematise the concept of *work* by connecting it to the knowledge-building process, also implemented thanks to action through what has been defined as the *operational dimension of knowing*<sup>8</sup>, then the pairing of the concept of *know-how* with the concept of *work* can take on a more significant meaning, and the distinction between tangible and intangible forms of know-how acquires importance.

In anthropological reflection, work is also considered closely connected to culture since some deem it a possible foundation, if not origin, of culture itself or, nevertheless, a fundamental juncture in the relationship between nature and culture<sup>9</sup>. Again Giulio Angioni, in the volume *I saperi della mano*, expands his reflection starting from the idea that «working activity [...] is an organic exchange between man (culture) and nature, a process that creates unity between man and nature, between nature and culture, mainly because, by working, man, as an individual and social group, achieves his aims, his ideas become material products»<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, he asserts that work is the strategic place in which to study culture: indeed, while attempting to go beyond the rigidity of «cultural materialism and [...] the vagueness of semiotic structuralisms»<sup>11</sup> Angioni tries to emphasise the strong bond between ways of tangible living and the expression of intangible culture, namely 'behaviours, attitudes, ideas, values and signs to give them meaning as 'discourses' capable of orientating individuals who participate in a culture in the natural and social world»<sup>12</sup>. In other words, to use the words of another anthropologist, Antonino Buttitta, since culture is, as well as a representation, also a transformation of reality, representing and doing are inseparable aspects of a single process.

In a post-cognitivist style pedagogical perspective, it is possible to speak of the interpretation, rather than representation, of reality on the basis of the know-how built in the constant inter-retro-action with reality itself, but the indissolubility of the bond between the interpretation and transformation of reality remains in the unity of the formative process. In this connection, Paolo Orefice asserts:

The formative process of every human being is defined, as it is not hard to recognise, by the relationship that he establishes with the environment: he 'takes shape' within the context of life and the elaborations and transformations

<sup>8</sup> «Action is a constitutive act of living beings [...] it is what self-poiesis does [...] besides, action fuels knowledge: by using the available meanings it creates other ones». (P. Orefice, *La Ricerca azione partecipativa. Teoria e pratiche*, Liguori, Naples, 2006, p. 42, own translation).

<sup>9</sup> See A. Leroi-Gourhan, *Gesture and Speech*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1993 (orig. ed. 1964). On this topic see the interesting volume by A.M. Cirese, *Segnicità, fabbrilità, procreazione*, CISU, Rome, 1984, in which the author deals with the topic of work also from the viewpoint of transcultural varieties and invariances (pp. 55-97).

<sup>10</sup> G. Angioni, cit., pp. 22-23, own translation.

<sup>11</sup> *Ivi*, p. 13, own translation.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, own translation.

that he makes on it [...] It is a three-way relationship, in which every element, on its specific part, has an active influence on the other two and, at the same time, is conditioned by them. At the vertices of a hypothetical triangle we find:

1. the tangible products of culture;
2. the intangible products of culture;
3. the system of learning and building forms of knowledge.

The 'tangible products of a culture' are the field for analysis of a human collectivity's technical living system, and include both the artefacts and the forms of organisation of tangible production (technologies and economy). The expression 'intangible products of culture' means [...] all the theoretical elements of a culture organised into systems of sensitivity, emotions, feelings and thoughts assumed at the basis of collective life [...] if the tangible production of culture expresses the moment of transformation of the environmental reality, the intangible production corresponds to the moment of its interpretation in terms of the baggage of knowledge possessed by the culture of a given society<sup>13</sup>.

If one accepts the strong link between work and culture and starts from the consideration that the formative process is a process that presides over the construction and evolution of each (individual and collective) subject's system of know-how in order to be able to interpret and transform reality, one can understand how such considerations cannot be avoided in the analysis of any context that refers in intercultural terms to the dimension of work.

It is in this framework that this paper intends to offer a merely introductory reflection, with a tendentially interdisciplinary slant, on reading work as a cultural *product*, which needs to be recognised so as not to lead to exclusion and rejection mechanisms and which, precisely because it is a cultural product, needs to be enhanced from the educational point of view.

## 2. Between tangible and intangible work

On the beach the figure, who initially blends in with the many animating the shore, slowly takes shape, but it is an odd shape: not just bags, necklaces or clothes are piled on the head and shoulders of M., but little carved tablets, decorated mirrors, ebony female silhouettes and statues. I have been meeting M. every summer for at least five years: he is a carpenter from the Ivory Coast, but also a salesman. In the summer, he brings the objects that he produces in his workshop with his father, brother and sons, but also other products that he buys in the markets of Abidjan or on his travels, especially in Burkina or Liberia. He is proud of his products. When he has time, towards the end of the summer season, because at this point he has not got many more objects to sell, he stops and *tells* me about the techniques to dec-

<sup>13</sup> P. Orefice, *Pedagogia Sociale. L'educazione tra saperi e società*, cit., pp. 6-8.



orate the sun- and moon-shaped mirrors or to engrave the wooden tablets, and tries to explain how the wood is chosen, the colour, the shape, what the symbols and decorations mean. It is not an easy conversation: not just because the language does not help and we need to mix Italian with some French and a bit of Dyula for the technical jargon, translated, when possible using gestures, but also because this know-how is something M. possesses and he has never had to tell it to anyone. It is in the objects that he has produced in his workshop and in his choices of other objects in the markets: it is *implicit* in the product and in the way of making it, it is *tacit* and shared in the local communities, there is no need to explain it. It is the intangible part that becomes real in the material aspect of the object and that can be grasped and interpreted if one knows the codes: but what in the places of production is *immediately* evident, here has to be *mediated* otherwise it remains uncomprehended, almost as if it did not exist. What in the contexts of origin is everyday know-how, *here* seems expert disciplinary knowledge, worthy of the anthropologists. *Here* it is easy to acquire the tangible part, while the intangible part of the product is in fact unconsciously *discarded*, it cannot be seen. One can acquire the object, without acquiring its meaning: but he who sells it, sells *the whole thing*, even though he knows it is unlikely that a large part of his work will be known or acknowledged, or nevertheless *appreciated*, in the literal sense of increasing its value.

One can also decide not to sell *the whole thing* and to select, by already getting rid of it in the work process, what may nevertheless not be correctly interpreted or whose meaning could be corrupted. So selection leads to the attribution of other meanings to objects. To this effect, the reference to all the objects that in anthropological literature fall under so-called 'tourism arts', airport art or arts of acculturation, becomes interesting. The tourist market's search for souvenirs has stimulated the production of new artefacts by numerous populations<sup>14</sup>. Tourist goods find themselves having to respond to commercial needs that reduce their meaning above all to an aesthetical dimension: to be bought, a product must be able to interest and strike the average tourist who finds in it a mnemonic surrogate for what they saw during their trip (like a postcard or a photograph), and who is also attracted by the pleasant appearance or the *exoticness* that it nevertheless manages to interpret.

Surely the social and cultural context in which tourist artefacts are produced is different from the context in which objects are produced for 'domestic' use, usually having to follow rules and regulations and responding to other assessment parameters than the *quality* of the product. Often some objects allotted to 'tourist consumption' are only apparently (that is, in their form) similar to the objects that they intend to represent, or to put

<sup>14</sup> M. Hitchcock, *Souvenirs: Intangible and Tangible Authenticity*, «Cultura y Desarrollo», 4, 2005, pp. 36-44.

it better, *recall* in the tourist's memory: suffice it to think of some ritual or also everyday objects which when they are produced and belong fully to their cultural context are significant and 'powerful', even potentially 'dangerous', and must be made and dealt with according to precise rules. An emblematic example is found in Guatemala with the stones depicting the Maya calendar: the stones made to sell to tourists do not have any 'power' and can be treated like any other commercial artefact, while the stones for ritual use, even if sold because they have ended up in the commercial circuit, maintain the original power that makes them, according to a precise interpretation of Maya cosmo-vision, parts of a spatial and temporal whole. The stones are an element of continuity between past, present and future, they express the bond joining man and the universe and therefore require respect and a precise set of rituals<sup>15</sup>. But this is not all exchanged in the commercial circuit, or, if it does get through, it is not *recognised*.

Therefore, while the product, the tangible outcome of a work process, can become an object of exchange with apparent ease, the same does not happen for its intangible component, which is nevertheless implicit in the work process itself<sup>16</sup>. Indeed, these objects mean much more than transpires or can immediately be interpreted: to all effects they represent potential forms of intercultural communication, forms of exchange – also symbolic – which can often even be put across by innovative forms of art. Even if they are set to be sold, the product's functions are not fulfilled by being an object of exchange. Instead they become the concrete expression and product of the cultural contact and socio-cultural changes which have led to their production: a sort of meta-level of interpretation of doubtless importance in terms not only of anthropological and sociological analysis, but also by all means of pedagogical analysis too.

When they overstep the threshold of the community which shares their uses and codes, objects with cultural connotations with regard to their identity and belonging represent and express the search for new relationships with the outside world and, therefore, put across new values. In this sense it is possible to agree with the assertion that Roberta Colombo Dougoud makes in relation to art in Papua New Guinea:

In a horizon that has suddenly become distant and always outside their reach, these populations feel the compelling need to find a new collocation, to express and communicate their existence, to explain who they

<sup>15</sup> Fundación Mayab' Nimatijob'al Universidad Maya, *Sustento cosmogónico y vivencial de la averiguación-búsqueda para la plenitud de la existencia. Investigación Maya*, Fu-Maya, Guatemala City, 2009, voll. 1 and 2; J. Mucia Batz, *Cosmovisione e numeri Maya*, in J. Macera Dall'Orso (edited by), *Calcolo matematico precolombiano, Atti del Convegno ILA, 21 ottobre 2003*, Istituto Italo-Latino Americano, Rome, 2004, pp. 341-360.

<sup>16</sup> For the anthropological category of the *implicit* in the analysis of work please refer to G. Angioni, cit.

are, how they live, what activities they do, what their particularities are, how they are unique, to declare their separate identity and offer a positive image of themselves<sup>17</sup>.

The object, product of a work process, is therefore re-semanticised, to make it become 'something else', transforming it into a fresh form of communication: it is a change that can enable tradition to live and integrate with innovation, to re-invent forms of expression and nevertheless guarantee that difference is maintained. It is a cultural answer inserted between two meta-narrations, one of homogenisation and the other of emergence, one of loss and the other of invention, but which nevertheless potentially enable the development of a new diversity, based more on interrelations and relatively less on autonomy and separation. The *product* of *work* can become an element of recognition and negotiation of belonging and identity in continual transformation<sup>18</sup>.

To take up the sense of a statement by Sennett, it is possible to claim not just that through the products of work «people can learn about themselves through the things they make»<sup>19</sup>, but that through the tangible production of culture people can create bonds and reveal a lot about themselves to others.

Besides, by way of a sort of metonymy, the term *work* also indicates the *product* of the work, but emphasises the *process*, probably in the attempt to linguistically explain what cannot be seen. By showing his goods, M. is highlighting his *work* rather than the *works* of others: in some cases they are by craftsmen whom he knows, other times they are simply objects acquired in the markets. He knows and nevertheless indicates the culture that they belong to, what they are used for, the techniques to make them: the single craftsman behind the product is not immediately visible, but one can grasp the collectivity that legitimises the existence of the product itself and at the

<sup>17</sup> R. Colombo Dougoud, *Arte e identità: le storyboard di Kambot* in S. Manoukian, *Etno-grafie. Testi, oggetti immagini*, Meltemi, Rome, 2003, p. 82.; also see J. Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA), 1988; M.L. Ciminelli, *La negoziazione delle appartenenze. Arte, identità e proprietà culturale nel terzo e quarto mondo*, FrancoAngeli, Milan, 2006.

<sup>18</sup> An interesting example of this need to 'make oneself known and recognised' is found in the books of the so-called 'migrant literature' produced and distributed on the streets by new publishers, often linked to social cooperatives and *Fair Trade* circuits with a strong slant towards diversity, tolerance and integration, to give a voice to life stories, but also to a decidedly little known branch of literature. For a few years, important publishers have also been paying attention and giving room to new literary forms. However, this is not the right place to dwell on the subject, which nevertheless deserves to be dealt with and refers to a *job*. See G. Commare, *I figli africani di Dante. Sulla letteratura migrante italoфона*, CUCEM, Catania, 2006 and G. Commare, *La letteratura migrante come fattore d'integrazione europea*, «Quaderni Europei. Scienze linguistiche e letterarie», edited by Centro di documentazione europea, Università di Catania, Online Working Paper, 7, Catania, 2008 <[http://www.lex.unict.it/cde/quadernieuropei/linguistiche/07\\_2008.pdf](http://www.lex.unict.it/cde/quadernieuropei/linguistiche/07_2008.pdf)> (18 July 2011).

<sup>19</sup> R. Sennett, *The Craftsman*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2008, p. 8.

same time legitimises both the craftsman's skill and social position. It is more difficult to grasp the technical knowledge, the skills and competences involved in the procedure to make the product; and almost impossible to retrace how this knowledge, the skills and competences were acquired. An intangible universe hidden in the tangible: a universe of women and men's *know-how*, constructed in the social life, along paths of formation, constantly put to the test in giving itself identity and belonging.

Thus the many objects that can increasingly be found in Western markets can be considered *migrant works*; their expression of cultural diversity is usually not evaluated, but just perceived by those who acquire them, and still unlikely to be considered the expression of a production system, with its social roles and systems of learning.

Those objects that can be seen more and more frequently, also in Italy, in exhibitions and museums on demography, ethnology and anthropology may also be considered as *migrant works*: signs of a *craftability*<sup>20</sup> which, thanks to the display operation, enables those who produced the objects to be active in the exhibition field on account of the goods into which their activity has materialised<sup>21</sup>. The product of *work* finds space in the museum, becoming a strong and potential intercultural meeting place in which, and through which, meanings can be traced and others attributed<sup>22</sup>.

*Migrant work* is not, however, just work that migrates from the local sphere towards the global, Western world. The West's *widespread migration* towards the rest of the world is surely much stronger. The West has definitely 'exported' and asserted both forms of thought and interpretations of reality and forms of *transforming* reality, even after the colonisation phase, by imposing modes of production and consequent life models. While it is unlikely that the intangible dimension of local production will become visible in the West, it may be affirmed that the same cannot be said for the diffusion of the tangible and intangible component of the West's products. From physical and institutional occupation, we have gone to intangible occupation, an occupation implemented through know-how, knowledge and mental frameworks which have a profound influence on the local systems of the production and set-up of work. It is an occupation that can no longer be retraced to geographical coordinates, which has channelled and conditioned the development of contacts between different peoples and countries' cultures and histories. At this point the West is intangible in the same way as globalisation, and simultaneously well-diffused and powerful, so much so that it becomes homogenising. So Western culture has been asserting the domination

<sup>20</sup> See A.M. Cirese, *Oggetti, segni musei*, Einaudi, Turin, 1976.

<sup>21</sup> M. Baxandall, *Exhibiting Intention: Some Preconditions of the Visual Display of Culturally Purposeful Objects*, in I. Karpe, S.D. Lavine (edited by), *Exhibiting Culture. The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, 1991, pp. 33-41.

<sup>22</sup> See B. Latour (edited by), *Le dialogue des cultures. Actes des rencontres inaugurales du musée du quai Branly, Babel*, Paris, 2006.

of its knowledge and the monopoly of its social and economic development in the world, thereby increasing the *divarication* between it and other cultures, other knowledge, and other social and economic development<sup>23</sup>.

### 3. Local products and problems of recognition

In the current globalisation processes that are driving the tangible and intangible production of the more technologically advanced countries, with the relative global know-how that is produced, one cannot escape from highlighting the collective forms of know-how and local territorial heritages of emerging societies and cultures, which risk, however, being conditioned by *dependent development*<sup>24</sup>.

To enhance the local dimension is not to uphold *localisms* and does not necessarily imply identifying precise geographical areas. Certainly, far from producing totally similar and uniform effects, globalisation seems to be characterised by an intrinsic ambivalence, meaning that processes of unification, homogenisation and standardisation are counterweight to processes of fragmentation, heterogenisation and differentiation<sup>25</sup>. In other words, the *revitalisation* of the local dimension can become the extreme, paradoxical product of globalisation, both because global work with its mobile and *frontier-less* processes and products nevertheless needs to be rooted in single territorial spaces, also making use of symbols and messages borrowed from the local cultures; and because, precisely due to this unstoppable unifying and homogenising dynamic, breakages, differences and divisions are becoming more acute. It is precisely the stronger meaning of the term 'local' that alludes to processes of profound cultural differentiation linked to the redefinition of identity, in what Clifford Geertz has defined a «world in pieces»: it is localism, the strong claim to differences and often the origin of the ethnic and religious conflicts traversing the world, also arising as the response to the equalising assimilation of globalisation. It expresses the need for identity of individuals bent, more or less consciously, on breaking free from the divarication of homogenisation. In first instance it may appear a legitimate need, since it is triggered by the necessity to rein in the loss of the limit, the uprooting and indifferenciation, by reintroducing boundary lines and individual and collective forms of self-identification.

<sup>23</sup> P. Orefice, *I domini conoscitivi. Origine, natura e sviluppo dei saperi dell'Homo sapiens sapiens*, Carocci, Rome, 2001, p. 191.

<sup>24</sup> P. Orefice, *Il potenziale formativo dello sviluppo locale nella società planetaria: dal dualismo mondo visibile-mondo invisibile alla complementarietà degli opposti nella realtà discontinua*, in E.J.F. Nunes, G. Boscolo, Y. D. Bandeira De Ataíde (edited by), *Saberes e Patrimônio Material e Imaterial: uma abordagem intercultural. III Seminário Internacional InterlinkPlus*, Eduneb, Brazil, Salvador-Bahia, 2010, pp. 15-43.

<sup>25</sup> See D. D'Andrea, E. Pulcini (edited by), *Filosofie della globalizzazione*, ETS, Pisa, 2001.

Hence cultures as complex practices giving meaning to and transforming reality, broken up on their inside, called into question owing to their very nature, characterised by intracultural transformations, request recognition, but not in terms of exclusivity or preservation. Every regime of absolute authenticity must be able to be brought into question<sup>26</sup>: identity, in the ethnographic as well as other senses, can only be mixed, relational and inventive; it is a hybrid, often discontinuous process that oscillates between loss and innovation. Indeed, as Geertz asserts:

Questionable acts of purification are involved in any attainment of a promised land, return to 'original' sources, or gathering up of a true tradition. Such claims to purity are in any event always subverted by the need to stage authenticity in *opposition* to external, often dominating alternatives. Thus the 'Third World' plays itself against the 'First World', and vice versa. [...] If authenticity is relational, there can be no essence except as a political, cultural invention, a local tactic<sup>27</sup>.

To be *local* in a globalised world risks being a sign of inferiority and social degradation, and often one ends up remaining local. Thus not only are those who migrate subject to exclusion, but so are those who find themselves confined to a local dimension which excludes them from global processes.

About thirty years have passed since Raffaele Laporta problematised the concept of local community with respect to the antinomic and corresponding official community<sup>28</sup>. By integrating and in part exceeding the spatial connotation of the local term, he coupled it with the category of marginality, borrowed from cultural anthropology and interpreted from a pedagogical viewpoint: a marginality not seen in the ethnocentric light of the idea of cultural inequalities<sup>29</sup>, since he was not defining the marginality of a culture in terms of inferior values, nor referring to a psycho-social or economic category, but thinking of marginality on the basis of prevalently geo-historical considerations. It is a marginality determined by precise and reconstructable contingencies, which had helped to characterise communities nevertheless located in geographical areas less involved in running the economic, social, scientific and technological transformation. While referring to the regions in the south of Italy, but also to some mountain and eastern areas of the country, Laporta underlined how while a community's condition of marginality had some geographical correspondence, the same did not happen for the so-called official community: this did not have an

<sup>26</sup> S. Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2002, pp. 49-82.

<sup>27</sup> J. Clifford, cit., p. 11.

<sup>28</sup> R. Laporta, *L'autoeducazione delle comunità*, La Nuova Italia, Florence 1979.

<sup>29</sup> A.M. Cirese, *Cultura egemonica e culture subalterne*, Palumbo, Palermo 1979; A.M. Cirese, *Dislivelli di cultura e altri discorsi inattuali*, Meltemi, Rome 1997.

equally identifiable geographical collocation, but was more or less distributed all over the country and hence was able to exercise a control, maintain a position of hegemony. Albeit with the necessary and obligatory differences, not just in terms of scale, this manner of interpretation could also be applied to the relationship that exists today between the many marginal areas in the world, the strictly local dimensions, the communities, or as Laporta himself underscores in his line of reasoning, the local cultures and the 'official', delocalised, hegemonic culture: the culture of those who in effect are holding onto and managing the destinies of the marginal cultures too.

Laporta spoke of violation perpetrated against cultures conceived «as historical residues, objects to reduce and preserve in museums, obstacles to progress [...] of which we need to free ourselves»<sup>30</sup>: a liberation conducted with the force of intentional acculturation, guaranteed by the arms of the state and sped up by the means of mass communication, by the «processes of massification falling under the national and international production system run by official culture»<sup>31</sup>.

Is without doubt that this analysis is topical: at this point the relationship between local and national has definitely expanded to planetary scale and the same is happening with the homogenisation processes, but substantially the tools are the same. As Laporta underlined, since the acculturation processes comprise a network of interactions, what is needed is attention not just to those who descend from the dominant culture onto and into the dominated cultures, but rather rediscovery and analysis of the real or potential influence of the marginal cultures on the 'official' one. This is in order to cast light on those factors that do not appear as elements which develop or emancipate local cultures, but which risk converting the marginal cultures into the official culture, perpetuating the marginalisation and inequalities.

