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### “A Dance without a Song”: Revolt and Community in Furio Jesi’s Late Work

**A**s Furio Jesi was revising his views of festivity and revolt in the 1970s, a broader political shift was taking place around him: the classical workers’ movement was fragmenting, its claim to represent proletarian life and experience was withering, its revolutionary horizon inwardly collapsing.<sup>1</sup> This implosion, of which the period between 1969 and 1978 in Italy was exemplary, would eventually empty the Left’s capacity to imagine or believe in revolution in a totalizing way. In what follows, I suggest that the mutation in Jesi’s theory of revolt from a positive to a negative festival “devoid of metaphysical stakes” can be read as an uptake and response to this epochal collapse of classical revolutionary politics. By contrast with the account of revolt presented in *Spartakus: The Symbolology of Revolt*, in which revolutionary ideology still plays a structuring role, the theory of negative festivity developed in the 1970s appears much more in sync with our current era, in which revolts proliferate in the absence of the long-term visions that previously supplied their animus and intelligibility. In hindsight, *Spartakus* might even be counted among the last testaments of a metaphysical politics, a fact all the more fitting in that it was published only posthumously.

The shift from positive revolt to negative festivity alters the ethical and political stakes for the mythologist, provoking a new strategic orientation to violence that aims no longer to embrace and channel myth into history but, rather, to deactivate it. Whereas the perspective adopted in *Spartakus* remained tethered to mythic time and its exceptional power of destruction—itsself predicated on the power to harness and channel the suspension of historical time through authentic proletarian myth—Jesi’s work from the 1970s no longer regards Myth as a terrain over which insurgents can stake out a claim to authentic access. Rather than affirming the logic of exception that pulls Myth and history apart in the hopes of becoming Myth’s purifying lightning rod (as with the “double Sophia” theory in *Spartakus*), the task of Jesi’s “mythological machine model” is to deactivate the machine that presides over this disjunction as such. Where Myth in its essential substance is concerned, we must learn neither to affirm nor to deny but to say that it “not-is there [*ci non-è*],” a posture designed to empty the subjectivizing machine of Western politics of its power to wrench us outside of ourselves. In this way, Jesi’s late work opens up a new epistemopolitical vista: instead of seeking to resurrect and harden the withering coordinates of political-ideological subjects of history, our orientation must be toward an anarchistic deactivation of grounds, a *destituent* practice of revocation and desertion.

In this respect, it makes perfect sense that, in the early to mid-1990s, when Giorgio Agamben went in search of a gesture by which to deactivate the sovereign ban relation that enjoins us to live our lives as if they were bereft of form, and which he would later identify with the Pauline *hōs mē*, or “as not,” it was precisely Jesi’s *ci non-è* that supplied the model. For this reason, a clarification of the stakes of Jesi’s late theory of negative festivity, including its connection to the ethical aporias of partisanship and revolt, contributes likewise to deepening the philosophical archaeology of destituent power.

My argument proceeds in three parts. First, I show why Jesi’s initial effort to respond to the dangers of mythic fascination through his theory of a “double Sophia” fails, provoking a new theoretical and ethical approach. Next, I show how Jesi’s concept of negative festivity alters the terms of his earlier theory of revolt, generating a new theory of solidarity attuned to an era in which positive images of human community are lacking. Finally, I show how the “double-outcome method,” and its insistence that myth *ci non-è* (not-is there), aims neither to affirm nor to renounce the mythological machine of revolutionary politics but, instead, seeks to deactivate the very operation of the apparatus that constructs mythological subjectivity in us, allowing the machine that presides over it to be exhibited and emptied of its power.

## Revolt and Eternity

At first glance, the argument of Jesi's *Spartakus* might come across as a celebration of revolt's messianic "now-time" against the long-term causal and historical time of revolution. After all, does Jesi (2014: 142) not say that, "in its hyperbole of the dominants of bourgeois consciousness, revolt constitutes the only effective overcoming of bourgeois society, culture, and spirit"? However, this reading misconstrues the intention of the text, which is in fact to offer a sympathetic critique of the "autonomizing" undertow of revolt as a subjectivizing event (see Aarons 2019).<sup>2</sup> For Jesi, the eruption of revolt suspends both everyday life and the preparatory project of revolution, and it does so in much the same way that mythic time bisected and interrupted historical duration in premodern societies: by grounding profane rituals in the "stilled time" of quasi-eternal symbolologies. To appreciate how this work sets the tone for his late theory of festivity, we must look past the beauty and power of its spirited and lyrical phenomenology of revolt to the cautionary argument that undergirds it. While it is good and right to sympathize and admire the power of revolt—and, better still, to join in—Jesi wants us to see that the source of its power also contributes to its weakness, yet not for the reasons traditionally given.