The concept of *residue* proposed by Laporta is very close to the *waste* metaphor used by Bauman: while speaking of the waste of our society, from object to knowledge waste, the author goes so far as to speak of 'human waste', the 'collateral', not always intentional or planned 'victims' of economic progress. Trade conditions, market demand, competitive pressure, productivity and efficiency requirements only seem to be able to give legitimacy to a part of knowledge: the rest is residual, it can be considered superfluous, excessive, from the viewpoint of tangible but also intellectual production. The condition of know-how as waste also has to reflect on those who possess it: they themselves end up being considered and considering themselves as *waste*, stripped of their self-security and the self-esteem needed to sustain social survival, often surrendering to a sort of sentence of their inferiority.

<sup>30</sup> R. Laporta, cit., p. 71, own translation.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, own translation.

As I have mentioned, Bauman interprets the problem of exclusion and marginalisation, phenomena that in different forms are increasingly characterising the present of many denied and dispersed cultures, but also many immigrant workers, using the category of 'waste'. A strong category that nevertheless enables us to maintain a dual level of analysis: rejection as waste, a residue to get rid of, but also as the action of rejection, refusing to see, know or consciously deal with real situations, with a sense of criticism, and also respect.

In his book *Wasted Lives* Bauman uses two metaphors taken from *Invisible Cities* by Italo Calvino: the two bizarre cities of Aglaura and Leonia. The inhabitants of the first speak a lot about their city, they build it, one could say, virtually, through a language that intends to shape what the real city does not have: they end up believing they live in an Aglaura that grows in name only and do not notice the Aglaura that is growing on the ground. On the other hand, the inhabitants of Leonia always and only need new and different things, and while the Leonians live off their pursuit of novelties, mountains of indestructible waste grow up around the city. But what is important is the rite of purification and renewal that takes place every day: in the first case rejecting reality prevents them from seeing it, and in the second the collection and disposal of waste end up being traced back to and deliberately perceived as technical problems, which, paradoxically reconsidered in the category of work, risk becoming an operation detached from ethical considerations. The disposal work needs to be done well, in the best possible way, in order to restore order. In this sense, considered as a secondary, indirect activity of economic progress, the production of human waste could have all the characteristics in order to be dealt with in an impersonal, technical way, so much so as to deny the responsibility of the intentions, will, decisions and initiatives of real human beings 'with first and last names'.

Among the dross that has always accompanied production, one can certainly also find other categories that belong to Western society, vulnerable products of Western *culture*: the workers who are asked for extreme 'flexibility', the young people who find themselves in a situation of unemployment. But Bauman's analysis nevertheless dwells more on the 'them' who appear more differentiated than the 'us': people and cultures, increasingly large quantities of people who have been deprived of their manners and means of survival in both the biological and socio-cultural sense of the word: immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, displaced people, not to speak of those both women and men who end up caught up in the terrible web of human trafficking. They are the ones who burst into a world believed to be 'tidy', like the inhabitants of Aglaura. They are responsible for a dis-order that jeopardises the 'tidied' image of the world<sup>32</sup> and, therefore, they are placed on the sidelines, rejected or even denied.

<sup>32</sup> Thus the disorder ends up prevalently taking on the dimension of physical insecurity and collective security: Z. Bauman, *Postmodernity and its Discontents*, Polity Press, Oxford, 1997; R. Castel, *L'Insécurité sociale: qu'est-ce qu'être protégé?*, Editions de Seuil, Paris, 2003.



Unfortunately, very often also on the part of those who possess it, the *producers*, there is no awareness of their own know-how and the value that this know-how has. Also because in the same way it is implicit in the object/product, this knowledge is also implicit in the recognition that the communities of origin give to the quality of the products themselves and as a consequence to the producer/worker. The moment in which, however, the production is taken out of context, all that know-how linked to the production process, whose recognition contributed to building a socially recognised identity and perhaps a precise status, risks losing value or even acquiring a negative worth.

The lack of social recognition also gives rise to mechanisms of self-devaluation. Again Sennett underlines how the value of every job needs to be *recognised*: not so much owing to the intrinsic quality of an object or action, but the level of correspondence and continuity with particular social standards, with tradition, also with respect to the innovation of that know-how handed down from generation to generation, belonging to a community that recognises the knowledge capital also at the basis of economic power. While speaking of goldsmiths in the Middle Ages who were apt to migrate, Sennett highlights how the strong sense of community was nevertheless safeguarded by belonging to a guild which had its network of contacts, its territorial references, which could guarantee not just aid for the migrant, but also his recognition within a community that could appreciate the value of his work and relay this to the outside. Moreover, this is what happens today for many communities: but just as recognition of the intangible component of objects is more fleeting and difficult, so is recognition of working skills and the worker's social position.

As the outcome of that mirror effect which leads one to consider the image sent back from the outside to be real, the devaluation of the know-how lying behind a *job* or even the denial of its existence can lead to exclusion. The causes of the exclusion can vary, but for those who find themselves excluded, the consequences do not change. The exclusion also ends up having a potentially negative educational effect: the expression of that implicit education typifying the processes of *violent inculturation* to which many immigrants are subject, in denial of their essential need for appreciation and recognition. It is that hidden and forgotten, disguised violence, which replaces physical violence, thematised by Jean-Pierre Pourtois and Huguette Desmet<sup>33</sup>. It is the violence that denies the right to recognition, while, as the two authors underline:

In order to live in society, every human being needs to be recognised as a person with merits, specific competences, a dignity. In order to exist as a

<sup>33</sup> See J.-P. Pourtois, H. Desmet, *L'éducation implicite: socialisation et individualisation*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 2004.

social being, one has to represent a value in society, have a certain prestige. It is the other's gaze that creates our self-representation, namely, the image, the esteem that we have of ourselves [...]<sup>34</sup>.

#### 4. From recognition to safeguarding intangible know-how

In international strategic documents the need for recognition and the full enhancement of cultural products as the heritage of local communities has been upheld for several years, considering the enhancement of culture in its various expressions an inescapable element for a local, endogenous, fair and sustainable human development. A reference can surely be the 1972 UNESCO World Heritage Convention, but they are principles which have recently been expressed and stated anew: in the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity of 2 November 2001, in the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions of 25 October 2005<sup>35</sup>, in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of 12 September 2007, and above all in the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, approved in Paris on 17 October 2003.

The latter convention explains the inseparable bond between the tangible and intangible dimension of the cultural heritage. Article 2 of the document gives a definition of the intangible:

The "intangible cultural heritage" means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. For the purposes of this Convention, consideration will be given solely to such intangible cultural heritage as is compatible with existing international human rights instruments, as well as with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, and of sustainable development.

<sup>34</sup> *Ivi.*, p. 122, own translation.

<sup>35</sup> In the convention the bond between the enhancement of cultural diversity, sustainable development and peace culture appears evident. Indeed, the premise reads: «that cultural diversity creates a rich and varied world, which increases the range of choices and nurtures human capacities and values, and therefore is a mainspring for sustainable development for communities, peoples and nations» and among the primary points of the objectives (art. 1) the importance is asserted «to encourage dialogue among cultures with a view to ensuring wider and balanced cultural exchanges in the world in favour of intercultural respect and a culture of peace».

It is a very wide-ranging definition that recognises the value of all intangible know-how as a cultural product that needs to be safeguarded. From the very first articles, the convention introduces the educational issue and the local territorial component to the extent that it calls upon communities and groups that over time have produced, transmitted and preserved the heritage which characterises their living environment. Article 1, which sets out the declaration's *general purposes*, asserts the safeguarding principle, which is nevertheless integrated with community awareness and joint responsibility building.

While without doubt we can totally agree with all of these principles, nevertheless the problem remains of being able to implement and sustain them. The problem is to convert them into acts that can guarantee the recognition and enhancement of local cultures and traditional know-how, to really produce tangible and intangible wealth, and strengthen cultural creation processes in respect of traditions, guaranteeing continuity and innovation.

In light of the considerations expressed in the previous paragraphs and starting from the consideration that the tangible and intangible dimensions of a produced good cannot be separated, or the good itself will not be attributed value, I shall pose some questions to which pedagogical reflection must help to give some answers:

- How can local communities be accompanied in identifying and recognising the value of their know-how?
- What can be done so that these processes become real and proper formative acts for the single individuals and the local communities, and therefore forms of empowerment and exercise of active citizenship?
- How can the local tangible know-how be educationally enhanced in order to affect the economic sector both vis-à-vis production and commerce and tourism, and at the same time consent the enhancement of the intangible component given by the know-how, knowledge and competences linked to production?
- How can this knowledge be made the local communities' own and be diffused at global level?

Many others could be added to these questions linked to production as a potential source of social inclusion and interculture. Indeed, if interculture is dialogue, namely communication, the relation between different points of view, complementary visions, but also the capacity to integrate a reading of the reality of life in a new perspective, we can assert that the places where *interculture* can be built are many scattered. When relations with the *other* (by *other* meaning what is outside the self, people and environments) multiply and are complicated by the speed, density and contiguity of spaces, but also by the cultural distance felt, the need for forms of mediation indeed seems to increase. They are the relational places, or where the relationship should or could take place in a mediated form, be-

tween the different meanings attributed to the same reality; the meeting places for different points of view which can produce inclusion, but also cause exclusion and marginalisation. It is certain that a constructive relationship only comes into being when the stimuli acquire a sense, to the extent that relationships are created between the meanings themselves, new interpretations are created and new knowledge and life skills are built in response to common problems. They are problems that relate to a pedagogical know-how which passes from interpretation to intervention: in order to build an open and democratic society, based on a critical refounding of know-how.

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# Childhood and Work: Protection and Obscuration

## I. Premise

I will start from the terms comprised in the title to introduce the analysis put forward in this essay, because I believe that they provide an extreme summary of the density of the underlying problem posed to those scientifically interested in investigating the phenomenon of child work. The first pair, childhood and work, has two purposes; one is explicit and a declaration, informing of the topic that will be examined; the other is implicit and a provocation: to make the first hint of an oxymoron, a cognitive clash, sound in the reader's conscience in preparation for setting out the underlying thesis. In contemporary culture, in both the common imagination and view, childhood is a period of life that does not fit the concept of work. If there is an element in the modern era that intervenes to distinguish the world of children from that of adults, to first of all distance them and then, in contemporary times, separate them once and for all, well, it is work. Conquering this truth, which today appears natural and self-evident so to speak, has cost around five centuries of Western humanity: childhood has got nothing to do with work, it must be saved from it and in any case kept away from it. To join with a conjunction these two, extremely intricate terms, which refer to ideas, meanings, practices, subjects, places, experiences, values, metaphors, myths and worlds that could do to be closely examined, is an unusual and hence disorientating and complex operation.

The second pair, protection and obscuration, provides a useful perspective in order to attempt to give a possible explanation for the conjunction linking the two nouns in the first pair. It sums up the dimensions characterising the historic process that has singled out childhood and its specific aspects, already referred to above, and led to the progressive formation of the idea of childhood to the detriment of the real child. The

ambiguous oscillation between the need for protection and the risk of obscuration is the root of that oxymoron and it is what accounts for the contemporaneous virtual disappearance of real children and establishment of childhood culture. Children who work are some of the real faces and bodies obscured by the emergence of the dazzling ideology, which standardises “other”, present but invisible, repressed childhoods, in order to fit an abstract and never sufficiently problematised model. This essay will try to centre its attention on the social cost that the discovery of childhood has inflicted in terms of the disappearance of real children; the topic of child work is used as an example in order to illustrate this ambivalent process, in which protection becomes exclusion and the recognition of childhood leads to children’s social obscuration.

## 2. Boys and girls’ work in traditional societies

Historically, children have always worked and they continued to work while, in the passage from the first to the second part of the twentieth century, child work became a taboo in Western culture: today children’s work is there but cannot be seen, is not spoken about but in irritated or rhetorical tones, in relation to geographically and ideologically far-off contexts, as a reality only belonging to a world apart. In the collective imagination a primitivistic prejudice makes children’s work an atavistic residue connected to a past, out of convenience, hurriedly forgotten; and this explains both the irritation (one prefers not to see that which recalls a past rekindling a feeling of shame) and the rhetoric (it is assumed that we deem the undesired absolutely and eternally detestable). In any case, it is presented and treated as an appalling, undesirable state of affairs. Now just the gesture of bringing this latter adjective into question, bringing a doubt to the reader’s attention, causes a first clash with expectations. Why and how should the undesirability of child work astonish us? I would say that this tie between childhood and work is undergoing the same historic fate experienced by children in general: in the same way as for a long time, until modernity, children existed but the idea of childhood did not, for a long time child work existed but its concept did not: it is not a tautology. Besides historians agree in considering that until the assertion of the idea of childhood in the Western culture and imagination, child work was not a social issue, and even less so a moral one<sup>1</sup>. The first question is therefore: what determined the change in the perception of an extremely long-term social phenomenon, to the point of overturning the idea that children’s work can be normal, if, for two and a half millennia, the normality was work, and for

<sup>1</sup> In Italy, the first significant study on the topic of child work was thanks to D. Bertoni Jovine, *L’alienazione dell’infanzia. Il lavoro minorile nella società contemporanea*, Editori Riuniti, Rome, 1963; on this point see pp. 9-12.



the past century or so this has been turned into the exact opposite, namely, children's protection from work?

In eras prior to the present, work existed but the difference between adults and children did not: work was an essence of life which did not spare those subjects who appeared other than adult owing to age, strength, experience, but not existential condition. Adults and children, side by side, joined by indistinguishable destinies, lived in the same living spaces, performed the same tasks and suffered the same hardships. The scarcity of resources, shortages, the fragility in the balances between needs and the assets to satisfy them is a natural premise to any further reasoning on the systems of working class families' lives, and the common denominator of individual and collective human experiences in any era or historic circumstance different from this one. To speak of work in pre-modern societies is to speak of practices linked in first place to survival: life was a narrow horizon that did not leave protected spaces for children. In traditional societies, work guaranteed life: the "imperfect" age ended exactly in the moment when children could start to give their contribution to everyday tasks connected to the work in which the adult family members were engaged. Both in the domestic dimension or outside the home, which, if we are speaking of farming societies, meant in particular caring for the land, work was the element that served to give a social status to those who did not yet possess one. Children's visibility in the family and society depended on the autonomy they had achieved, which enabled them to fulfil gestures, behave in a particular way and perform tasks and roles connected to the assumption of a share of responsibility for the common good: work was participation in the tasks linked to the family and community's survival. It was what defined status: being somehow and to some extent a productive element inside one's social group.

In the classical conception of man and his work, influenced by the Aristotelian interpretation which would continue to dominate throughout the Middle Ages, albeit – as Vittorio Tranquilli argues in an extremely clear and convincing study – filtered by the Christian ethic that repropounded and highlighted its negative nature, work was considered an impediment and a negation of the perspective of more properly human growth and self-realisation, since it was seen as an activity aimed at satisfying necessary needs, connected to pure and simple physical subsistence, namely animal, and generically non-human survival<sup>2</sup>. Work itself deprived man of his human dignity, reduced him to other from himself, to the point that exemption from work constituted the condition for his most authentic realisation. Therefore, it was the majority who sustained the task of work for the few who were exempted. The large part of humankind, including children, were reduced

<sup>2</sup> V. Tranquilli, *Il concetto di lavoro da Aristotele a Calvino*, Ricciardi, Milan-Naples, 1979, p. 358.

to a servile species: they worked for their own natural, crude, animal subsistence, and to enable the few, freed from this barely human concern, to devote themselves to activities more worthy of man, the classics' *otium*, which would subsequently become the contemplation of the Middle Ages<sup>3</sup>.

Starting from this premise, to say that the world of children is not separate from that of adults is to agree more with Elias and Ariés than with deMause<sup>4</sup>: the discourse that highlights the lack of distinction between adults and children with relation to work, rather than the sentimental sphere, was mainly social and, only secondarily, psychological. In premodern societies, social status was endowed as a result of the work that an individual could do: this was the hard and fast rule. The public dimension of existence was marked by participation in work meant as a service. The private sphere was irrelevant, insignificant even, at the social level: it was entirely absorbed by domestic life, characterised by unvalues, owing to which day-to-day, female practices did not bestow any social recognition<sup>5</sup>. Women were recognised in society owing to men: as wives and mothers. This difficulty in being recognised affected children even more: their social visibility, which depended on participation in work, was moreover inexistent until the age of seven. The lack of separation, the blending between adults and children did not mean that the latter were not recognised as "others" with respect to men: but this otherness must be conceived more as an extraneousness than a specificity. So long as children had not proved to possess fully human characteristics, they would necessarily be considered extraneous, no matter whether they were closer to the divine or bestial. Children's humanisation coincided with their becoming adults, and the form that this process of social inclusion and recognition of children historically acquired was a sudden passage from the limbo of the early years to the world of social complexity outside the family: work made up for the child's missing part of humanity. The processes of children's early entrance into adulthood through work, found in every period of Western history, definitely had a primary function which was brutally material (more workers = more resources for the mouths that needed feeding); but it could be said that they also had a more profound and indeed psychological function: they served adults in order to make children, those extraneous presences, namely the *infans* who could not talk or walk, and therefore disturbed them, more familiar, that is, more similar to themselves<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> See J. Le Goff, *Time, Work and Culture in the Middle Ages*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1980 (orig. ed. 1977).

<sup>4</sup> See P. Ariés, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1962 (orig. ed. 1960); L. deMause (edited by), *History of Childhood*, The Psychohistory Press, New York, 1974; N. Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, Urizen Books, New York, 1978 (orig. ed. 1969).

<sup>5</sup> See S. Ulivieri, *Educare al femminile*, ETS, Pisa, 1995.

<sup>6</sup> See D. Richter, *Das fremde Kind: zur Entstehung der Kindheitsbilder des bürgerlichen Zeitalters*, S. Fischer, Frankfurt am Main, 1987, *Introduction*.

In the two and a half millennia preceding modernity, work was a natural fact for children: there was no reason to give a motive for it, and even less so to justify it. In the same way it appeared normal that children learned to talk and walk, it also fitted perfectly into the natural order of human existence that at six-seven they learned to work. The concept totally lacking in this premodern world was that of economic exploitation. And this is the break that the capitalist system made in the adult/child relationship mediated by work. It was in the preindustrial phase that the necessary elements were prepared for the transformation which would take place in the nineteenth century in the concept and consciousness of work<sup>7</sup>. And this would be one of the fundamental elements for the birth of the nineteenth-century idea of childhood. It is in this passage towards the twentieth century that the flesh-and-blood child tended to disappear, supplanted by the ideal child who lived in sheltered and protective social contexts (the family home and school), receiving the necessary care and protection in order to unhurriedly complete the process of growing into a future adult and reaching maturity as a future citizen.

### 3. The institutionalisation of childhood

In the traditional model, which did not conceive of the idea of childhood, to grow up was to become productive, namely, to work in order to contribute to the resources needed for life. Children had always worked, but this did not mean that humankind had become extinct; it was natural for children to work, so much so that it did not give cause for scandal or concern. In order for it to become a culturally negative fact it was first necessary to draw up an idea of childhood so powerful as to undermine children's very naturalness. And so as of the end of the eighteenth century, the discourse was turned upside down. An idea gradually appeared that was an alternative notion and representation of childhood to the traditional ones. In the nineteenth century this idea would become a myth, to quote Leonardo Trisciuzzi, and this representation would assert itself as a social category, as shown convincingly by Egle Becchi. As a result, the actual children themselves were lost along the way<sup>8</sup>.

The sentiment of childhood formed during modernity and asserted with the middle classes' social and cultural triumph during the nineteenth century is deeply ambiguous. Families took care of looking after children, investing affective as well as economic resources in their upbringing; phi-

<sup>7</sup> See C. Pancera, *La socializzazione dell'infanzia lavoratrice nell'età preindustriale*, in C. Covato, S. Olivieri (edited by), *Itinerari nella storia dell'infanzia*, Unicopli, Milan, 2001.

<sup>8</sup> See E. Becchi (edited by), *Il bambino sociale. Privatizzazione e de-privatizzazione dell'infanzia*, Feltrinelli, Milan, 1979; L. Trisciuzzi, *Il mito dell'infanzia. Dall'immaginario collettivo all'immagine scientifica*, Liguori, Naples, 1990.

lanthropists launched themselves into the social mission of rescuing them; governments dealt with protecting and safeguarding childhood, investing legislative and juridical energies in this end, but there was still an evident distance between the theoretical recognition of children's new needs and the actual implementation of the measures needed to meet them. Now, the ideas and theory saw childhood as a particular age necessitous of special protection, but, in practice, children still worked. The ideas and images of children shown in the collective portrayals of nineteenth-century childhood were far from reality. The world of childhood was separated from that of adulthood, but to the detriment of real children.

In the bourgeois imagination, the idea of childhood as a separate age from adulthood took root at family level through the process of its withdrawal into the private realm, and at the social level through its institutionalisation. Family and school were the places where the idea of childhood was discovered, and where the sentiment came into being that upset the traditional view of the early achievement of adulthood through work. Entering adulthood was still the task that children were expected to fulfil, but now it became a slow process, not to be hurried, requiring protection and ethical (family) and social (school) preparation in a period of formation. But the contemporary idea drawn up of childhood did not take the real situation into account. Therefore, a gap was produced with respect to real children, who did not go to school or live at home with their families, but worked and toiled at the same level as adults rather than together with them.

On the contrary, during the nineteenth century, the century of childhood ideology, the situation got worse for those very child workers who were fulfilling the process of entering society through work in the urban contexts of factories. The very real and concrete reality of economic exploitation not only concerned work in general, but that of children in particular: previously a service, work then became a good; what was a skilled and organised manual activity, became the pure performance of mechanically repetitive tasks; what was the technical and skilled transformation of nature tending towards its humanisation became an abstract, alienating and dehumanising process lacking in meaning and sense. The human being, who had been the master of the tool used to perform the work, had now become the tool bowing down to, or even an extension of, the master-machine. From serving as an example and expert guide to introduce and accompany their young protégés, teaching them "how to do the job", adults had now become their companion and very often rival, tormentor and exploiter.

It has been said that the contribution of child workers was decisive in the definitive triumph of the capitalist system based around industrial production<sup>9</sup>. The bourgeois ethic of work as ennobling man only

<sup>9</sup> See H. Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500*, Longman, London-New York, 1995, pp. 141-142.

served to cloak in hypocrisy the moment in history which produced the maximum degree of human alienation through work. The work of the many, who in previous eras had rightly been called servants, at this point no longer served to free the purely human energies available to the few who could exercise them by devoting themselves to much more human occupations than those connected to the mere satisfaction of material and bodily needs. Consolidated on the enlightened ideals of equality and universalism, in nineteenth-century society there was no longer a gentleman to serve, in the same way as there were no longer servants but citizens: now work served the common good. There were no gentlemen; instead, much worse, there were masters, and the masters did not have servants, but slaves. The work of the many servants now served an end that was no longer human, even though it had been at the disposal of the few: the work of the many served for the accumulation of capital. A new law came into being in the work dialectic, supplanting that of subsistence and liberation from need: it was the law of profit. This type of economic exploitation was the element that, with the advent of industrial capitalism, transformed the meaning and reality of human work.

Work was stripped of the elements of humanity that it did possess to be reduced to a mechanism that produced wealth for others: it was no longer a manual activity planned and organised in view of satisfying needs, but a formal act marked by senseless, repeated gestures and conduct, lacking an immanent purpose. In an economy with a radically new, purely quantitative basis, there remained little that was ennobling for man. Profit is the result of an algebraic calculation, not banal arithmetic: this is why for the first time in history children's work became not just useful, but convenient. If work itself is a good, children's characteristics, traditionally seen in a negative light as a sum of deficits or imperfections, now made them quite a precious work-good because they were particularly suited to limiting production costs and speeding up timescales. While the nineteenth century produced and celebrated the bourgeois ideology of childhood, while philanthropy was deeply touched and did its best to save children from suffering, at the hand of adults real children were experiencing the most pitiless reality of economic exploitation and the most radical expropriation of their age.

#### **4. Protection of work or from work?**

At the outset of the twentieth century, those who dealt with children's rights seemed to be aware of this gap, the distance between the bourgeois myth and ideology of children and children's real lives. In Italy, this is the lesson drawn from the substantial failure of obligatory schooling and the fight against illiteracy, which in this country interwove with the first provi-

sions against the economic exploitation of children and child trafficking<sup>10</sup>. Now, the institutionalisation of childhood as the age of education, and the disappearance of children as real subjects in society who also had to face up to their own and their families' living requirements, and therefore work, was a dual and two-sided process. It is shown clearly in the evolution of children's rights with relation to work: tellingly, the ambit of work was one of the first and main spheres of reflection in the identification of children's rights. But *nota bene*: we are speaking of the right to work, not of protection from work. Indeed, it is very interesting to observe the evolution of this issue within the international documents that progressively assert children's rights. There are substantially two phases with an approach opposing the problem of premature work. The first phase positively asserts children's right to work: upon certain conditions, away from situations of exploitation. Only in a second phase, from the first international declaration on children's rights approved after 1948, is the question put in negative terms: children must be protected from work.

It is no coincidence that what we know, thanks to Philip Veerman, to be the first twentieth-century document on children's rights came about on occasion of the Prolet'kult congress in Moscow in 1918. It was a non-official declaration which, among other claims in favour of boys and girls, explicitly supported their right to work and, more precisely, their right to social work<sup>11</sup>:

7. Insofar as his/her abilities and talents permit, each child, from his/her earliest childhood, shall participate in social (public) educational labour necessary for the good of the people as a whole. This labour, however, must not endanger the child's psychological health or hamper his/her spiritual growth, but it must be in full agreement with the complete system of his/her education and development. Participation in socially necessary educational work gives the child the opportunity to realise one of the most important rights of children: the right to feel that they are not parasites but active members and builders of life and that their lives can have social worth, not only in the future, but also in the present.

This is not the only ideological declaration from the post-war period. Others appeared, promoted by very diverse subjects, also driven by less radical social reform projects. The common element expressed in these attempts to declare the fundamental rights of childhood is a distinct, origi-

<sup>10</sup> See on the one hand C.M. Cipolla, *Literacy and Development in the West*, Penguin Books, Baltimore, 1969; and on the other G. Di Bello, V. Nuti, *Soli per il mondo. Bambine e bambini emigranti tra Otto e Novecento*, Unicopli, Milan, 2001.

<sup>11</sup> *The Declaration of the Rights of the Child*, Moscow 1918, art. 7. The text of the document can be found in P.E. Veerman, *The Rights of the Child and the Changing Image of Childhood*, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Dordrecht-Boston, 1992, pp. 435-436.

nal attention to the conditions of working children. The *Children's Charter* promoted in Washington by the *International Council of Women* provides another interesting precedent: the problem of work is central in the tricky and still uncertain recognition of children's legal status as subjects holding specific rights. Section 4, comprising four articles of the *Children in Employment* declaration, is devoted to the problem of child work. The first two reflect to the letter the text of Conventions 5 and 6 promoted by the International Labour Organization in 1919, of which I will speak momentarily; the third appears effectively quite interesting and in certain ways surprising: it is the first place to express the necessity to balance school hours with working hours<sup>12</sup>:

IV.3. The hours spent by young persons under 18 at Continuation Schools [are] to be counted as part of working day.

In this historical phase, schooling and work were not conceived as two realities that exclude each other. They appear as fundamental rights that can coherently be safeguarded and promoted without harming the complexity of the formation process, a process which involves a set of human dimensions and responds to the wealth of needs expressed in this period of life.

The *Declaration of the Rights of the Adolescent* adopted by the International Union of Socialist Youth Organisations in Salzburg in 1922 is totally centred around the topic of work<sup>13</sup>. Starting from a general defence of adolescents' right to work, this document appears to have two fundamental objectives: first of all to extend to child workers the same protection and guarantees reserved for adult workers (in particular with respect to salary, daily and weekly working hours, and the right to time off); second, to introduce and reinforce the particular protection due to working children in consideration of their age (prohibition of piece work, night work and underground work) and their fundamental right to obligatory school education (prohibition of remunerated work during school age, calculation of school hours within daily working hours, reform of the apprenticeship system). In short, the main motives that would soon lead to children's expulsion from industrial work were beginning to appear: this type of labour, as well as very soon becoming of little use for production system needs, was already losing its nineteenth-century convenience.

Some of the very first conventions promoted by the ILO (International Labour Organisation) concerned minors. It was 1919, just a few months

<sup>12</sup> International Council of Women, *The Children's Charter*, Washington 1922, IV.3. The text can be found in P.E. Veerman, *The Rights of the Child*, cit., p. 442.

<sup>13</sup> International Union of Socialist Youth Organizations, *Declaration of the Rights of the Adolescent*, Salzburg, 1922. The text can be found in P.E. Veerman, *The Rights of the Child*, cit., pp. 438-439.

after the organisation's foundation, when Conventions number 5 and 6, as referred to previously, were promoted. These were dedicated respectively to introducing the minimum working age of 14 and the prohibition of industrial night work<sup>14</sup>.

It needs pointing out that an important mention of children's positive right to work is present in the League of Nations Pact, which came into force in 1920:

Art. 23. [The Members of the League] [w]ill endeavour to secure and maintain fair and human conditions of labour for men, women, and children, both in their own countries and in all countries to which their commercial and industrial relations extend, and for that purpose will establish and maintain the necessary international organizations.

Again in the first official and specific declaration on children's rights – the *Geneva Declaration* adopted in 1924 by the same League of Nations – the view taken on the topic of work appears very distant from subsequent attitudes. Principle number 4 reads:

4. The child must be put in a position to earn a livelihood, and must be protected against every form of exploitation.

To earn a livelihood means many things: it is to guarantee the conditions and educational opportunities that can then allow the child to occupy a dignified position in the society of which he or she will be a full citizen, through free access to routes to literacy and education; but it also means an explicit assertion of the positive right to work when this is needed for living. It is not possible to consider the assertion of such a principle with the mind free from prejudices, not even in consideration that the social and economic conditions in Western societies after WW1 were such as to require so much realism. It is not a question of cynicism: it is not just the juridical, but a more profoundly cultural capability to keep a nonetheless positive notion of work, which is not lacking in formative content, separate from the absolutely negative notion of economic exploitation. The West's evolution at the economic and social level has raised the standards of living of populations, families and children to such an extent that today it would not make sense to assert the right to work. The possibility of a positive acceptance of child work that safeguards children's rights and effectively combats exploitation is something that remains to be retrieved.

<sup>14</sup> International Labour Organization, *Convention no. 5 Fixing the Minimum Age for Admission of Children to Industrial Employment*, 1919; International Labour Organization, *Convention no. 6 Concerning the Night Work of Young Persons Employed in Industry*, 1919.



After 1924, positive references to work as a children's right disappear, and in the New York *Declaration of the Rights of the Child* from 1959:

9. The child shall be protected against all forms of neglect, cruelty and exploitation. He shall not be the subject of traffic, in any form. The child shall not be admitted to employment before an appropriate minimum age; he shall in no case be caused or permitted to engage in any occupation or employment which would prejudice his health or education, or interfere with his physical, mental or moral development.

And in particular in the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) from 1989:

Article 32. 1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.

What is lost is any hint at the possibility that, when these conditions are respected and maintained, work should be considered a lawful activity during childhood: not just in cases in which the material necessities of subsistence foresee a child's participation in the family's work activities, but above all owing to the intrinsically emancipatory character of the working activity in itself. In the CRC work is once again made to fall into the category of protection rights, but not participation rights: protection from economic exploitation, from premature entry into work that does not account, taking up the ILO conventions, for the necessity of a minimum age to be gradually extended to 18, the legal end of childhood. There are scholars who have looked at the social causes of this transformation and have attempted to problematise the naturalness with which, in today's society, the idea as well as the practice of children's work is absolutely condemned.

As said, the root of the difficulty to conceive an association between the idea of children with that of work lies in the fact that, in the meantime, children's work has become a taboo: it has substantially disappeared from the visible social panorama in the advanced countries, remaining in the shadows, hence real boys and girls have made way for ideal children. The most provocative thesis on this obscuration process, concluded in our phase of history, is the one drawn up by Jens Qvortrup, which has become central in the sphere of new childhood sociology. The moment in which real children were gradually but inexorably excluded and distanced from the workplace and brought en masse to the classroom, they paid the price for this civil progress in terms of an economic disappearance from the social scenario: the result was a sort of expropriation and marginalisation of children, whose production work ceased to be economically useful and therefore became

culturally disapproved of. At that point a mature industrial economic system, it no longer needed child labour; premature work no longer appeared of any use since the further modernisation of the production systems tended to be towards quality, thereby the characteristic of purely quantitative growth which had dominated until then was lost. Now workers in the industrial sector also needed training and specialisation in order to be of use to industry. Therefore, the passage was not what it may at first sight appear to have been, from children's usefulness to their lack of use. Instead what happened was a passage from a no longer useful function to one whose utility was increasingly imposed upon them. Qvortrup writes<sup>15</sup>:

While children may have changed work, it was not for their own good, but because in the end their manual tasks had become surplus to requirements and obsolete, therefore less and less requested, while the use of children within the new dominating panorama of the modern economy was favoured [...]. As a consequence, none of modern societies could do without schooling children.

In addition to this is the fact that also from the trade unions' point of view, it was convenient to distance children from work in order to defend the salaries of adult workers. Only after the process to expel children from salaried work was terminated would it be possible to complete an ethical judgement that not only struck at the reality of exploitation phenomena, but at children's work as a whole: once it had become of no use in reality, the idea of children's work would become absolutely unjust. Qvortrup's thesis is that schooling is a continuation of children's work in a society in which the importance of manual labour has largely been replaced by intellectual work<sup>16</sup>:

In terms of indispensability there are hardly differences between the two forms, but while the visibility of manual work is obvious [...], the usefulness of school work is opaque and abstract. In a sense one might argue that manual child work in pre-industrial society is producing use value within a scheme of simple production, whereas schooling is producing a long-term exchange value within a system of extended production.

What happened in the second part of the twentieth century, according to Helmut Wintersberger among others, was a new generational division of work: in the broad sense and to look closely, children's work did not disappear but became invisible and separated into accepted activities (school)

<sup>15</sup> J. Qvortrup, *I bambini e l'infanzia nella struttura sociale*, in H. Hengst, H. Zeiher (edited by), *Per una sociologia dell'infanzia*, FrancoAngeli, Milan, 2004, p. 40, own translation.

<sup>16</sup> J. Qvortrup (edited by), *Structural, Historical, and Comparative Perspectives. Sociological Studies of Children and Youth. Volume 12*, Emerald, Bingley, 2009, p. 17.

and socially unaccepted ones (work). However, in terms of the physical and mental burden, school should be considered equivalent to adults' working activity, and as equally irreplaceable for economic and modern society<sup>17</sup>. What has been brutally cut off is the nexus between work and earning; children are excluded from work for their good, but, along with Qvortrup, we should ask ourselves how paternalistic this ideological attitude to protect childhood is. It is an attitude that reproduces a process of expropriation and exclusion from citizenship rights, in a society in which many have highlighted the progressive shift from citizenship to consumer rights. In short, it appears that the process to expel children from the labour market has ended with their generalised exclusion from the distribution of wealth. As Viviana Zelizer wrote, the process of distancing children from the world of work has been ambivalent in the least: in substance, during the twentieth century they were excluded from the labour market because it was more convenient to cut them out than employ them, also in light of the progressive extension of guarantees that were becoming progressively consolidated at the international legal level<sup>18</sup>. Furthermore, if we admit that the time that children spend at school is needed not just for their individual growth, but is also beneficial for the system as a whole, then what happened during the twentieth century was, from this point of view, the umpteenth act of expropriation caused to childhood<sup>19</sup>:

As children became increasingly defined as exclusively emotional and moral assets, their economic roles were not eliminated but transformed; child labor was replaced by child work and child wages with weekly allowance. A child's new job and income were validated more by educational than economic criteria.

Therefore, we have an ideal and moral image of the child, subsumed in the dominating model of childhood as an age of growth, need and protection, which seems to obscure the real, flesh-and-blood children. Childhood is a transitory period of time, in which children are caught up and deprived of their full identity because it is always postponed to their future, to their becoming another. The world of childhood is, therefore, separate from the adult world, but paradoxically part of it when there are the conditions for its effective recognition. What comes to pass is what Antonietta Censi has defined an affective instrumentalisation, owing to which adults create childhood's needs and depict children in the guise most agreeable to

<sup>17</sup> H. Wintersberger, *Divisione del lavoro e distribuzione delle risorse: approccio generazionale e analisi economica dell'evoluzione dell'infanzia*, in H. Hengst, H. Zeiher (edited by), *Per una sociologia dell'infanzia*, cit., p. 171.

<sup>18</sup> V.A. Zelizer Rotman, *Pricing the Priceless Child. The Changing Social Value of Children*, Basic Books, New York, 1985, p. 112.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*.

them<sup>20</sup>: a subject always condemned to be transitory, always dependent on adults-parents and the society of adults as a whole. In a society divided into generational classes, children's sideline position is not a banally existential but a seriously political condition. It descends from the metaphor of biological immaturity used in order to presume an innate social incapacity during childhood: the protected child is at the same time an excluded child.

## 5. Work elsewhere

Elsewhere children are not unproductive, or apparently unproductive subjects who are merely the cost of realising an indispensable promise for the future. While here, today more than ever, children may be tomorrow's citizens, in a phase of preparation for the social life from which they are momentarily excluded, or euphemistically protected, elsewhere they are active, visible and recognisable members of society. And they are so thanks to the concrete contribution that they manage to give to the life of their community through work, which retains the social function of providing rapid, tiring but full recognition for social inclusion and participation. In this connection, this passage in which Alberto Salza recounts a very widespread situation, not just in central Africa, is emblematic<sup>21</sup>:

While speaking to the parents, it emerged that the children were consciously taken away from the school authority, since they are indispensable for the economic survival of the farming community. I tried to explain that school was a good thing, but they explained back that avoiding school was a strategy for subsistence. At school age (seven-thirteen), boys and girls around Lake Turkana perform indispensable tasks, such as grazing the small animals and protecting them against predators and raiders. Without goats and sheep, the whole community would be deprived of wealth in times of plenty and the only resource for subsistence during famine. The adults have to deal with long-distance migratory herding (men) and bringing up small children (women). Building an ideal, carefree, work-free childhood intent on learning is typical of our model of development. The same as democracy, which cannot and must not be exported at any cost.

The other side of the taboo is something very similar to hypocrisy, taken in the international perspective: child work must be abolished. On this principle, agreement cannot be less than universal. No one would want to live in a world like ours, where according to the estimates contained in the last report published by the *International Labour Organization*, there are around

<sup>20</sup> A. Censi, *La costruzione sociale dell'infanzia*, FrancoAngeli, Milan, 2001, p. 142.

<sup>21</sup> A. Salza, *I Bambini-bambino ovvero i tanti volti dell'infanzia nel mondo*, in U. Marin (edited by), *Sostegno a distanza e infanzia*, Aviani, Udine, 2011, p. 30, own translation.

215 million children aged between 5 and 14 who are economically active in occupations that fall under the category of child labour. Namely, they are jobs that, according to the international standards on child labour set down by Convention no. 138 *On Minimum Age* from 1973 and by Convention no. 182 *On the Worst Forms of Child Labour* from 1999, are likened to exploitation<sup>22</sup>. Indeed, according to these international standards, *children in child labour* are taken to be a subset of *children in employment* in the sense that<sup>23</sup>

It includes those in the worst forms of child labour and children in employment below the minimum age, excluding children in permissible light work, if applicable. It is therefore a narrower concept than “children in employment”, and excludes all those children who only work a few hours a week in permitted light work and those above the minimum age whose work is not classified as “hazardous work” or among other worst forms of child labour.

Therefore, child work, like human work in general, is not all alike: there are working activities that children rightfully protest to be able to continue to do without anyone profiting from their need to work to live and allow their families and communities to survive in decent conditions. But the child work that we know best is that which causes scandal and indignation, and shows the sides that need to be cancelled out: overwork; work that is illegal because it is risky, harmful or criminal; semi-slavery, enforced or imposed with threats and violence. In relation to this humanitarian emergency, through the *International Program on the Elimination of Child Labour* (IPEC), the international community has set 2016 as the deadline to achieve the main goal of abolishing the worst forms of economic exploitation of childhood. Then there are the other sides to children’s work, which as I have said is a wider phenomenon that cannot be wholly summed up in the concept of exploitation. However, having at this point transformed the very idea of children’s work into a cultural taboo, today it is more difficult to support the positive right to work in conditions protected from exploitation; a right understood in turn as a necessary condition for creating other fundamental rights, such as the right to life, health, social security and participation in communitarian life.

<sup>22</sup> International Labour Organization, *Convention no. 138 Concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment*, 1973; International Labour Organization, *Convention no. 182 Concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour*, 1999.

<sup>23</sup> International Labour Organization, *Accelerating Action against Child Labour. Global Report under the Follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work* (Geneva 2010), p. 6, <[http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/publication/wcms\\_126752.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_126752.pdf)> (7 March 2011). According to the quoted report, these are the estimates relating to 2008: 305 million children in employment; of whom 215 million child labourers; of whom 115 million involved in hazardous works, out of a world population in the 5-17 age group of 1,586 million (*ivi*, p. 9).

To recognise children working, protected from economic exploitation, as a positive right is to leave behind the taboo and go back to admitting that while children's work would not exist in the best of all possible worlds, it does exist in this one and not for contingent reasons: its abolition comes up against the resistance of a global model of economic development that is still to a large extent held up precisely by exploiting child work. One can agree with the abolitionist position in principle: who would not agree that every child should not have to work? But it is not enough to declare that it is illegal in order to eliminate a complex phenomenon. The problem emerges where we ask ourselves what idea of childhood we are referring to and if this totally corresponds with the many faces of the real children in the world: that is, when the universal principles that work in theory are put into the social, cultural and historical context.

It is one of the paradoxes of the *International Convention on the Rights of the Child*: in universally proclaiming the principles that underlie the specific rights of boys and girls, at times we risk levelling out expectations, needs, necessities and living conditions on the basis of our idea of childhood. It is to fail to see how not necessarily, in contexts so different that they cannot be compared to this one, the idea of child work, not labour, continues to be natural and normal. In order to emancipate children from the system of economic exploitation, it is no use to proclaim the abolition of child work in general. Instead the positive effects of "good" work need to be implemented and this happens when child workers are safeguarded, sustained and protected from economic exploitation; and when these interventions to safeguard and support are accompanied by wider projects for social improvement, starting from strategies for the political, social and cultural empowerment of the local communities. In this case children's work can end up being a mainspring in a human development that can improve the quality of life of the children themselves, their families and respective communities. It being understood that once the main objective of fighting people's poverty – the cause and effect of the planetary diffusion of premature work – is placed on the international agenda, also by reducing the debt burden on penalised economies, protecting children who work is the most effective way to rein in the phenomenon of the hidden and illegal exploitation of child labour. And, as Cecilia Muñoz Vila wrote, in a concise summary of the approach that aims to critically set value by children's work<sup>24</sup>:

Perhaps it is time that we make an effort to change our negative perception of children's work, translating its unrecognized value, like that of women's work within the home, into positive values associated with cooperation

<sup>24</sup> C. Muñoz Vila, *The Working Child in Colombia since 1800*, in H. Cunningham, P.P. Viozzo (edited by), *Child Labour in Historical Perspective 1800-1985*, UNICEF – Istituto degli Innocenti, Florence, 1996, p. 104.

as well as into monetary value. If we do not, we are implying that their work is without worth.

It is time to try to make the effort to set positive value by the (lawful) work of children by changing the negative perception that accompanies the very idea of child work: this is the effort that can make children's work visible once again. To set value by children's work is to recognise its necessity in those contexts in which it effectively is needed and where it appears unrealistic to think that its total abolition would be in itself sufficient to improve the living conditions of those children and their communities; it is to fully recognise the contribution that they make through their work to directly creating or indirectly freeing up resources for local development; it is to give work fundamental importance in terms of the social identity of children who, by taking part in work, have the possibility to actively take part in the social life within their community and to gain more chances to autonomously exercise their rights.

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## Young People and Work: Commodification and Perception

### I. Starting from the present: labour is not a commodity

To propose a historico-educational investigation into the relationship between young people and work, for the writer at least, is not an easy task, but it provides a wealth of cues. In order to attempt to deal with this topic, however, it seems dutiful first of all to take into account the dramatic phase that young generations are currently involved in, trapped in precarious and flexible work and its now well-known inauspicious effects on the person.

Among the most authoritative analyses on the new forms of contract and their outfall on people, it is worth remembering that of Luciano Galilino, who with his *Il lavoro non è una merce* ('Labour Is Not a Commodity') recently returned to speak of flexible work in order to emphasise the necessity for a new work reform in Italy that goes beyond the current law and to strongly bring attention to the risks deriving from the commodification, or rather the re-commodification, of work<sup>1</sup>. To sum up extremely briefly, he is convinced that the new contractual forms of flexible work which began to be introduced in Italy at the start of the twentieth century, as well as not being a necessary measure, have by no means led to an increase in employment not, even less so, have benefited the quality of the work or the lives of precarious workers.

The authoritative sociologist singles out flexible work as a dangerous setback to workers' conquests and the quality of work gained in a large part of Europe since the end of WW2, as regulated by the first paragraph of the 1944 Declaration of Philadelphia, which reads «labour is not a commodity»,

<sup>1</sup> The sociologist published the first systematic work on this topic ten years ago with *Il costo umano della flessibilità*, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 2001, while the text that I am referring to is *Il lavoro non è una merce. Contro la flessibilità*, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 2009 (orig. ed. 2007).

as evoked by Gallino in the very title of his book. Indeed, however gradually, in the post-war period in Italy and the biggest European states there began a phase of the de-commodification of work, that is, the democratisation and modernisation of workers' rights and labour legislation, traces of which can easily be traced in the Italian Republican Constitution and the 1970 Statute of Workers' Rights. Then starting from the middle of the 1970s, in line with the development of the free market – above all under Thatcher – deregulation took work back in time. As a result, it ended up being governed by the economy and therefore bought and sold, negotiated and exchanged just like any other commodity; in other words, it was re-commodified<sup>2</sup>. In short, if the economy prevails over politics, workers' rights progressively vanish, to be replaced by laws of the market and precariousness, summed up by Gallino as «the biggest human cost of flexible jobs»<sup>3</sup>.

Here there is no point listing the variety and types of flexible jobs that can be done in Italy, or dwelling on their effects on individuals, a phenomenon by now widely circulated in the daily news, and one with which lately almost every family has come into contact: suffice it to think that quite a successful literary genre has come into being on precariousness, not to speak of the films also offered up by mainstream cinema such as the famous *Tutta la vita davanti* by Paolo Virzì<sup>4</sup>. Instead, it is sufficient to remember that short-term work, with little protection (or pay) necessarily forces people to change work frequently without having any security about their future, which is exactly the opposite of what happened before the introduction of flexibility.

This lack of continuity and job insecurity have no small reflection on the subject's personal and social identity, in particular for young people naturally committed to building an image of themselves and their future, an image which, in this way, is in fact denied. In other words, precarious work becomes a concession and no longer a right and precarious workers suffer the consequences not only in the material but also the symbolic sphere, perceiving themselves «as different from the others» and developing «new types of conduct and language»<sup>5</sup> linked to the negation of a work and social identity<sup>6</sup>. In short, Gallino goes on, labour cannot be a commodity

<sup>2</sup> L. Gallino, *Il lavoro non è una merce*, cit., pp. 58-61.

<sup>3</sup> *Ivi*, p. 76.

<sup>4</sup> Among the various books and novels testifying this, see A. Sansonetti (edited by), *Tu quando scadi? Racconti di precari*, Manni, Lecce, 2005; A. Nove, *Mi chiamo Roberta, ho 40 anni, guadagno 250 euro al mese*, Einaudi, Turin, 2006; E. Albinati and F. Timi, *Tuttalpiù muoio*, Fandango, Rome, 2006; F. Dezio, *Nicola Rubino è entrato in fabbrica*, Feltrinelli, Milan, 2004; M. Carlotto, *Niente, più niente al mondo*, E/O, Rome, 2004. For the testimonies included also see the trilogy: R. Curcio (edited by), *L'azienda Totale*, Sensibili alle foglie, Milan, 2002; R. Curcio (edited by), *Il dominio flessibile*, Sensibili alle foglie, Milan, 2003; R. Curcio (edited by), *Il consumatore lavorato*, Sensibili alle foglie, Milan, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> L. Gallino, *Il lavoro non è una merce*, cit., pp. 76-77, own translation.

<sup>6</sup> *Ivi*, p. 79.

«since it is an integral and integrating element of the subject who does it, of the person's identity, self-image, sense of self-esteem, position in the community, and his/her present and future family life»<sup>7</sup>.

If for Gallino to commodify work is to impose market laws on the subject, one of the most intriguing interpretations of contemporary society instead contextualises the process of re-commodifying work (described by Gallino) in the wider and more complex picture of the passage from producer to consumer society.

This is the well-known analysis of Zygmunt Bauman who, in a bitter and provocative and therefore very effective summary, describes the trends of consumer society in which economic and social processes are governed by the market and only marginally by the state. The result is that the labour market also becomes «only one of many commodity markets in which individual lives are inscribed; the market price of labour is only one of many market prices that need to be attended to [...]»<sup>8</sup>. Thus, if everything is a market, even «interhuman relations [are redefined] in the likeness of the relations between consumers and the objects of their consumption»<sup>9</sup> and the subject can only be such if transformed into a commodity, or rather if dissolved into the «sea of commodities»<sup>10</sup>. In this view, for Bauman contemporary society is measured first of all on the basis of consumption and no longer, or nevertheless only marginally, on the basis of production, and the poor are no longer those who do not work, the unemployed, but first of all those who cannot access consumption<sup>11</sup>.

## 2. The years of de-commodification

The commodification of work slant therefore sets out a period for the study illustrated in the next few pages. The cues for reflection that follow will start from the 1950s and 60s, the decades in which rights were won and work de-commodified. An extremely rich period for Italy, it saw profound transformations in identity, culture, society, economy, education and so on. What is more, they were years when being young assumed a whole new meaning in terms, for example, of lifestyles, image, social and family relations.

Young people erupted onto the scene mainly thanks to a process of heightened schooling and the mass proliferation of factory work. The post-war rebuilding indeed rapidly gave way to the 'economic miracle', which, moreover, brought a whole system of values and interpersonal relationships into question. Nevertheless, Guido Crainz, who gives one of

<sup>7</sup> *Ivi*, p. 59, own translation.

<sup>8</sup> Z. Bauman, *Consuming Life*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2007, p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> *Ivi*, p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> *Ivi*, p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 125-26.

the clearest interpretations of this change in gear, quite rightly puts us on our guard against reductive and resolute analyses. He invites us to take an all-round look and adopt a vision of these two moments in Italian history – the reconstruction and the economic boom – not as two worlds separated by a profound break, but rather as realities which did not follow on from each other, but blended together. In other words, even though the colossal changes at first sight indicate a rapid shift in direction, a decisive caesura between a poor and rural Italy and a modern and industrialised one, in reality the country's transformations seem to have followed a gradual formula of mixing between the old and new<sup>12</sup>.

The same gradualness also distinguished the first steps of the so-called consumer society, which gradually eroded the space of the producer society. In other words, a society took hold marked by the increasingly mass diffusion of durable consumer goods, encouraged by the recovery of the European economy and the phenomenon often expressed using the simplistic term of 'Americanisation'. These were all aspects that first of all concerned the new generations, whose identity was greatly affected by the symbolic elements deriving from new consumption (music for example), and not just work<sup>13</sup>. However, in this case too we must not be swept away by resolute interpretations and prefer more prudent observation.

While remembering the slow evolution of consumption, in some aspects dating from eighteenth-century England or even the Renaissance courts, historiography acknowledges the 1950s and 60s as one of the moments that saw a turnaround in this process, for Italy in particular. Yet in reality it seems a good idea to remember the parallel realities perceived by the people who lived in that period and the facts which really happened to and around them<sup>14</sup>. The progressive but quite significant expansion of well-being between the 1950s and 60s, while without a shadow of a doubt affecting the Italians' living conditions, did not wipe out poverty, unemployment, social exclusion or illiteracy in a single stroke... Nevertheless, hope for a better and different future to the previous generations, and the concrete possibility of an increase in economic and social well-being, made a strong impact on the imagination. They were a stimulus to concretely achieve a certain standard of living, which also meant uniformity in consumption. Therefore, the attitude towards work changed, becoming a resource for access, as well as to essential goods, to newly diffused goods such as electrical appliances, Lambrettas, cars and also luxury items.

<sup>12</sup> G. Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano*, Donzelli, Rome, 2005.

<sup>13</sup> M. Tolomelli, *Giovani anni Sessanta: sulla necessità di costituirsi come generazione*, in P. Capuzzo (edited by), *Genere, generazioni e consumi. L'Italia degli anni Sessanta*, Carocci, Rome, 2003, p. 200.

<sup>14</sup> P. Capuzzo, *Culture del consumo*, il Mulino, Bologna, 2006, pp. 7-8; R. Sassatelli, *Consumer Culture: History, Theory and Politics*, Sage, London, 2007 (orig. ed. 2004), pp. 40-50; E. Scarpellini, *Material Nation: A Consumer's History of Modern Italy* (2008), Oxford University Press, Oxford-New York, 2011, pp. ix-x.

In other words, work as sacrifice and submission in order to save money was being brought into question and at times even rejected out and out in favour of devoting more space to leisure<sup>15</sup>. Besides, above all for young people, the variety and quality of job opportunities available had never been seen before: work on the land, for example, was no longer, as it had been until a few years earlier, the inevitable destiny for the majority of the new generations. However, it needs to be repeated that it was a gradual change in lifestyle, uneven according to geographical area and social class, and part real, part dreamt of or diffused in the imagination by the new media (cinema, music, TV) and styles of consumption. As a result, consumption became the common denominator for above all young citizens from different classes and social backgrounds<sup>16</sup>. Nevertheless, as Mario Isnenghi recently remembered, perceptions are facts that have to be dealt with beyond their reality; hence perceived and real facts blend together indistinctly to form man's history<sup>17</sup>.

This short essay, therefore, aims to be the beginning of a broader and more complex treatment of the subject, which would have to cover at least the following stages: young people's contestation of the work-consumption pairing around 1968 up to the experiences of 1977; going onto the 1980s and the so-called 'withdrawal' phase; and the re-commodification of work from the early 1990s to date. In these pages, however, as hinted before, I will restrict myself to dealing with some cues from the 1950s and early 1960s, while concentrating, in line with the other chapters in this book, on some significant texts.

### 3. Poverty and unemployment

Ever since the years of the reconstruction, work had been immediately central to the present and future of the country, so much so that the Constituent Assembly placed it at the basis of the Republic, as recites the well-known article 1 of the Constitutional Charter. In democratic and free Italy, work was to be the vehicle for people to assert themselves, the tool to express their citizenship (art. 3) and the engine for social mobility (art. 4). Concepts light years from liberal Italy and even more so from Fascist Italy when workers were relegated so far to the sidelines of society that they were denied the most fundamental rights<sup>18</sup>. Therefore, the Constitution forcefully declared that labour was not a commodity, it assigned a leading

<sup>15</sup> G. Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano*, cit., 140-141.

<sup>16</sup> E. Scarpellini, *People of Plenty: consumi e consumismo come fattori di identità nella società italiana*, in Capuzzo (edited by), *Genere, generazioni e consumi*, cit., pp. 55-56.

<sup>17</sup> M. Isnenghi, *Storia d'Italia. I fatti e le percezioni dal Risorgimento alla società dello spettacolo*, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 2011, p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> M. Dondi, *La Costituzione repubblicana: i principi dell'antifascismo e il valore umano del lavoro*, «Storia e Futuro. Rivista di storia e storiografia», 18 October 2008, pp. 7-8.

role to workers in building the Republic without neglecting their rights of representation (article 39), and was also concerned with their protection and dignity as well as that of their families (articles 35, 36, 37 and 38). In short, ahead of the new generations lay the outlook of a future and emancipation that they could exercise precisely through work.

But such a high ideal had to clash with the harsh reality of early-1950s Italy, when for many having a job remained a mirage or vain promise. Indeed, the war had left Italy on its knees, and recovery was by no means lightning fast. Infrastructures and production plants had been destroyed or their capacity reduced considerably, there was a lack of raw materials, the agricultural and animal farming sector had in part been wiped out: this was the sad legacy left by the bombing. And as a result the everyday life of a good part of the Italians was marked by poverty, unemployment, a lack of essential hygiene and sanitary services and insufficient housing. To tell the truth, these were common sores in many of the countries that had come out of the conflict, but in Italy they had been worsened by twenty long years of Fascist dictatorship<sup>19</sup>. In short, the at times violent landscape of rubble and desolation traversing the peninsula in the years immediately after the war did not seem to have changed in the early 1950s, and, even though, despite it all, the will for rebirth and a new life continued to blossom from that same rubble, for a large part of the Italians the road was still most definitely uphill, and steep<sup>20</sup>.

For a view summing up the country, its endemic difficulties and the specific difficulties of the aftermath of the war, of doubtless efficacy are the photographs taken by the two inquests on poverty and unemployment promoted by parliament almost contemporaneously, in 1951 (but which in fact began the year after) and in 1952 respectively, the work on which, entrusted to two commissions appointed for the occasion, ended in 1953. In the liberal epoch, parliamentary inquests had already had their own history and success brusquely interrupted by Fascism, but while at that time inquests had been promoted above all to tackle extraordinary problems, the ones on poverty and unemployment were intended to examine the two main obstacles to the country's recovery in order to understand their causes and thus propose a suitable strategy to successfully overcome them<sup>21</sup>. In other words, they were inquests into Italy's ordinary social and economic

<sup>19</sup> C.G. Lacaita, *Riforma della scuola e società italiana negli anni dello sviluppo economico*, in M. Baldacci, F. Cambi, A. Cardini, M. Degl'Innocenti, C.G. Lacaita, *Il Centro-sinistra e la riforma della Scuola media (1962)*, Lacaita, Manduria, 2005, 50-51; G. Fiocco, *L'Italia prima del miracolo economico. L'inchiesta parlamentare sulla miseria, 1951-1954*, Lacaita, Manduria, 2004, 23-25.

<sup>20</sup> G. Crainz, *L'ombra della guerra. Il 1945, Italia*, Donzelli, Rome, 2007.

<sup>21</sup> P. Braghin (edited by), *Inchiesta sulla miseria in Italia. 1951-1952. Materiali della Commissione parlamentare*, Einaudi, Turin, 1978, p. ix. This book gives a useful summary and reconstruction of selected pages of the work by the Commission. In this essay I will make reference to some parts of the text as well as Braghin's critical introduction, with the page numbers in Roman numerals.



problems, to which the Republic wanted to give a political response. Tellingly, the right to parliamentary inquests was placed in the Constitution (art. 82) as a useful tool to guarantee its principles<sup>22</sup>.

First of all, it needs to be said that both the inquests offered a cross-section of the Italians' everyday life which would not have been able to emerge fully using the traditional survey tools, such as the almost contemporaneous census of 1951. The poverty inquest commission, presided over by the Social Democratic politician, Ezio Vigorelli, indeed focused its investigations on some specific aspects of the Italians' material living conditions, such as housing, clothing and food; at the end of the works, the population's poverty and well-being index was therefore regulated on levels of consumption rather than on income and did not stem from average values but from classes of consumption<sup>23</sup>. As far as food is concerned, the 1951 census for example gave the in-itself-alarming data of annual average consumption per capita of 14 kg of meat and 12 kg of sugar. The same data, distributed over consumption classes, instead showed how over one third of Italians had a poor diet to say the least, with meat not appearing ever or just once a week, while one fifth never or almost never ate any sugar<sup>24</sup>.

Certainly, as sociologist Paolo Braghin pointed out in the 1970s, the Commission did not produce exhaustive results: the limits of the data both in terms of quality and quantity were not indifferent, nevertheless historiography recognises the validity of at least one piece of data which emerged after the publication of the 15 volumes drawn up by the Commission, that is, that one quarter of the population on the peninsula in the 1950s could be defined as poor<sup>25</sup>, and that one half of them lived in conditions which again Braghin did not hesitate to define as subhuman<sup>26</sup>.

The data on diets was unfortunately not the most desolating: the housing and clothing conditions found helped to confirm a standard of living defined by the inquest as poverty for around 6,200,000 people and hardship for not a great deal fewer (5,900,000 people)<sup>27</sup>. In short, one quarter of Italians lived in overcrowded and at times, to say the least, dilapidated housing, or even huts or shacks, without counting that only 7.4% of houses had the combination of drinking water, electricity and sanitary facilities<sup>28</sup>. At the same time, only just over half of Italians wore decent shoes, 'one of the most

<sup>22</sup> G. Fiocco, *L'Italia prima del miracolo economico*, cit., p. 21.

<sup>23</sup> P. Braghin, *Inchiesta sulla miseria in Italia*, cit., pp. xiv-xv; G. Fiocco, *L'Italia prima del miracolo economico*, cit., p. 101.

<sup>24</sup> P. Braghin, *Inchiesta sulla miseria in Italia*, cit., pp. 15-17; G. Fiocco, *L'Italia prima del miracolo economico*, cit., pp. 98 ff. See also J. Dickie, *Delizia! The Epic History of the Italians and their Food*, Scepter, London, 2007, p. 294.

<sup>25</sup> P. Braghin, *Inchiesta sulla miseria in Italia*, cit., p. xv.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>27</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 18-20.

<sup>28</sup> P. Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: society and politics, 1943-1988*, Penguin Books, London, 1990, p. 210.

essential kinds of clothing', the Commission noted, therefore particularly indicative of families' real economic hardship<sup>29</sup>. If we then consider the data distributed geographically, social inequality, as can be imagined, takes on even more worrying proportions, with poor families counting for 5.8% of the northern population against 50.2% of those in the South<sup>30</sup>. One may wonder, therefore, what image the young members of the most hard-up families might have had of work. Nevertheless, it appears clear that similar living conditions invalidated or made vain, as Maria Cao-Pinna, one of the commissioners, underlined, the image of life promised by the Constitution<sup>31</sup>.

The Commission's parallel inquest into unemployment presided over by Social Democrat Roberto Tremelloni enabled the outlines of this image to be traced more precisely, as well as a better understanding of the relationship between young people and work in the early 1950s. Like the inquest on poverty, the Commission was also careful to investigate the elements that could provide a living snapshot of the country, hence it used the concept of 'lack of employment' which covered all «the visible manifestations of the potentially active population's inactivity»<sup>32</sup>, therefore including those who were in search of a job, estimated at around two million, together with the underemployed, who amounted to double the previous figure<sup>33</sup>.

A lack of employment thus affected around 6 million people, a great deal of whom were young people aged under 28<sup>34</sup>. On the other hand, among the employed, young people aged between 14 and 19, considered of working age, only accounted for 3.2% of the total, a picture suggesting 'scarce dynamism on the part of a production apparatus' that was incapable of taking in new entries<sup>35</sup>, a mechanism moreover aggravated by the progressive diminishment of the active population in proportion to the Italians' overall demographic increase<sup>36</sup>. The results of the inquest therefore underlined that youth unemployment was the offspring of the rigidity of the production system. However, among the reasons for the lack of generational changeover, and therefore unemployment, the Commission also singled out the miserable level of education of the active popula-

<sup>29</sup> P. Braghin, *Inchiesta sulla miseria in Italia*, cit., p. 19, own translation.

<sup>30</sup> *Ivi*, p. xv.

<sup>31</sup> G. Fiocco, *L'Italia prima del miracolo economico*, cit., p. 105.

<sup>32</sup> M. Parasassi and G. Ruffolo (edited by), *La disoccupazione in Italia. Relazione sintetica delle indagini e degli studi promossi dalla commissione parlamentare d'inchiesta sulla disoccupazione*, Zanichelli, Bologna, 1954, p. ix, own translation. For convenience, I will refer to this volume with preface by Roberto Tremelloni, since it gives a summary of the Commission's work.

<sup>33</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 11-112. They are estimates based on the seasonal variability of the people registered as unemployed and lost working days. See also P. Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, cit., p. 187.

<sup>34</sup> M. Parasassi, G. Ruffolo (edited by), *La disoccupazione in Italia. Relazione sintetica delle indagini e degli studi promossi dalla commissione parlamentare d'inchiesta sulla disoccupazione*, cit., p. 121.

<sup>35</sup> *Ivi*, p. 63, own translation.

<sup>36</sup> *Ivi*, p. 45.

tion, which also reflected the widespread rate of illiteracy in the country (around 13%)<sup>37</sup>.

While the level of the unemployed people's schooling was dramatic (only 26.4% had qualifications above primary school level), that of the employed exceeded it in negative terms: quite a clear index of an overall, to put it mildly, desolating picture of the active population<sup>38</sup>. Indeed almost all of the Italians in employment – no less than 85.7% – did not have qualifications above primary school level, and among them many had not even finished primary school, while others were completely illiterate<sup>39</sup>. It was by no means a problem that disregarded the new generations: in 1950, the Commission highlighted that 68% of 11-year-old boys only had a primary school leaving certificate, if that, and, among these, 500,000 would enter the world of work, while 120,000 would continue at school<sup>40</sup>.

To sum up very briefly, what emerged from the two Commissions' results was that many young Italians in the early 1950s had to reckon with widespread and pervasive poverty in parallel with a static world of work that was quite impermeable to the demand. The phenomenon without doubt presented some extremely complex aspects which go far beyond the few remarks just made; nevertheless, the same Commission presided over by Tremelloni pinpointed an increase in education as one of the methods for putting the country en route towards greater development<sup>41</sup>.

#### 4. «School will always be better than cows»

As hinted, a large part of young people of working age had not spent long in the classroom, so as a result they had developed little awareness towards work and were prevalently oriented towards low-skilled jobs<sup>42</sup>. But the 'new generation' of workers were also lacking sufficient technical skills, also because, of the few who carried on at school, half chose classical studies, deserting the technical subjects<sup>43</sup>. Investing in education would thus have led to a rise in the quality of work, without taking into account that more schooling, that is, longer compulsory education, would have delayed entry into the world of work, which would then be tackled with more matu-

<sup>37</sup> *Ivi*, p. 126.

<sup>38</sup> *Ivi*, p. 194.

<sup>39</sup> *Ivi*, p. 64.

<sup>40</sup> *Ivi*, p. 123. For a further investigation of these topics see in particular A. Occhiuto, *Le leve di lavoro* in Commissione parlamentare di inchiesta sulla disoccupazione ed., *La disoccupazione in Italia, Studi Speciali. Atti della Commissione*, vol. IV, book 2, Camera dei Deputati, Rome, 1954, pp. 105-131; R. Spesso, *L'utilizzazione delle forze minorili in Italia*, in *ivi*, book 5, pp. 157-200. In this connection I thank the Livorno Chamber of Commerce library for enabling a rapid consultation of these documents.

<sup>41</sup> M. Parasassi, G. Ruffolo (edited by), *La disoccupazione in Italia*, cit., p. 196.

<sup>42</sup> *Ivi*, p. 124.

<sup>43</sup> *Ivi*, p. 123.

rity and preparation. In addition, it would have enabled the eradication of child labour, which was still rampant in that period, as well as preserving the health of the boys and in particular pubescent girls<sup>44</sup>.

In short, the relationship between young people and work in the early 1950s appeared somehow conditioned and in part distorted by the lack of widespread education; in other words, in order to guarantee the constitutional right to work and, therefore, the full exercise of citizenship, it appeared necessary to guarantee at least one other fundamental constitutional principle, that is, obligatory and free schooling for all for at least eight years (art. 34), and Italy still had a long way to go along this road.

As known, the first proposal to reboot the Italian school system after the war – law decree no. 2100 *General Regulations on Education* – was drawn up in 1951 by the Minister for Public Education, Guido Gonella. However, for various reasons it was immediately rejected across the board, so much so that it did not even get to be discussed in parliament. Beyond the various motives for opposition aroused by Gonella's intervention, and the backstage events heralding the birth of the law decree on which historiography has not failed to express itself<sup>45</sup>, it is worth underlining that on the topic of compulsory schooling between the ages of 11 and 14 the *General Regulations on Education* were even more stringent than those set out in the Bottai School Charter in 1939, which then became law the year after.

As an alternative to the two channels of schooling possible at the time – provided for in law no. 899 dated 1 July 1940 – either a single three-year middle school or vocational training, again for three years, which was, however, a dead end – the Ministry proposed four different routes: classical, technical, vocational schools and the '*normale*'<sup>46</sup>. It was a hypothesis that wiped out the perspectives of a single channel, and therefore the likelihood of an effective extension to compulsory education and of opening schools to everyone. Instead, it threw open the way to stop-gap, experimental solutions which were anything but a reform, such as the post-primary school, also known as 'the poor people's school'<sup>47</sup>. Besides, the creation of a new

<sup>44</sup> *Ivi*, p. 159.

<sup>45</sup> See D. Ragazzini, *Guido Gonella Ministro della Pubblica Istruzione nel periodo transitorio*, in G. Tassinari (edited by), *La pedagogia italiana nel secondo dopoguerra, Atti del Convegno in onore di Lamberto Borghi. Università di Firenze, Facoltà di Magistero, 8-9 ottobre 1986*, Le Monnier, Florence, 1987, pp. 215-225; G. Chiosso, *I cattolici e la scuola dalla riforma Gonella al piano decennale* in L. Pazzaglia (edited by), *Chiesa e progetto educativo nell'Italia del secondo dopoguerra*, La Scuola, Brescia, 1988, pp. 303-339; P. Russo, *Il ministro Gonella (1946-1951)*, in L. Bellatalla, G. Genovesi, E. Marescotti (edited by), *La scuola in Italia tra pedagogia e politica (1945-2003)*, FrancoAngeli, Milan, 2006, pp. 36-55.

<sup>46</sup> Translator's note: the *scuola normale* was a post-primary school established solely so that children could finish their compulsory schooling, as it did not enable them to continue to the next level.

<sup>47</sup> G. Lacaita, *Riforma della scuola e società italiana negli anni dello sviluppo economico*, cit, pp. 56-57; S. Santamaita, *Storia della scuola: dalla scuola al sistema formativo*, Bruno Mondadori, Milan-Turin, 2010, pp. 121-123; C. Betti, 1955: *un anno da tematizzare*, in E. Catarsi, N. Filograsso, A.

middle school, in addition to cultural and political obstacles, had to reckon with the country's structural restrictions: the same inquest on unemployment judged it impossible to effectively extend compulsory education without building 70,000 new classrooms at an expense of 200 billion lire<sup>48</sup>.

In conclusion, one can say that in the early 1950s Italian schools excluded a large part of children, thereby jeopardising their social and working future. One of the sharpest observers of the relationship between school, young people and work in those years was without doubt Don Lorenzo Milani, who, together with his pupils at Barbiana, cast some of the sharpest pointers for reflection, as collected in the inexhaustible mine of ideas, the *Letter to a Teacher*. As is known, the *Letter* was published in 1967, but the data that it contains, as well as some of the everyday situations to which it refers, can be traced back to some years before that, to the first steps of the school at Barbiana after the priest's arrival in the mountain hamlet in 1954. There is no point here remembering Don Milani's commitment to the diffusion of the 'Word', that is, literacy, and education in order to emancipate the weakest classes<sup>49</sup>. However, what it is opportune to mention is one of the sentences that appeared in the *Letter* which sums up, better than many academic dissertations or the inquests that I have spoken about, the role that school could have with regard to work.

Lucio, one of the co-authors of the *Letter*, in response to a 'teacher' visiting Barbiana who showed himself to be against the notable lack of recreational activities in the priest's school said: «school will always be better than cow shit», or in other words: it is better to go to school than to work (in his case in the cowshed) so it did not matter if there was no recreation<sup>50</sup>. In reality it appears that when writing up the book Lucio proposed replacing the word 'shit' with the more modest 'cows', whose shed it was that needed cleaning, but Don Milani, always ready to provoke and cause scandal, preferred the first term as much more representative of a tiring world which earned some of its scant profit from that very excrement<sup>51</sup>. «That sentence,» the *Letter* continues, «can be engraved over the front doors of your schools. Millions of farm boys are ready to subscribe to it»<sup>52</sup>.

Giallongo (edited by), *Educazione e pedagogia nell'età della 'guerra fredda' 1948-1989*, Edizioni Goliardiche, Trieste, 1999, pp. 289-310; C. Betti, "I Diritti della Scuola" e il triennio conteso in G. Bonetta, F. Cambi, F. Frabboni, F. Pinto Minerva, *Educazione e modernità pedagogica. Studi in onore di Giacomo Cives*, ETS, Pisa, 2003, pp. 61-83. Please allow me to also make reference to S. Oliviero, *La scuola media unica: un accidentato iter legislativo*, CET, Florence, 2007.

<sup>48</sup> M. Parasassi, G. Ruffolo (edited by), *La disoccupazione in Italia*, cit., p. 160.

<sup>49</sup> See among others F. Cambi, *Un modello, alto, di pedagogia dell'emancipazione* in C. Betti (edited by), *Don Milani fra storia e memoria. La sua eredità quarant'anni dopo* Unicopli, Milan, 2009, pp. 29-37.

<sup>50</sup> Scuola di Barbiana, *Letter to a Teacher*, Random House, New York, 1970, p. 7.

<sup>51</sup> A. Santoni Rugiu, *La pedagogia del consumismo (e del letame)* Anicia, Rome, 2003, pp. 48-49. See also A. Santoni Rugiu, *Don Milani. Una lezione di utopia*, ETS, Pisa, 2007, p. 166.

<sup>52</sup> Scuola di Barbiana, *Letter to a Teacher*, cit., p. 7.

For many of the young and very young, school could be a lifeboat saving them from a tiring and perhaps meagrely remunerated world. In short, the exploitation of child labour was always hiding around the corner, in the farming sector and in the factories, where for a long time the practice was for young people's salaries to be lower than an adult's (despite art. 37 of the Constitution), which seems to have changed little, even after the 1955 law regulating apprenticeships<sup>53</sup>. In short, it was not very fertile ground for fostering rights and it would resist change for several years yet. The farming sector, as the *Letter* again reminded, was excluded even by the 1961 legislation on prohibiting work for the under 15s and indeed during the 1960s there were no few derogations<sup>54</sup>.

Nevertheless, what slowed down the development processes indicated by the Commission presided over by Tremelloni was still the inadequacy of the school system. The Fascist law on exoneration from compulsory education after three years of primary school valid in small villages was only repealed in 1955<sup>55</sup>, while two years later almost 80% of Italian municipalities were not able to offer a school after primary level<sup>56</sup>. Moreover, the school – and so it would continue for a long time – was implementing a 'slaughter' of the 'oldest' and 'poorest', to again cite Don Milani's famous accusation, and the boys from the weakest classes ended up served on a silver plate to the world of work without having sufficient cultural bases or technical skills; therefore, they caused harm, as seen in Tremelloni's inquest, to the collectivity too<sup>57</sup>.

It was a phenomenon whose persistence was shown by the Barbiana experience as continuing way beyond the 1950s, even though in the meantime the country, to tell the truth, seemed to be heading towards a complex metamorphosis that would reach its peak, in part owing to real changes, but also to imagined ones, with the so-called 'economic miracle'. Tellingly, parents were starting to understand the importance that school was assuming for their children, in other words how much study could help to open the doors to a better future, or, in any case, a different one from their present, also in terms of work. The upshot was that enrolments in Italian schools, despite the enormous obstacles hinted at and the strongly elitist and static set-up of the Italian school system, grew. So in 1961, a couple of years before the advent of school for the masses with the single middle school, illiteracy fell by several points compared to 1951 (from 12.9 to 8.3) and, above all, a tangible sign of the increase in schooling, the numbers of

<sup>53</sup> Law no. 25 dated 19 January 1955, A. Rapini, *Denaro e lavoro* in P. Sorcinelli and A. Varni (edited by), *Il secolo dei giovani. Le nuove generazioni e la storia del Novecento*, Donzelli, Rome, 2004, pp. 101-102.

<sup>54</sup> Scuola di Barbiana, *Letter to a Teacher*, cit, pp. 38 and 41.

<sup>55</sup> G. Lacaita, *Riforma della scuola e società italiana negli anni dello sviluppo economico*, cit., p. 58

<sup>56</sup> *Ivi*, p. 69.

<sup>57</sup> Scuola di Barbiana, *Letter to a Teacher*, cit., pp. 43-44.

children in possession of a primary school leaving certificate rose (by 49%). This is not to speak of the numbers enrolled in lower middle school, which almost doubled, as did those at secondary level, with a dazzling increase (of 74%) in those holding a middle school leaving certificate<sup>58</sup>.

Meanwhile, the whole country seemed to be on the move. The end of protectionism and the entry in the Common Market were essential catalysts to the country's economic recovery, encouraged, like for the other European states, by aid from the European Recovery Program, the so-called Marshall Plan, which provided liquidity and, indirectly, new technology for industry. The expansion of the metalworking industry, thanks to the IRI (Institute for Industrial Reconstruction), and of the methane and hydrocarbons industry, with Mattei's ENI; the construction of new infrastructures; the low fiscal burden on companies; monetary stability; and above all the vast availability of cheap labour did the rest. Indeed, from 1951 to 1961 the active population employed in the farming sector, as is known, dropped drastically (from 42.2% to 29.1%), in an almost inversely proportionate manner to the growth of the industrial sector (from 32.1% to 40.6%), a sign of the great transformation underway<sup>59</sup>. And this is not to speak of the multiplication in the production and consumption of electrical appliances and the substantial motorisation of the country with the rise in the ownership of two- and four-wheel vehicles<sup>60</sup>. Widespread schooling and economic progress thus gave a new role to young people who were starting to occupy a very precise and autonomous space in society<sup>61</sup>.

## 5. Between work and consumption

Omar Calabrese, several years ago, singled out freedom and time as the two categories that overhauled the sense of being young during the 1950s<sup>62</sup>: freedom, in addition to that – let it be understood – conquered with the defeat of Nazi-Fascism, with respect to adults, and thus autonomy of movement in everyday life outside the older generations' control; and time, again meant in generational terms, that is the dilated time of preparation for future life, precisely thanks to the extension of the time spent in the classroom.

<sup>58</sup> G. Lacaita, *Riforma della scuola e società italiana negli anni dello sviluppo economico*, cit., pp. 63-64; Rapini, *Denaro e lavoro*, cit., p. 103. See also G. Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano*, cit., pp. 77-78. Among the reasons for the increase in enrolments neither must one undervalue the beginning of the debate on the new middle school started in 1959, see S. Oliviero, *La scuola media unica*, cit.

<sup>59</sup> G. Lacaita, *Riforma della scuola e società italiana negli anni dello sviluppo economico*, cit., p. 62; P. Capuzzo, *Gli spazi della nuova generazione*, cit., p. 223.

<sup>60</sup> G. Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano*, cit., pp. 141-142; P. Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, cit., p. 215; E. Asquer, *La rivoluzione candida. Storia sociale della lavatrice in Italia (1945-1970)*, Carocci, Rome, 2007, pp. 11-38.

<sup>61</sup> See O. Calabrese, *Appunti per una storia dei giovani in Italia*, in P. Ariès, G. Duby (edited by), *La vita privata. Il Novecento*, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 2001 (orig. ed. 1987), p. 92.

<sup>62</sup> *Ivi*, p. 93.

It is a conception of time, a time of youth, that did not, however, only affect those places with a high level of schooling – the urban areas and the North – but also progressively reached the young people of the more peripheral and rural areas, mainly through consumption and the myths of consumerism circulated by the mass media<sup>63</sup>. They were messages that young people would grasp first of all by fleeing from the countryside, from the pace and working and family restrictions of rural life, and from the South in search of different jobs and the well-being shown in these new showcases<sup>64</sup>. The symbolic power of the new possibilities of living, to a large extent driven by the media, had a determining influence indeed: suffice it to think that despite the great migrations of young people, at the end of the 1960s, half of them still lived in small towns and villages with less than 30,000 inhabitants<sup>65</sup>.

In this connection, the cinema played a determining role: after diffusing the ethic of sacrifice with neorealism and the image of a poor Italy, it began to put forward a more modern idea of the country with the 'commedia all'italiana' genre, as well as providing some tastes of American society<sup>66</sup>. The cinema would have no small influence on young people from every social class in the cities and in the countryside, thanks to the widely diffused cinema halls which were attended by six out of ten young people at least once a week in 1957, surprising figures considering the poverty and widespread unemployment from which the country was only slowly freeing itself<sup>67</sup>. However, while in the 1950s going to the cinema became a rite that also encouraged socialisation among young people, instead it was the television that explicitly indicated different ways of living, linked to consumerism, to all the Italians: suffice it to think of *Carosello*<sup>68</sup> which after its debut in 1957, by 1960 was already the most popular TV show<sup>69</sup>.

Lastly, music. It was above all music that changed the rhythm between the Italy of the past and the Italy of the future, and therefore between the two generations. 1958, for example, was a dizzying year for the record in-

<sup>63</sup> See E. Scarpellini, *People of Plenty*, cit., pp. 55-56.

<sup>64</sup> G. Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano*, cit., p. 103.

<sup>65</sup> P. Capuzzo, *Gli spazi della nuova generazione*, in P. Capuzzo (edited by), *Genere, generazioni, consumi*, cit., p. 222. See also P. Bordieu, *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste* (1979), Routledge, London, 1984, pp. 482-484.

<sup>66</sup> V. Castronovo, *L'Italia del miracolo economico*, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 2010, p. 8 and pp. 105-106. See also G.P. Brunetta, *Cent'anni di cinema italiano. 2 Dal 1945 ai giorni nostri*, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 2003.

<sup>67</sup> G. Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano*, cit., p. 148; E. Capussotti, *Tra storie e pratiche: soggettività giovanile, consumo e cinema in Italia durante gli anni Cinquanta*, in P. Capuzzo (edited by), *Genere, generazioni e consumo*, cit., pp. 172-177. 1954-55 was the record year in takings at Italian cinemas. See also E. Scarpellini, *Material Nation*, cit., p. 170.

<sup>68</sup> Translator's note: *Carosello* was a television programme consisting of ten minutes of advertising, which was aired every evening on RAI for 20 years. See P. Dorflès, *Carosello*, il Mulino, Bologna, 2011.

<sup>69</sup> P. Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, cit., pp. 240-242. See also V. Castronovo, *L'Italia del miracolo economico*, cit., pp. 100-101.



dustry: juke boxes were springing up everywhere, the legend of Elvis Presley was growing in Italy too, and Celentano and Mina were cutting their first records<sup>70</sup>. And in 1959 the same nineteen-year-old Mina interpreted how young people saw themselves, by declaring that she only had to worry about «bringing out the devilish beats that all we young people have inside». However, while reporting this interview, Anna Bravo did not hesitate to specify that «to say everyone was forcing the point»<sup>71</sup>, even though the age factor was tendentially becoming a stamp of belonging. Again in the musical field, while, for example, in 1959 Mina was triumphing with *Tintarella di Luna*, the radio was transmitting the aria of the *Vecchio frac* whistled by Domenico Modugno: 'shouters' (*urlatori*) and 'neo-melodics' existed side by side. The same Modugno had won the Sanremo song contest the year before with *Nel blu dipinto di blu* which in turn was deemed a step away from the alternatives in the line-up, among which the song by Nilla Pizzi<sup>72</sup>. In short, the transformations were gradual and had many different faces.

With the recovery of industry, even though there continued to be vast swarms of unemployed people, job opportunities began to grow and it was above all young people who reaped the benefits. Factory work offered young people from the countryside a sort of emancipation from work and family ties, to which in a certain sense until then they had had no choice but to succumb. It offered the possibility, especially for young people from the South and for women, of having contact with the outside world, outside the home, and to come into comparison with their peers<sup>73</sup>. Nevertheless, there was also the other side of the coin. Salaries did not grow in proportion to profits and rights were scarce, especially for the young (and not so young) from the South who emigrated in search of work and ended up recruited, with no contract and low salaries, by the infamous cooperatives which provided the factories with a workforce, a practice only cut short in 1960<sup>74</sup>.

On the other hand, the Fascist law preventing urbanisation was repealed in 1961. This law, even though scantily applied, made those Italians who did abandon their birthplaces and migrate into illegal citizens in their own country, and, therefore, tasty morsels for exploitation in the workplace<sup>75</sup>. The welcome to the factory was not the best for the new arrivals and the working hours were quite hard<sup>76</sup>, but factories nevertheless meant eman-

<sup>70</sup> G. Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano*, cit., 82.

<sup>71</sup> A. Bravo, *A colpi di cuore. Storie del sessantotto*, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 2008, p. 38.

<sup>72</sup> G. Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano*, cit., p. 83; see also *La nuova enciclopedia della musica Garzanti*, Garzanti, Milan, 1989, *ad indicem*.

<sup>73</sup> P. Capuzzo, *Gli spazi della nuova generazione*, cit., p. 226; P. Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, cit., pp. 238-239 and p. 244.

<sup>74</sup> *Ivi*, p. 223.

<sup>75</sup> G. Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano*, cit., p. 101.

<sup>76</sup> P. Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, p. 224; G. Maifreda, *La disciplina del lavoro. Operai, macchine e fabbriche nella storia italiana*, Bruno Mondadori, Milan-Turin, 2007.

cipation. For example, being hired by FIAT in the mid-1950s was a «mirage for many unemployed and underemployed young people»<sup>77</sup>. The well-being promised and shown by the media indeed seemed to be increasingly within reach and few wanted to miss out on this chance<sup>78</sup>. While speaking of this period, Vittorio Foa, the thinker often cited in this connection, claimed that the workers were more interested in a car and electrical appliances in order to change the sense and timing of their lives rather than civil and cultural consumption<sup>79</sup>. It was a period of continuity and breakage, which was exponentially reflected in the new generations. Guido Crainz reports an interesting and emblematic excerpt from an interview with a seventeen-year-old after the events of July 1960, in which, not only the young men and women in the striped shirts, but also the awareness gained in the classroom and the first signs of intolerance with the world of work bubbled to the surface. «I'm an anti-Fascist», the boy declared, «because I want to be a modern youth. And you can't be modern if you're not against this society which has grown old»<sup>80</sup>. In short, the category of young people, with their specific features, took shape. However, it only fully came into being in the 1960s, when the first fruits of the 'miracle' were really reaped and, with the affirmation of the single middle school, schooling for the masses became a more solid reality. These are topics that could, however, take the discourse way beyond the possibilities of this short essay<sup>81</sup>.

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<sup>77</sup> G. Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano*, cit., p. 67, own translation.

<sup>78</sup> M. Casalini, *Famiglie comuniste. Ideologia e vita quotidiana nell'Italia degli anni Cinquanta*, il Mulino, Bologna, 2010, p. 283.

<sup>79</sup> V. Foa, *Questo Novecento*, Einaudi, Turin, 1996, p. 263.

<sup>80</sup> G. Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano*, cit., p. 142.

<sup>81</sup> O. Calabrese, *Appunti per una storia dei giovani in Italia*, cit., p. 94. See also M. Tolomelli, *Giovani anni Sessanta*, cit., pp. 197-199.

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# Diverse Jobs: Atypical Work and Formation to Support an Unstable Balance

## I. The social scenario and the world of work

The entrance of *atypical work* in Italy in 1997 with the 'Treu Package' and the successive law no. 30 from 14 February 2003 entitled *Delegation to the Government on the Subject of Employment and the Labour Market*<sup>1</sup>, the so-called 'Biagi Law', have led to profound changes in the labour market, both in economic terms and regarding the relationship between workers' identity and their work experiences<sup>2</sup>.

Part-times, apprenticeships, temporary contracts, work/training contracts, project work, occasional collaboration and employer-coordinated freelance contracts (*collaborazione coordinata e continuativa*) are the forms of work that may have introduced a radical transformation to the labour market, but have become sources of concern, not just for the young. These are 'atypical' forms of work, insofar as they are not customary, different from the traditional open-ended employment contracts and forms of self-employment, and they have led to an important transformation in the social fabric and personal make-up of the present-day subject.

Without doubt, one of the most significant transformations is that the worker's personality has become involved in the working process, so much so that when we refer to the 'labour market' today, we are talking about a real and proper *market of lives*. Namely, we are looking at that working dimension in which not only does a person exchange *any one* working capacity, that is, acquired professional skills, but his whole personality, with all its distinctive characteristics<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> See <<http://www.camera.it/parlam/leggi/03030l.htm>> (20 April 2011).

<sup>2</sup> See P. Andreoni, *Tempo e lavoro. Storia, psicologia e nuove problematiche*, Mondadori, Milan, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> As Emilio Reyneri underlines, «until now, in the Italian context at least, it was the case that workers could have a period – their youth – when by law and/or fact the level of precariousness Vanna Boffo (edited by), *A Glance at Work. Educational Perspectives*, ISBN 978-88-6655-187-4 (online PDF), ISBN 978-88-6655-188-1 (online EPUB), ISBN 978-88-6655-321-2 (print), © 2012 Firenze University Press

It is clear that the widespread presence of atypical forms of work in our society is not only causing a change in the possible kinds of work, but is also emptying the same work of its social function<sup>4</sup>. There are multiple psychological variables at risk since, whether we are talking job instability linked to a personal perception of losing one's job, or an actual contractual condition, forms of problems are arising with repercussions on the construction of people's professional identity, on the interaction between subject and work organisation, and on satisfaction levels and quality of life, including private lives.

At this point I shall leave aside the political and ethical aspect of the legislator's choice to introduce these types of contract with the goal of reducing the rate of unemployment and cash-in-hand work<sup>5</sup>, albeit underlining that today this choice needs to be reviewed on account of the complex needs expressed by the human subject, a subject who cannot be boiled down to a mere "producer of goods and services" to the detriment of his serenity and well-being. Instead, I shall place my attention on the meaning that this way of working takes on from the psychological point of view, in order to attempt to promote a formative process that can offer the subject the potentials for resilience and creative resources to react to the burdensome stress that these types of work involve. For the world of education and training this attention is becoming increasingly urgent. To date the aim has perhaps been more to build basic and specific knowledge and skills, without taking this distinctive aspect of the worker's identity and his internal stability into account.

A certain interest in the problems connected to atypical work is found in occupational psychology studies, but its entry in the socio-political debate, ten years ago and mainly centred around social data and economic success rather than the psychological upshots of this situation, was definitely late<sup>6</sup>. The data relating to the diffusion of forms of precarious work,

was high. But then, at a certain age, by fact or by law they achieved some stability. But what will happen in the future? What should worry us is not so much the precarious situation of twenty year olds, who still have a whole personal and family life ahead of them and can also deal with it well at the emotional level. The big question is what will happen later during their lives, when they head into their thirties and need more and more security at both the economic and emotional level». E. Reyneri, *Sociologia del mercato del lavoro. Le forme dell'occupazione*, il Mulino, Bologna, 2005, p. 127, own translation.

<sup>4</sup> See L. Gallino, *Il costo umano della flessibilità*, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 2001; L. Gallino, *Il lavoro non è una merce. Contro la flessibilità*, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Numerous multidisciplinary studies have come up with contrasting results as to the efficacy of this law; so much so that, while institutional data strongly underscores a reduction in the rate of unemployment, other authors equally as strongly highlight an increase. As Gallino maintains, the only certain piece of data is that there is no certain relationship between flexibility and employability. For the ongoing debate see: Z. Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2000; T. Boeri, P. Garibaldi, *Un nuovo contratto per tutti*, Chiarelettere, Milan, 2008; L. Gallino, *Il costo umano della flessibilità*, cit.

<sup>6</sup> It is only recently that atypical work has become a subject of research in the psychological sphere too. In particular, in the essay by Ferrari and Veglio one finds many of the variables correlated to atypical work, such as: training, gender differences, worker identity, job satisfaction



nevertheless, shows that it is a greatly increasing phenomenon. However, it does not enable us to make forecasts as to what will happen over the next few years. In particular, we cannot foresee if, and to what extent, precarious occupations will also affect the stronger segments of the labour force in the future, or if they will remain a prerogative of young people and women. All the same, it is no excuse for us not to centre the attention of all the human sciences – and pedagogy first of all – on the problems that atypical work and instability involve for those who have to live with them today.

## 2. The concept of atypical and precarious work

The analysis that I am about to make is prevalently centred around forms of atypical work not caused by free choice, but by labour market supply. The possibility of entering a world of precarious work triggers a series of difficulties at various levels of existence, starting from the psychological sphere. This is due to the fragmentation of work, having to continually adapt to new organisational contexts and relationships and the frustration caused by the necessity to direct expectations towards the possibilities offered without being able to choose according to one's desires and aspirations, or even one's formation.

Ongoing uncertainty about the future, lack of protection for illness, maternity and injuries, discontinuity and precarious economic conditions, low wages and continuous changes in workplaces and locations, short-term relationships, the feeling of being constantly under observation and at risk of losing one's job, and the perception of an outside rule over one's life are all sources of remarkable stress and intense suffering, above all for those upon whose work other subjects depend, such as those with a family to maintain. An internal condition that is difficult to express except through forms of body language, the somatisation of painful emotions, or problematic and destructive ways of behaviour<sup>7</sup>.

The reaction to stress develops at several levels: at the more immediately *emotional* level, with the emergence of anxiety, tension and dissatisfaction; at the *physiological* level, with increases in the heart rate, the secretion of catecholamines, reductions in the production of endorphins and dopamine; and at the more behavioural level, manifested through the use of drugs and alcohol, forms of absenteeism, lack of concentration, etc. This first reaction can be followed by a more long-term situation, expressed in the form of real and proper mental and physical health problems<sup>8</sup>.

and career guidance. See L. Ferrari, O. Veglio, *Donne e uomini nel mercato del lavoro atipico. La dimensione psicologica e di genere del lavoro precario e flessibile*, FrancoAngeli, Milan, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> See I. Corradini, P. Lambertucci, *Lo stress nei luoghi di lavoro. Profili psicologici, giuridici e metodologie di valutazione*, Themis, Rome, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> A study by László and partners used a self-assessment method to investigate the effects of temporary work on the health of workers aged between 45 and 70 in 16 European countries:

An interesting theory allowing us to interpret the reason why there has been such a widespread diffusion of unstable occupations can be found in the reflection of Polanyi<sup>9</sup>. In his opinion, the market tends to expand with destructive effects on society, but, at the same time, defensive and protective mechanisms are implemented in the social fabric to restrict this expansion. Therefore, it becomes fundamental to know what individual and social potentials are activated in reaction to processes of suffering, and which mechanisms can lessen the deriving problems.

Not having a contract that guarantees stability puts the subject in a condition of continual risk owing to the highly uncertain market situation. As a consequence, work becomes greatly commodified, in a process which, as Polanyi asserts, activates protective reactions outside the market. The mechanisms that defend society from market expansion and act in favour of the de-commodification of work are found in the family and in welfare<sup>10</sup>, defined by Esping Andersen as the main spheres that restrict these phenomena. In the case of Italy, where state intervention for precarious workers is low, it is precisely in the family that the main support mechanisms are implemented and, as we will see, in a series of social relations that show great potential for offering support.

In the present crisis, felt at all economic and social levels owing to the progressive, endless reduction in public expenditure, the family has taken on the role as a pillar of 'alternative welfare' to replace the state. In the demographical field these families are described as 'bunches' (*la famiglia-grappolo*)<sup>11</sup>, and within them people find help for problems; the family-bunches devote time, economic resources and services and satisfy many primary and social needs, as well as providing affection and unconditioned dedication. As well as being the main support for old people, even more the family is the main back-up for young people who are now remaining

Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Israel, the Netherlands, Poland, Russia, Austria, France, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and Sweden. The interviewees were all people with precarious jobs and from the data it emerged that they had a reasonable risk of illness in most of the countries included in the analysis. The countries varied in terms of the capacity of labour market regulations, health care and trade union strength. These factors can potentially act as a buffer or further increase the risk of illness owing to the precariousness of work. There was a significant correlation between precarious work and negative health conditions in various countries, including those with a well-developed welfare system, a factor that seems to indicate the negative consequences of precarious work on the subject not just in economic terms, but also in terms of self-perception. A summary of the research work can be consulted on the site: <<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2845821/>> (15 June 2011). The end product of the research is: K.D. László, H. Pikhart, M.S. Kopp, M. Bobak, A. Pajak, S. Malyutina, G. Salavec, M. Marmot, *Job Insecurity and Health: A Study of 16 European Countries*, «Social Science and Medicine», 70, 6-3, 2010, pp. 867-74.

<sup>9</sup> See K. Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, Rinehart, New York, 1944.

<sup>10</sup> See G. Esping Andersen, *Social Foundations of Postindustrial Economies*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999.

<sup>11</sup> See F. Billari, G. Dalla Zuanna, *La rivoluzione nella culla. Il declino che non c'è*, Edizioni Boccioni, Milan, 2008.

in the home way beyond the age of thirty. Young people who are always in motion, between studies, temporary jobs, internships, vocational courses and experiences abroad, show that they are very dynamic but also very needy in terms of security and stability, something which they can only find in the home. The young people lean on the generations that created them to solve every problem, procrastinating at length, with no agenda to untie themselves from their parental figures or older members of the family, a release that is necessary both in terms of autonomy and gaining a sense of responsibility pertaining to adulthood<sup>12</sup> and feeling an active and significant part in the development of a society.

The family, therefore, becomes the first of the social shock absorbers and an important domain for absorption of the uncertainty, by lessening the hardships caused to workers by the instability of employment. In many research projects it has emerged that unstable workers put all their trust in their parents or partners, both when they need economic support and for any other choices concerning various types of desires and needs, from buying goods to cultural interests or investing in their free time. As a result, they remain in a condition of dependency that is not easy to deal with<sup>13</sup>.

### 3. Instability vs. stability or two potential sides of the same coin?

Alongside those who entrust the family to find that stability and certainty which they cannot find in a long-term job, there are subjects who channel their energies into the potential offered by a fragmented and segmented work situation, which could, however, become stable. Despite having to be in a continual situation of seeking and changing work, of brisk

<sup>12</sup> See D. Demetrio, *In età adulta. Le mutevoli fisionomie*, Guerini, Milan, 2005.

<sup>13</sup> Another factor that could jeopardise the family's capacity to amortise the hardships of unstable employment is the progressive weakening of family ties themselves. With the growth in divorces and separations, an increasingly large number of people could find themselves lacking the protection – i.e. the family – against the hardships caused by job instability. For example, the women who perform interim jobs today to make up their husband's wage and have their own independence could find themselves in difficulty in the event of a divorce because at that point the need to have a stable income would become more pressing. At the same time, for these same reasons, the increase in the instability of marriages should lead to an increase in the labour force willing to carry out unstable jobs. Women who did not work and who, following a separation from their husbands, look for employment in fact very rarely manage to find a permanent job; therefore, in order to work, they are willing to accept contracts that give no guarantee of ongoing work. Even though these considerations concern a hypothetical future rather than the current situation, nonetheless they should highlight how complex and fragile the balance created between current job market phenomena, the welfare system and family structures are. Within this balance, the destructive effects linked to the spread of unstable jobs end up being greatly reduced. Hence, for many subjects moving on the market, this same job instability actually becomes a genuine resource for strategy building. See Various Authors, *Instabilità del lavoro ed esposizione al mercato: le strategie dei lavoratori e il ruolo della famiglia come protezione contro i rischi*. Paper published at the Social Studies Department of Brescia University, *DSS Papers SOC 7*, 01 (June 2001).

offers and temporary opportunities, through a series of networks of relationships and contacts with employers and agencies that operate in the various economic sectors, many subjects with a specific professional role work with temporary contracts, almost always with no long-term solution.

This 'ongoing state of instability' can come to pass in two main ways. The first is when there is a single work provider that hires on short-term contracts but offers the security of continual renewal; the second is when there are working relationships with a set of subjects who offer work, giving a range of opportunities. They are two ways of working that differ substantially owing to the workers' perception of their stability: in the first case there is a continuity that is unstable but guaranteed by a privileged relationship, while in the second the worker has a different role, as his own guarantor for the whole network of relationships that he manages to build up both with operators in a particular sector and with other collaborators, proving to be much more active, dynamic and flexible. In both cases, nevertheless, the lack of formal guarantees results in a type of adaptation to job uncertainty. This lowers the thresholds of fear that instability brings about and makes the necessity to experience this new form of worker identity cause less anxiety.

The problem remains that the forms of work with unconventional contracts are often subject to low and discontinuous salaries, with the consequent economic insecurity and higher risk of being at the mercy of the employer's rule. However, this aspect is linked to a situation that requires more attention from those who have to guarantee the worker's rights and is difficult to deal with in the formative context.

An additional problem that definitely must not be undervalued is having an instable, presumed but not predictable income. This is the characteristic shared by all those with the various forms of atypical, short-term contract. It has an immediate effect on time management, since an uncertain income leads to the inability to say no to any opportunity, and anxiety about possible periods of inactivity leads to overlapping different jobs, resulting in the need to work many hours a day, with the consequent outfall on all the other aspects of a person's life. While on one hand, the possibility of a high level of autonomy in organising one's work has the characteristics of freedom, on the other it can lead to frantically seeking work to do in order to protect oneself against possible periods in which there might be fewer opportunities. It is a sort of insecurity that can lead people to gobble up every opportunity without assessing the quantity, quality and real possibilities that they can do them without running the risk of being suffocated by all their other day-to-day needs<sup>14</sup>.

Without doubt we have to account for a possible 'catch' in this analysis, namely a 'subsequent justification' of a change underway at the social

<sup>14</sup> See S. Bologna, D. Banfi, *Vita da freelance. I lavoratori della conoscenza e il loro futuro*, Feltrinelli, Milan, 2011.

level, a change that is not wanted or planned, but undergone and in this approach even considered as positive. For those who aim to guarantee stable working conditions for all, this analysis could be considered the legitimation of a *defect* of our society, which should guarantee security and well-being to its citizens but, on the contrary, is not even able to offer the basis for stability. However, it is important for the purpose of reflection on the psychological consequences of atypical work and on the possible formative responses, because at the centre it places the *subject's needs* which can be given a more suitable and more significant response in the manner in which the formative paths are structured, in the various dimensions in which they unfold. Reliability, elasticity, willingness, constancy, risk management skills, concreteness and interpersonal skills are all aspects around which the formative process must be planned and the work methods developed.

Introduced as 'atypical' work, that is, 'different from normal', the concept needs to be regarded as it is evolving: indeed, in truth, it is becoming a very widespread and progressively growing work model. It emerges from many research projects that forms of unstable work, which today mainly concern young people and women, not only seem to be increasing, but, it is hypothesised, are set to affect wider and wider brackets of workers. It must not be undervalued that, with the growth of separations and divorces, a large part of subjects also risk losing that support given today by the family. This is a change that needs backing and to be dealt with suitably because it concerns a large part of society which risks succumbing under this pressure.

The situation that at this point has been created between labour market demand, the social support system and family structures shows how the social bond is progressively weakening. Yet it also demonstrates how the reaction of single people is to implement strategies that can contrast the loss of job security, by activating their own considerable resources and multiple energies to live their lives and professional identities well all the same.

#### **4. Living in instability: a restriction or a resource?**

The increase in subjects who live in a state of instability and in precarious living conditions is taking place in a period in history when insecurity is increasing at all levels, since all systems are being fully transformed and redefined. While it may be true that this process is associated with a very high risk of the subject experiencing existential difficulties, it is also true that it leads to the development of high levels of freedom.

Job instability is complex in that it involves concern for that which is not secure, but also the pleasure of not being bound. It is that potential inherent in the vision of Ulrich Beck, for whom the uncertainty leads man to

focus his attention more on himself, resulting in a progressive increase in individualisation and consequent inclination towards action<sup>15</sup>.

In his theory on 'reflexive modernisation', Beck upholds that in the passage from industrial to postmodern society we have gone from the domination of the logic in which the production of wealth overshadowed the production of risk, to a society in which this relationship has been overturned. From analysis of the behaviour of instable workers and their decisions in relation to job opportunities, one can see that, while it is true that the market conditions and type of demand define the opportunities and affect the action strategies of people in work or looking for work, it is also true that people draw up their own paths, and strengthen their own professional experiences, creating autonomous routes to reaching the desired professional position.

For some, therefore, employment instability can be a *tie*, a 'restriction', to which one has to adapt in order to live in this society, while for others it is perceived as a *resource*, as a 'guarantee of freedom' since it enables people not to be recognised by the job they do and it always leaves the possibility open to change job, to move on several fronts, and overcome the risk of being blocked in a job they find unsatisfying.

As many scholars underline, in recent decades a progressive de-institutionalisation has taken place in life paths and today there are no more precise stages and pre-set moments that mark the contemporary subject's shifts in status. For young people today there is no precise definition of the beginning of adult life, and what were considered fundamental stages along the path to adulthood, such as starting work and leaving the family home, can no longer be used to analyse the growth processes<sup>16</sup>. Starting from the conviction that the subject's identity is also built thanks to his choice of work, there is no doubt that the individualisation process and new forms of structuring the life path are inseparably connected to the transformations that have taken place in the labour market. Contrary to what happened in Fordist society, where work in itself was sufficient to develop a stable identity and ensure social integration, in our society, characterised by precarious and transitory jobs, the sense of one's identity and perception of stability, as well as the definition of a particular social status, are always changing. This is happening in a historical context in which uncertainty and transformation are recurrent in all the subject's standards of

<sup>15</sup> H.R. Maturana, F.J. Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living*, D. Reidel Publishing, Boston, 1980, p. 124.

<sup>16</sup> For a further look at this topic see: M. Farina, *La famiglia lunga del giovane adulto*, in E. Scabini, P. Donati (edited by), *Nuovo lessico familiare*, Vita e Pensiero, Milan, 1995, pp. 117-133; G. Rossi, *Quando i giovani restano a lungo nella famiglia di origine: il caso italiano*, in E. Scabini, G. Rossi (edited by), *Giovani in famiglia tra autonomia e nuove dipendenze*, Vita e Pensiero, Milan, 1997, pp. 45-68; C. Buzzi, A. Cavalli, A. De Lillo, *Rapporto giovani. Sesta indagine dell'Istituto Iard sulla condizione giovanile in Italia*, il Mulino, Bologna, 2007.

reference, with the result that no one any longer seems to be able to make long-term plans and everyone always tends to keep all the alternative possibilities open, continually looking to new directions in which to head and remaining in a condition in which the present takes centre stage.

In this dimension, job instability amplifies the sense of insecurity, fueling the need to make short-term strategies. It does not impose the necessity to make life plans, but enables people to live the definition of their identity with a strong sense of freedom. Those who do not have a stable job can always hope to find a better one, or those who do not manage to find the job that they want can temporarily use their time in other activities without having to give up on their plans, while waiting for the right opportunity to come along: on one hand this might risk reducing the sense of responsibility, but, on the other, it always leaves open the possibility to live different experiences, which always go to enrich the identity.

The risk that is inherent in this process made up of small, always uncertain steps, in pursuit of short-term goals and only focussing on the immediate effects of one's actions, is to lose the taste for and value of investing in one's formation. By implementing what Laffi defines as a 'non-stop search', lacking direction and with a minimum time span, many young people risk seeing a weakening in their capacity to link their personal choices together and not managing to organise their work experiences in a coherent manner<sup>17</sup>. Openness towards all opportunities, putting off choices that require the assumption of responsibility, remaining on hold while awaiting a better job opportunity, lowering the judgement threshold in order not to be too selective towards the various opportunities, are all aspects that, in the long term, can end up weakening the capacity to self-determine one's own existence and limit the definition of a meaningful life plan.

Richard Sennett also underlines how the lives of flexible workers are a collage of fragments, to which the subject cannot always manage to give a sense of planning<sup>18</sup>.

In a context characterised by unstable work, the subject is faced with an ever-changing reality which leaves him a lot of freedom but can result in a weakening of the capacity to draw up strategies and outline intentional processes of self-development. While some may manage to use the instability as a resource in order to independently define their professional career, knowing how to deal with the risk deriving from uncertainty, for others – lacking training in specific skills – it remains very difficult to manage to combine the resources available in order to achieve a secure and gratifying position in the job market. This means that in the present-

<sup>17</sup> See S. Laffi, *Il furto mercificazione dell'età giovanile, L'ancora del Mediterraneo*, Naples, 2000.

<sup>18</sup> See R. Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*, Norton, New York, 1998.

day subject there is a potential for adaptation<sup>19</sup> which, if also backed by a well-structured formative process, organised to welcome and limit life's uncertainty and precariousness, despite it all, levels of well-being or satisfaction can be achieved that are suited to the requirements of the present day and world.

## 5. Complexity and development of the contemporary subject

I would like to dwell, however briefly, on analysing what is happening in our epoch, immersed in complexity and dependent on a future constructed at a planetary level. It can be defined as a time that is leading man's consciousness to reflect more on what he learns, on everything proposed to him. It is increasingly becoming a categorical must not just to learn, but to *learn* to learn, in order to manage to control the cognitive and motivational processes but also to be able to adapt them to each new problem that arises<sup>20</sup>. Technological developments have enormously extended – and continue to extend – our symbolic possibilities, self-reflection, the capacity to depict reality using the most diverse languages, so much so that the imaginary reality itself seems to be real.

We find ourselves belonging to different sets, owing to the multiplication of positions, social relationships, groups and associations that we come into contact with. It is much quicker to enter and exit these systems than it was in the past and we have to approach a set of languages, roles and rules which we need to adapt to each time. All this pushes the individual to continually change, seek another way of being in each situation, with new codes and new forms of relationship, with constant pressure to respond in a suitable manner each time. The myriad of information produced by equally as many transmitters approaches each subject like an 'avalanche', in the face of which we need to find the necessary tools and shelter so that it does not bury us. This means learning to find our way in the information, looking for methods to analyse it, select it, then memorise it, and finally

<sup>19</sup> In Morin's complexity theory, the human subject is indissolubly linked to the environment in which he is placed, reintegrated in a natural and biological sense in the physical, as well as the social and cultural worlds. Knowledge is a process activated by the living subject and human knowledge, which pertains to the cultural, is such if it is understood as self-knowledge, the subject himself becoming responsible for his own action. See S. Manghi, *Il soggetto ecologico di Edgar Morin*, Erickson, Trento, 2009.

<sup>20</sup> This reflection is a constant in Edgar Morin's studies, which often underline that in order to read the *complexity of the real* in a *complex society*, the subject needs new cognitive tools, but in particular how he has to acquire a *forma mentis* that enables him to read history, society and its time in its *inter-polis-trans-disciplinarity*. See further: E. Morin, *La Méthode 1. La nature de la nature*, Le Seuil, Paris, 1977; E. Morin, *La Méthode II. La vie de la Vie*, Le Seuil, Paris, 1980 and *La Méthode 3. La connaissance de la connaissance*, Le Seuil, Paris, 1986. Only the first of the three volumes has been translated into English: *Method: Towards a Study of Humankind. 1. The Nature of Nature*, Peter Lang, New York, 1992 (orig. ed.). Furthermore see: *La tête bien faite: repenser la réforme, réformer la pensée*, Seuil, Paris, 1999.



prepare effective and pertinent feedback for each of the different communicative sources of provenance.

It is extraordinary the speed at which the whole of society is changing<sup>21</sup>.

In this perspective, made of many – perhaps at times it seems too many – opportunities, possibilities and alternatives that appear in everyday life, the most engaging challenge becomes having to choose: «in the face of the possible that seduces and threatens, the risk of decision-making cannot be avoided»<sup>22</sup>. Choice is inevitable and by no means simple, so much so that every time we try out a method of action, we realise that it is not possible to transfer experience gained previously in another field. In every context, in every relationship we realise that it is impossible to use the languages, rules, and procedures that we are familiar with, and that we need to remodel our ways of thinking each time. Speed and variability are two characteristics of the complex systems which, however, at this moment in time have achieved a frequency and intensity without precedent. As a result, in the face of the great quantity of fields of action against which we can measure ourselves, we realise that the capacities at our disposal are insufficient. A profound sense of uncertainty accompanies the decisions and the analysis of the various possible alternatives that must be made every day, so much so that the capacity to choose becomes one of the primary goals to pursue, not least because not choosing is nevertheless always a possible alternative and, therefore, a choice.

Every experience of change brings with it a positive component, which projects towards the new and the unexplored, but also a fear of what we do not know, of what we cannot foretell. Change becomes an objective to aspire towards, an ambition, but at the same time it is limited by *fear* and *uncertainty*. The choice that continually places itself before us therefore fluctuates between launching oneself into the unknown and anchoring oneself to the certainties of what is already known; but choosing between the endless possibilities is an arduous task, especially because that which is discarded is always more than what is chosen. The resulting difficulty can lead the subject towards a situation of depression, but also lead him to try to keep all the various opportunities together. The deriving fragmentation of the self denies him the partiality intrinsic to a choice, through a split in the internal reality, or through a maniacal syndrome ending up in an infinite vortex. While mental suffering is the extreme response to this difficulty, there are various stages of problems in this transformation process. During the process the self becomes multiple, and does so with the intent of underlining the various identities that the self can assume in time and

<sup>21</sup> See S. Burgalassi, *Uno spiraglio sul futuro. Interpretazione sociologica del cambiamento sociale in atto*, Giardini Editori, Pisa, 1980.

<sup>22</sup> A. Melucci, *Il gioco dell'io. Il cambiamento di sé in una società globale*, Feltrinelli, Milan, 1992, p. 51, own translation.

the discontinuity in identifications due to the rapid changes we are subject to. There is also another factor that we must not forget, namely that in the self of each one of us there reside several parts and our profound experience of uncertainty arises precisely from the conflict between the difficulty to identify ourselves with a single one of these and, at the same time, the need to do so<sup>23</sup>.

This mobility to which the self is subjected then leads one to reflect on the dynamic aspects of the identity and to centre on the variety of identification processes. Furthermore, the multiplication of the self also highlights a new viewpoint from which to read the relationship between the individual and society, with a subject who is seen as the protagonist of his action, and no longer subjugated by entities such as divinities or nature or society itself, since he is able to give meaning to his own action and act in an autonomous manner. We have gone from the metaphysically conceived subject to the *individual-subject*, a process in which the multiple self finds his unity and individuality<sup>24</sup>.

Therefore, the self's identity can be conceived as a dynamic system defined by limits and possibilities, appearing as a 'field', assuming the characteristic of being at once a system and a process, since the field contains a set of relations, but also the possibility to intervene on oneself and redefine oneself each time. In this sense, two problems arise, which stem from outlining the concepts of *continuity* and *boundaries of the self*. Starting from the idea that the identity is a field of possibilities and limits, we can read the boundaries as recognition of the limit to which the identity is subject and as dynamicity between the open- and closedness of these limits. In addition, continuity can be seen as a *change of form*, not so much because of the passage between different metaphysical states, but because of the organisation of several systems of relations into processes<sup>25</sup>.

In this perspective, the topic of responsibility takes on a role and a particular meaning, in its acceptance as the *capacity to respond*, both as recognition of ourselves and of what we feel we are, and as recognition of the other and our way of dealing with relationships.

In this game of responsibilities between the self's capacities to respond, the identity becomes a process of constant negotiation between different parts and times of the self – who I am and who I am with respect to yesterday and tomorrow – and the ambits and systems of relationships of which the subject is part. This leads to the capacity – or incapacity – to respond to the multiple and contradictory elements constantly present in the subject who, while he acts, is not always conscious of his action, or unconsciously favours specific parts of himself. The type of identity that one will have al-

<sup>23</sup> See R. Bodei, *Scomposizioni. Forme dell'individuo moderno*, Einaudi, Turin, 1987.

<sup>24</sup> See J. Elster (edited by), *The Multiple Self*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985.

<sup>25</sup> See A. Melucci, *Il gioco dell'io*, cit.

so depends on how this negotiation takes place. Indeed, in the negotiation process the identity – depending on the single person's choices – has an unstable tendency that leads the self to experience openness in a provisional and reversible way. By shifting further and further towards the individual, social action becomes increasingly subjective and individualised, and the identity manages to find spaces to barter with other subjects who are no longer rigidly defined from the outside, but aware of and responsible for the sense of their actions<sup>26</sup>.

From the paradox described before, according to which the subject may open up without limit, but at the same time, has no possible exit (one cannot *not* choose), we can deduce the importance taken on by the need for unity, the need to find elements of stability in the change. This is no longer found in identification with a single model, belonging to a single group or fully recognising oneself in a culture. Instead, there is the need to *change form*, to be able to redefine oneself in the face of what is new, to make choices and decisions reversible and renewable.

That typical characteristic of *metamorphosis* – which the subject used to experience primarily during adolescence – has now become something that we have to constantly face up to in our own ego<sup>27</sup>. Our epoch is characterised by this obligation to multiply ways of being, languages and relationships. And it intrinsically requires a great humanity, a strong inclination towards the other and to seek correlation between the differences, an injection of humility so we can always scale down our boundaries to welcome, carry and support those who are not immediately in unison. Without this willingness, it is not possible to change form: at most one can change 'appearance'.

More and more complex networks of relationships, and increasingly broad messages and information risk breaking up the individual. We need to learn to *open* and *close* our world: participation and renunciation, response and silence, bonds and detachments become fundamental for the vitality of the *man-system*, which must find its own rhythm in this non-stop trend. The capacity to live in discontinuous and heterogeneous times and spaces also requires a unity of experience, which must come from qualities of immediate perception, intuition and imagination, all aspects which belong to traditional cultures. Roots in the present cannot forgo roots in the past, so that the acting and action do not merely become an

<sup>26</sup> On the issue of the subject, for a view that enables one to see how this process has developed over a period of time, beginning at the start of the 1980s and achieving consolidation in our times, see: A. Bruno (edited by), *La crisi del soggetto nel pensiero contemporaneo*, FrancoAngeli, Milan, 1988; F. Cambi (edited by), *Soggetto come persona. Statuti formativi e modelli attuali*, Carocci, Rome, 2003; A. Porcheddu, *La crisi del soggetto nella modernità liquida. Una nuova sfida per l'educazione*, Unicopli, Milan, 2007.

<sup>27</sup> See M.R. Mancaniello, *Adolescenza come catastrofe. Modelli d'interpretazione psicopedagogica*, ETS, Pisa, 2002.

end. But roots in the present are fundamental in order to face up to the transformations and go through the metamorphosis coming to the fore during one's lifespan<sup>28</sup>.

In our society all those forms of ritualised passage that allowed us to change how we looked at ourselves and discover our limits and possibilities, by passing or failing certain tests, have been lost (suffice it to think of the meaning traditionally given to the first day at work). Therefore, we have to seek a contact with the inner world, which processes the various passages, since while the input and the signals from the outside world may change, we then have to reckon with the sensations, depictions and perceptions that remain constant within man. Body, mind and spirit have to achieve a vital integration in the awareness that a lack of harmony becomes a more or less profound form of unease<sup>29</sup>.

The critical point between inside and outside, between subject and surrounding environment, is what each person must understand and overcome in order to find where to place himself with respect to the change and the reality. Changing form is a necessity which requires these passages to be elastic, the capacity to preserve and leave behind, to risk and be prudent. In order to pass into the various forms to which we are called without *disintegrating*, to face up to the possible fragmentations given by the unforeseen, a great capacity of intuition and imagination is required, safe in the knowledge that there is no metamorphosis without loss or without a least a bit of novelty.

To feel at the centre of one's *operari*, of the definition of one's ways through life and of the risk inherent in choice itself leads to two different horizons: the first is that of a strong subjective dimension in which the uncertainty of the context leads to a projectuality increasingly concerned with one's own needs and desires, fuelling increasingly intricate and complex choices with a large amount of the *hypothetical* in order to not mentally anticipate the result of our decision; the second is that, in this never-ending movement, the spaces for *freedom of action* and *autonomous decision-making* are expanding. It is a process made of experiences and alternatives, experiments and increasingly conscious trials; a path through which the uncertainty gradually leads to the conquest of ever wider degrees of freedom.

## **6. The role of formation: a look at the possible responses**

Following on from the establishment of this model of the labour market and worker's role, at this point structural for Italian society, the question that spontaneously arises is if and how has and is education and training

<sup>28</sup> See A. Melucci, *L'invenzione del presente*, il Mulino, Bologna, 1991.

<sup>29</sup> See M. Waddell, *Inside Lives. Psychoanalysis and the Growth of the Personality*, Routledge, New York, 1998.

changing in this scenario<sup>30</sup> characterised by discontinuity and unpredictability? What formation can be given to a subject who needs to learn to manage and sustain the uncertainty?

The problem of change is closely linked to the topic of formation, which contains elements of dynamicity and plasticity, and is characterised by transformation, openness and variation<sup>31</sup>. It is absolutely necessary to define a formative model which specifically takes into account the period in which we are living in order to respond to the problems that young people, as well as many other categories, are experiencing today. In recent decades, there has been a renewal in pedagogical thought, which has become more attentive to the 'complexity' that lies behind the cognitive processes, and this has given rise to «a *new idea of formation* that is more dynamic, dramatic even, dysmorphic (and conflictual), as well as a *concept of form* that is less hypostatic, less rigid and abstract, less generalising and modelling, in order to instead come to a "living" vision of form, which is built in the process, which is never completed»<sup>32</sup>, which is always subjected to re-organisations, revolutions and redefinition.

Indeed, from the pedagogical point of view, formation cannot allow itself to reduce to a unit an extremely complex reality such as that embodied by man, articulated at different levels which cannot be put into a hierarchy, comprising social, affective, cultural and psychic dimensions, each with its own importance. In the other human sciences it is conceivable to separate man into his different components and study their specific characteristics, fragment him and 'section' him in order to isolate his various aspects. However, this is something that pedagogy cannot do. It cannot allow itself to break the original unity: this would dissolve its specific characteristic as a discipline which thinks of how to act *on* – and *with* – man, of what type of formation to offer to his entire being, of which single form to «move him to»<sup>33</sup>.

This takes knowledge and formative practice to a level of extreme complexity, since they have to bear in mind and give answers to the most radical problems, in the awareness that no human formation can avoid thinking of a subject, that specific subject, with all his distinctive features, to enable the subject to understand *what it means to him/her to be a man/woman*.

The necessity to continually change work places and times requires an outstanding ability to develop planning strategies and problem-solving skills and an inclination towards innovative models<sup>34</sup>. The work entry sys-

<sup>30</sup> See M. Callari Gallari, M. Ceruti, F. Cambi, *Formare alla complessità. Prospettive di educazione nelle società globali*, Carocci, Rome, 2003.

<sup>31</sup> See R. Fadda, *Forma, formazione, mutamento*, in F. Cambi, E. Frauenfelder (edited by), *La Formazione. Studi di pedagogia critica*, Unicopli, Milan, 1995.

<sup>32</sup> F. Cambi (edited by), *Nel conflitto delle emozioni, Prospettive pedagogiche*, Armando, Rome, 1998, p. 10, own translation.

<sup>33</sup> See R. Fadda, *La cura, la forma, il rischio*, Unicopli, Milan, 1997.

<sup>34</sup> See G.P. Quaglino, *Orientamento, autoformazione e aut-orientamento*, ISFOL, Rome, 2003.

tem is increasingly requesting *ever greater* skill levels for all professional categories, both of a more strictly technical and transversal nature, above all in terms of the capacity to react to change, to work in a team, to be self-entrepreneurs, to recognise the motivations behind our own personal action. If not, we risk exclusion from a labour market process and our particular social context. The necessity is becoming more accentuated to be able to autonomously plan our careers and life paths, while learning how to choose our goals for professional growth and, linked to these, to plan out our formative experiences and action in order to make our professional profiles marketable. This means that both the school and university education sector and vocational training need to come up with an attentive and conscious response, which can accommodate the subject's needs and respond to the trends in the world of work. The increasingly evident request for specialised professionals and workers requires the worker to acquire more and more new knowledge and competences, an objective that requires continual refresher and formative activities on his part<sup>35</sup>. These courses of learning are often followed autonomously, which makes it crucial to be able to establish our educational objectives and choose the most suitable experiences, hence very often workers turn to individualised forms of career and personal growth guidance<sup>36</sup>. Associated with this type of process – as Delors also clearly highlights<sup>37</sup> – is the private life outside of work, from which the subject obtains skills and informal learning, which becomes fundamental in the professional world.

In such a situation, formation has the task of filling the sense of emptiness and inadequacy and facilitating the rapid renewal of our way of looking at the world<sup>38</sup>. In order to try to keep check on this sense of breakage, a response has been to structure a formative system that can be a tool supporting ongoing learning. Another has been to boost the motivation to learn autonomously, enabling the person to remould all the know-how acquired informally over time, which otherwise would risk being ejected from paths with an extreme focus on the acquisition of knowledge, into formally recognised forms.

More recently, the theories that have arisen from the postmodern and critical approaches have mainly placed attention on the processes of 'social knowledge-building'. They are processes to which the subject attributes a different meaning on the basis of how he interiorises it, rather than be-

<sup>35</sup> See M.R. Mancaniello, *La risposta ai nuovi bisogni educativi: il ruolo dell'educazione e della formazione*, in P. Orefice, A. Carullo, S. Calaprice (edited by), *Le professioni educative e formative: dalla domanda sociale alla risposta legislativa*, Cedam, Padua, 2011.

<sup>36</sup> See S. Soresi, *Interessi e scelte. Come si evolvono e si rilevano le preferenze professionali*, Giunti, Florence, 2000.

<sup>37</sup> See J. Delors (edited by), *Learning: The Treasure Within. Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century*, UNESCO, Paris, 1996.

<sup>38</sup> See F. Cambi, *Abitare il disincanto. Una pedagogia per il post-moderno*, Utet, Turin, 2006.

ing an acquisition defined from the outside, by an outside reality. From this viewpoint, the emphasis is placed on the dimension of power and the acquisition of power, one of the key processes in self-formation and self-orientation. For a better understanding of this postmodern and critical approach to learning, we must read the knowledge- and self-building process by first of all receiving and creating messages or 'points of view' on the world, created together within communicative contexts. According to the critical approach, we learn through *critical reflection* and by developing our awareness of the knowledge-building processes at the social level, while, according to the postmodern approach, learning is the result of a process of deconstruction and eclecticism. Adult education, self-directed learning, transformative learning, the postmodern perspective and the critical paradigm, attention to the use of narrative methods and the creation of de-structured paths, the return to the subject, and emphasis on the individual experience and the social dimension are the fundamental references of the interactions and dynamics existing between contexts of formation, self-formation, orientation and *self-orientation*<sup>39</sup>.

The necessity to *prepare to learn*, to valorise individual experiences, as well as the need to stimulate reasoning skills and to develop autonomous problem-solving and information-seeking skills, force the world of education and training to progressively destructure previously adopted solutions in favour of a growing contextualisation, upheld by flexible formative approaches which are rich in operational capacities and highly heuristic. It becomes fundamental to be able to recognise and understand the contexts in which we move in a perspective that restores the logic of action research as a pivot and guide<sup>40</sup>. To think in a logic of action research – even more so in a more specific logic of participatory action research – is to guarantee an effective contextualisation of the formative operation<sup>41</sup>: with a criterion of action that deeply transforms the internal dimensions of the formative process, a process that becomes increasingly open, participatory and adaptable, based on the flow of events, whose sense and coherence can only be reconstructed after the end of the experience; with a change that modifies the vision of the formative process at all the key points along the way. It does so:

- *at the level of logic* by moving from that linear, sequential, rational logic and preset goals towards the law of formation as 'opening', as the flow of events. A perspective based precisely on a process built on the relational dynamic and subjective dimension, in which 'ownership' of the formation process is shared equally between the person providing

<sup>39</sup> A. Grimaldi, G.P. Quaglino (edited by), *Tra orientamento e auto-orientamento, tra formazione e autoformazione*, ISFOL, Rome, 2004, p. 23.

<sup>40</sup> See D. Lipari, *Logiche di azione formativa nelle organizzazioni*, Guerini, Milan, 2002.

<sup>41</sup> See P. Orefice, *La ricerca azione partecipativa. La creazione dei saperi nell'educazione di comunità per lo sviluppo locale*, Liguori, Naples, 2006.

the formation and the person benefiting from it, in a circular manner which, during the course of the path, feeds on the work experience gained in order to reprocess it and bring it back to the formative source. This leads to a shared construction, a systemic point of view, a rationality in harmony with the emotions experienced and the sensations felt, a vision made of intuitive ideas through which one's gaze can be cast on a future with a broad horizon, comprising multiple hues. This logic has immediate effects on the method, since it legitimises the use of techniques and tools aimed at recuperating experiences and interpreting them, in terms of both their subjective and interpersonal effects;

- *at the level of needs analysis*, since, with the assertion of the new logic, where the attention of formation shifts to meaning-building and world-interpretation processes, as well as to the role and value of the emotions in knowledge, needs analysis focuses on informal contents and spontaneous actions, so that the single person's experience may become a wealth and heritage of collective reflection and a solution to the problems of the many<sup>42</sup>. This means that the needs analysis must not be separated or untied from the formative process but, on the contrary, must also be a central part of organisational analysis or action research paths, in all the different forms that these can take, without prejudice to the principle that it is necessary to have a knowledge of the context that one is building by acting on its concrete problems;
- *at the planning level*, since the reflections on the difficulty to make forecasts resulting from the rate of transformations and the emergence of the awareness that subjects are dominated more by the emotional than the rational levels leads not so much phases or goals but development for hypothetical work to be placed at the centre. Today time is a *complexified* variable that has taken on a dynamic conception which increasingly tends to follow the various lines of the reflexive and narrative process, while totally lacking the linearity followed by the rational model. Therefore, the formation project assumes an *open sequence of hypotheses*, ideas and concepts that become "*bricole*" or markers<sup>43</sup> along the formative path, which direct and mark the *navigational path of learning*, but only assume a definite form through the elaboration processes implemented as the formative work progresses;

<sup>42</sup> See C. Argyris, D.A. Schön, *Organizational Learning II. Theory, Method and Practice*, Addison-Wesley, Reading (MA), 1996; D.A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* Basic Books, New York, 1983.

<sup>43</sup> «"Briccole" are big poles planted in lagoons and they are used to mark safe shipping lanes for sailors. Those who leave the way indicated by these poles will surely end up running aground in shallow waters. And in the lives of each one of us there exist the navigation poles of education which offer us security as reference points for every decision we make». L. Trisciuzzi, *Elogio dell'educazione*, ETS, Pisa, 2001, p. 11, own translation.



- *at the assessment level*, since by breaking the logic of linearity and the domination of objectives we have to pass from an engineering-like conception of assessment, to one that is focussed on the learning path and process, based on the collection of qualitative rather than quantitative data, and giving central importance to the dynamic created between the components present in the action, between the context relationships and the webs created there.

The moment in which *individual needs* become *the starting blocks* since they are recognised as fundamental in accompanying a subject to live, manage and master the flexibility and uncertainty dictated by current society, and *the context* assumes the role of central variable, education and training can but prepare by thinking of very destructured action processes, hypotheses rather than projects, methodologies, methods and tools that can change as the relationship between the subjects involved in the formative process varies, very much centring on self-formation.

The subject whom today education and training have to look towards and give answers that can produce well-being and security is a subject who has undergone a loss of sense, who is disoriented with respect to the categories of time and space (with no boundaries or limits, except the certainty of death, something which, however, is often hidden even to ourselves). He is fragmented, but also restless and anxious to know what the aspects and the dynamics are that are created in his own formative history, and wanting to rediscover the 'coordinates' of the horizon and direct his path in search of his own *sense*. A pedagogical and formative approach that requires the subject to constantly overlap between *being formed* and *forming himself*, in which, through the *relationship with the context* and through the *representation of his own existential experience*, the subject de-constructs and re-composes himself, giving rise to a dimension of collective growth, in which we can also grasp the universal meaning of our own *acting* and *being*. A formative process in which the subject is the leading player, also in 'unveiling' and clarifying his *future*, by learning to re-organise and re-define his existence on the basis of a profound knowledge of himself and the surrounding reality.

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## Names index

- Albinati E., 116, 130  
Accornero A., 39, 43, 54  
Alanen L., 111  
Alinei M., 39, 54  
AlmaLaurea, 21-22, 35  
Alston Ph., 111  
Amato C., 154  
Ambrosini M., 61, 63, 75  
Amighini A., 75  
Anci Toscana, 75  
Andreoni P.E., 135, 153  
Angioni G., 50, 54, 78-79, 82, 92  
Arendt H., 23, 25-27, 35  
Argentero P., 153  
Argyris C., 152, 154  
Ariès Ph., 10, 127, 130-131  
Aristotele, 97, 112  
Arrighi G., 42, 54  
Arriola J., 154  
Asquer E., 127, 130  
Baldacci M., 120, 130, 132  
Ballone F., 154  
Bandeira De Ataide Y.D., 85, 93  
Bandini G., 13  
Baronio G., 75  
Batini F., 154  
Bauman Z., 19, 35, 75, 87-88, 92, 117, 130, 136, 154  
Baxandall M., 84, 92  
Becchi E., 99, 111  
Beck U., 141-142, 154  
Bellatalla L., 124, 130, 132  
Bendix R., 41, 54  
Benelli C., 154  
Benevene P., 154  
Benhabib S., 86, 92  
Ben Jelloun T., 70, 75  
Bentham J., 18, 49  
Bertoni Jovine D., 96, 111  
Betti C., 124-125, 131  
Beverez N., 47, 56  
Billari F., 138, 154  
Bloch M., 46, 54  
Bobak M., 138, 155  
Bocca G., 23, 35  
Bodei R., 35, 146, 154  
Boeri T., 68, 69, 136, 154  
Boffo V., 7, 11-12, 15, 36, 39, 161  
Boll F., 50, 56  
Bologna S., 16, 20, 22, 29, 35-37, 39, 42-43, 47, 54, 56, 61, 74-75, 118, 122, 128, 130-132, 136, 140, 142, 148, 154-156  
Bonazzi G., 42, 51, 54  
Bonetti S., 75  
Boscolo G., 85, 93  
Bottai G., 124  
Bourdieu P., 131  
Braghin P., 120-122, 131  
Braverman H., 51, 54  
Bravo A., 129, 131  
Brunetta G.P., 128, 131  
Bruno A., 31, 37, 45, 49, 55-56, 78, 93, 124, 129, 132, 147, 154  
Buber M., 35  
Burgalassi S., 145, 154  
Butera F., 29, 35  
Buttitta A., 79, 92  
Buzzi C., 142, 154  
Caggiano V., 154  
Caillé A., 17, 18, 35, 36  
Calabrese O., 127, 130-131  
Calaprice S., 150, 156  
Callari Gallari M., 149, 154  
Callea A., 154-155  
Calvino I., 88, 97, 112  
Cambi F., 147, 149, 154  
Cammelli A., 22, 35  
Cancrini A., 21  
Cancrini L., 21

- Cao-Pinna M., 122  
 Capussotti E., 128, 131  
 Capuzzo P., 118-119, 127-129, 131, 133  
 Carbone A.E., 75  
 Carchedi F., 72, 75  
 Caritas Migrantes, 61, 64, 75  
 Carlotto M., 116, 131  
 Carullo A., 150, 156  
 Casalini M., 130-131  
 Cascioli A., 154  
 Casini Benvenuti S., 75  
 Castel R., 50, 54, 88, 92  
 Castillo S., 53-54  
 Castronovo V., 128, 131  
 Catania D., 83, 92-93, 155  
 Catarsi E., 124, 131  
 Causarano P., 7, 11, 13, 39-40, 46, 51, 53-55, 161  
 Cavalli A., 142, 154-155  
 Celentano A., 129  
 Cella G.P., 47, 54  
 Censi A., 107-108, 111  
 Ceruti M., 149, 154  
 Chandler A.D., 48, 54  
 Charlot B., 53-54  
 Chiosso G., 124, 131, 163  
 Chirinos M.P., 24-25, 27, 36  
 Chrisman J.R., 53, 56  
 Ciminelli M.L., 83, 92  
 Cipolla C.M., 45, 54, 102, 111  
 Cirese A.M., 79, 84, 86, 92  
 Clifford J., 83, 85-86, 92  
 Coin F., 75  
 Colombo Dougoud R., 82-83, 92  
 Comenius, 23  
 Commare G., 83, 92-93  
 Comune di Firenze, 66, 75, 76  
 Contini M., 16-17, 36  
 Corradini I., 137, 155  
 Covato C., 99, 111-112  
 Crainz G., 117-120, 127-131  
 Cunningham H., 100, 110-112  
 Curcio R., 116, 131  
 Dal Corso F., 153  
 Dal Lago A., 69, 75  
 Dalla Zuanna G., 74-75, 138, 154  
 D'Andrea D., 85, 93  
 Dei F., 40, 55  
 Del Gobbo G., 7, 11, 13, 77, 162  
 De Lillo A., 142, 154-155  
 Delors J., 150, 155  
 Del Sarto G., 154  
 De Martino E., 20  
 deMause L., 98, 111  
 Demetrio D., 139, 155-156  
 De Monticelli R., 154  
 Desmet H., 89, 93  
 Dewey J., 19, 36  
 Dewitte Ph., 66, 75  
 de Witt G., 29, 35  
 Dezio F., 116, 131  
 Di Bello G., 102, 112  
 Dickie J., 121, 131  
 Di Giovanni 36  
 Dippo D., 44, 56  
 Donati P., 142, 155  
 Dondi M., 119, 132  
 Donne J., 7, 137, 153, 155  
 Dota F., 75  
 Dubet F., 48, 57  
 Duby G., 127, 130-131  
 Elias N., 45, 55, 98, 112  
 Elster J., 146, 155  
 Engels F., 71  
 Esping Andersen G., 138, 155  
 Esposito R., 36  
 ETS, 45, 55, 77, 85, 93, 98, 112, 125, 131, 133, 147, 152, 156-157  
 European Commission, 22, 36  
 European Union, 60, 73  
 Fabbri L., 155  
 Fadda R., 149, 155  
 Falossi L., 40, 46, 53-55  
 Famiani M., 155  
 Farina G., 74-75, 142, 155  
 Farina M., 74-75, 142, 155  
 Federighi P., 36, 44, 55, 161  
 Ferrari L., 136-137, 153, 155  
 Figeat M., 53-54  
 Filograsso N., 124, 131  
 Fiocco G., 120-122, 132  
 Fiorucci M., 75

- Fistetti F., 17-18, 36  
 Foa V., 130, 132  
 Foucault M., 31, 36, 45, 49, 156  
 Franceschini G., 163  
 Fratini C., 45, 55  
 Frauenfelder E., 149, 155  
 Freire P., 73, 75  
 Friedmann G., 49, 51, 55  
 Frisch M., 68  
 Fumagalli A., 154  
 Galfré M., 53, 55  
 Gallie D., 155  
 Gallino L., 34, 36, 115-117, 132, 136, 155  
 Gambi L., 43, 55  
 Gardner H., 22, 36  
 Garibaldi P., 136, 154  
 Geertz C., 85-86  
 Gennari M., 19, 36  
 Genovesi G., 124, 130, 132  
 Giallongo A., 125, 131  
 Gilli G.A., 46, 55  
 Ginsborg P., 121-122, 127-129, 132  
 Giovannini P., 40, 42, 53-55  
 Godbout J.T., 36  
 Gonella G., 124, 131-132  
 Gozzini G., 46, 55  
 Greinert W.-D., 53, 55  
 Grimaldi A., 151, 155  
 Guedj F., 51, 55  
 Habermas J., 93  
 Hegel G.W.F., 24  
 Heidegger M., 31  
 Hengst H., 106-107, 112-113  
 Hitchcock M., 81, 93  
 Hobsbawm E.J., 41, 55  
 Horn G.-H., 52, 55  
 IDOS, 61, 64, 75  
 Indrieri M., 155  
 IRPET, 76  
 ISFOL, 149, 151, 155-156  
 Isnenghi M., 119, 132  
 ISTAT, 72, 155  
 Italia Lavoro, 76  
 Jedlowski P., 20, 36  
 Julia D., 111  
 Karpe I., 84, 92  
 Kechiche A., 68  
 Kenney P., 52, 55  
 Kets De Vries M.F.R., 36  
 Khawatmi R., 66-67  
 Kilminster L., 45, 55  
 Klapisch-Zuber C., 112  
 Kopp M.S., 138, 155  
 Kriedte P., 49, 55  
 Krugman P., 36  
 Lacaita C.G., 120, 124, 126-127, 130, 132  
 Laffi S., 143, 155  
 Lambertucci P., 137, 155  
 Landes D.S., 45, 48, 55  
 Laporta R., 86-87, 93  
 László K.D., 137-138, 155  
 Latouche S., 18, 36  
 Latour B., 84, 93  
 Lavine S., 84, 92  
 Leal E., 93  
 Le Goff J., 45, 55, 98, 112  
 Leroi-Gourhan A., 79, 93  
 Linden van der M., 40, 57  
 Lipari D., 151, 156  
 Littler C.R., 46, 55  
 Livraghi R., 36  
 Locke J., 23  
 Lombardi M., 76  
 Lucassen J., 42, 55  
 Lyotard J.-F., 18, 36  
 Macinai E., 7, 11-13, 95, 112, 162  
 Magnani N., 76  
 Maifreda G., 49, 55, 129, 132  
 Malyutina S., 138, 155  
 Mancaniello M.R., 7, 12-13, 135, 147, 150, 156, 163  
 Mancuso V., 36  
 Manghi S., 144, 156  
 Mania R., 36  
 Mannucci A., 163  
 Manoukian S., 83, 92  
 Marescotti E., 124, 130, 132  
 Mariani A., 45, 55, 77, 93, 156  
 Marin U., 108, 112  
 Marmot M., 138, 155

- Marshall G., 127  
 Marsh C., 155  
 Martin A., 31  
 Marx K., 10, 24-25, 70-71  
 Massa R., 154, 156  
 Mattei E., 127  
 Maturana H.R., 142, 156  
 Mauss M., 17-18, 36  
 McClure A.F., 53, 56  
 McLennan G., 41, 56  
 Medick H., 49, 55  
 Melucci A., 145-146, 148, 156  
 Mennell S., 45, 55  
 Meyrowitz J., 43, 56  
 Milani L., 125-126, 131, 133  
 Mina (Mazzini M.A.), 129  
 Ministero dell'Interno, 71-72, 74, 76  
 Mock P., 71-72, 74, 76  
 Modugno D., 129  
 Monti C., 155  
 Morin E., 19, 144, 156  
 Moritmer J.T., 156  
 Mortari L., 31, 37  
 Mounier E., 16  
 Mucia Batz J., 82, 93  
 Mumford L., 45, 56  
 Muñoz Vila C., 110, 112  
 Musso S., 40, 56  
 Natoli S., 18-19, 37  
 Naville P., 52-53, 56  
 Negri A., 40, 56  
 Nove A., 116, 132  
 Nowotny H., 47, 56  
 Nunes E.J.F., 85, 93  
 Nussbaum M.C., 12, 34-35, 37, 42, 56  
 Nuti V., 102, 112  
 Occhiuto A., 123, 132  
 Oliviero S., 7, 11, 13, 115, 125, 127, 132, 163  
 Onetti A., 37  
 Orefice P., 44, 55, 78-80, 85, 93, 150-151, 156, 162-163  
 Orsenigo A., 156  
 Pace F., 22, 37  
 Paci M., 156  
 Pajak A., 138, 155  
 Pancera C., 99, 112  
 Pappadà G., 36  
 Parasassi M., 122-123, 125, 132  
 Pavan A., 37  
 Pazzaglia L., 124, 131-132  
 Pedon A., 154  
 Perchiazzi M., 154  
 Pirenne H., 112  
 Perulli A., 45, 56  
 Peterson A.C., 156  
 Pigenet M., 53-54  
 Pikhart H., 138, 155  
 Piore M.J., 48, 56  
 Pittau F., 65  
 Pizzi N., 129  
 Polanyi K., 17-18, 138, 156  
 Polster E., 156  
 Porcheddu A., 147, 156  
 Postman N., 112  
 Pourtois J.-P., 89, 93  
 Presbitero A.F., 75  
 Presley E., 129  
 Prost A., 50, 56  
 Pugliese E., 61, 66, 68-69, 76  
 Pulcini E., 21, 37, 85, 93  
 Quaglino G.P., 149, 151, 155-156  
 Qvortrup J., 105-107, 112  
 Ragazzini D., 45, 56, 124, 132  
 Raimondi F., 76  
 Ranieri M., 8, 13  
 Rapini A., 126-127, 132  
 Regini M., 42, 56  
 Revelli M., 49, 56  
 Reynaud B., 47, 56  
 Reyneri E., 135-136, 156  
 Ricciardi M., 76, 97, 112  
 Richard J.-L., 28, 32, 66, 143  
 Richiardi M.G., 75  
 Richter D., 98, 112  
 Ricoeur P., 16, 37  
 Rigotti F., 37  
 Robert J.-L., 50, 56  
 Roche J., 112  
 Rossi B., 37, 142, 155, 157  
 Rossi G., 37, 142, 155, 157  
 Roth J., 41, 56

- Rousseau J.-J., 23  
 Rovelli M., 76  
 Ruffolo G., 122-123, 125, 132  
 Russo P., 124, 132  
 Sabel C.F., 48, 56  
 Salais R., 47, 56  
 Salavec G., 138, 155  
 Salvati M., 48, 56  
 Salza U., 108, 112  
 Sansonetti A., 116, 132  
 Santamaita S., 124, 132  
 Santoni Rugiu A., 40, 50, 56, 125, 133  
 Sapelli G., 50, 56  
 Sarracino V., 77, 93  
 Sartori G., 19  
 Sassatelli R., 118, 133  
 Sassen S., 63-64, 76  
 Sayad A., 69, 76  
 Scabini E., 142, 155, 157  
 Scarpellini E., 118-119, 128, 133  
 Schenke A., 44, 56  
 Schlumbohm J., 49, 55  
 Schön D.A., 32-33, 37, 152, 154, 157  
 Schuknet L., 56  
 Semeraro A., 112  
 Sennett R., 28, 32, 37, 83, 89, 143, 157  
 Sgammini P., 155  
 Silva C., 7, 11, 13, 59, 71, 76, 162  
 Silver B.J., 42, 56  
 Simon R.I., 44, 56  
 Smith A., 24, 37, 51  
 Smorti A., 157  
 Socrates, 31  
 Sorcinelli P., 126, 132-133  
 Soresi S., 150, 157  
 Soubiran-Paillet F., 53-54  
 Spesso R., 123, 133  
 Stedman Jones G., 41, 56  
 Strozza P., 74-75  
 Taccolini M., 40, 56  
 Tanzi V., 53, 56  
 Tassinari G., 124, 132-133  
 Taylor F.W., 29, 51, 93  
 Thery M., 157  
 Thompson E.P., 41, 56  
 Timi F., 116, 130  
 Tobin J., 111  
 Tolomelli M., 118, 130, 133  
 Tomei G., 155  
 Totaro F., 23-25, 37  
 Touraine A., 48, 57  
 Tranquilli V., 97, 112  
 Trebisacce G., 45, 55  
 Tremelloni R., 122-123, 126  
 Tripier M., 66  
 Trisciuzzi L., 99, 112, 152, 157  
 Tronto J., 31-32, 37  
 Ulivieri S., 13, 98-99, 111-112, 163  
 UNESCO, 90, 150, 155, 163  
 Vaccaro C.M., 155  
 Varela F.J., 142, 156  
 Varni A., 126, 132-133  
 Vasapollo L., 154  
 Veerman Ph., 102-103, 113  
 Veglio O., 136-137, 153, 155  
 Vergani E., 76  
 Vidotto G., 153  
 Vigorelli E., 121  
 Vindt G., 51, 55  
 Viozzo P.P., 110-112  
 Virzi P., 116  
 Vogler C., 155  
 von Hayek F., 17  
 Waddell M., 148, 157  
 Weber M., 20  
 Wieviorka M., 48, 57  
 Williamson O.E., 42, 57  
 Wintersberger H., 106-107, 113  
 Zaninelli S., 40, 56  
 Zappaterra Z., 8, 13  
 Zeiher H., 106-107, 112-113  
 Zeitlin J., 48, 56  
 Zelizer V., 107, 113  
 Zucca G., 155  
 Zwahr H., 40, 57





STRUMENTI  
PER LA DIDATTICA E LA RICERCA

1. Brunetto Chiarelli, Renzo Bigazzi, Luca Sineo (a cura di), *Alia: Antropologia di una comunità dell'entroterra siciliano*
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