If the social and historical phenomenon of revolt cannot be adequately understood by reference to the ideological or material factors that condition its emergence, this is because its event-like structure effects a symbolic transformation formally analogous to mythic epiphany. Since revolt arrives with the force of an event and therefore upends and disjoins any direct link between revolutionary strategy and the causal mesh of historical forces, the internal dynamism and strategic limits of a revolt can never be understood by attending merely to the initial political premises of the fight, whether these are material-causal or ideological. Revolts always develop their own internal rhythm and logic, and their distinctive phenomenological mutation ensures that they remain, to a greater or lesser degree, irreducible to the "reasons" their participants might originally have offered for why they first threw themselves in.<sup>3</sup> To think that one has deciphered the truth of a revolt by studying the institutional contradictions that catalyzed it, or the background and identity of those that threw themselves into its vortex, will only guarantee that one remains at a comfortable distance from the truth. The solution to the danger that revolts present to their participants must be discovered from within the events themselves.

Although *Spartakus* opens with an affirmation of mythic consciousness as a reservoir of subversive energy, Jesi is quick to note that our political

modernity has proven dangerously adept at capturing this energy within morbid and instrumentalized expressions, the better to deactivate its revolutionary potential. The riddle to which the event of the Spartacist uprising attests lies in the possibility of a *true* experience—to the point of death—of a false myth. If it failed, this is in part because the meaning of the battle (the sides to be taken, the ends of the conflict, the sites accorded strategic importance) remained organized around “non-genuine” myths of the exploiting class that, despite their falsity, nevertheless exerted over revolutionaries the “dangerous power of effective myths” (Jesi 2014: 73).

Whenever the reservoir of mythic experience is unleashed (or provoked) into political upheavals, there is a risk that it induces a collective mutation of experience that I have called an “insurrectional ban structure,” a distinctive phenomenological combination of dissociation and hypermobilization that operates like a double-edged sword, since it allows rebels to take up the fight autonomously, “now or never,” at the same time as it invites dangerously sacrificial forms of identification (Aarons 2019). On the one hand, revolts introduce powerful mutations in the structure of experience that have the capacity (for example) to empty out the strategic and ideological office of the vanguard party, replacing it with a freely willed street-fighting assemblage, or what I have called a “decisional commune.” The decision to take sides and hurl ourselves into the battle suspends the reign of atomizing separations that compose the normal time of urban pacification, unleashing a shared epiphany that crystallizes itself in a free and collective use of the city oriented around the partisan confrontation with “*the enemy*.” At the same time, the event-like power of revolt is inseparable from its tendency to autonomize itself from historical time, a trait common to mythic symbols. Once the perceptual machine of the event sets in, “only the symbolic components of the ideology . . . are truly perceived by the combatants” (Jesi 2014: 53); from this point forward, all that appears does so with a symbolic force unlike that of normal semiotic experience. As Jesi writes, “the clash of the revolt distills the symbolic components of the ideology that has put the strategy in motion, and *only these are truly perceived* by the combatants” (53). In this claim lies one of Jesi’s most original phenomenological insights: revolt is at once a form of hyperoperativity *and* inoperativity, at the same time, albeit at different levels or registers. It is immersive not despite but precisely *because* it is also tone-deaf or muted at another level. Revolt symbolizes perception, but not without suppressing or “muting” other features of experience, namely, the long-term planning and causal reasoning typical of formal vanguardist parties. The experience of continuity with the world that informs Jesi’s stirring account of

the free appropriation of the city is premised on a discontinuity and amputation of the experience of historical duration. On the one hand, revolt generates an immersive continuity between self and world, thought and gesture, individual and collective (as some friends put it, “the situation has form” [Invisible Committee 2017: 14]). At the same time, the mode in which the given becomes participable depends on the withdrawal or discontinuity of the symbols that condition it. It is this internal tension between continuity and discontinuity, participation and dissociation that makes Jesi’s phenomenology of revolt so original and powerful.

At the center of this theory lies Jesi’s (2014: chap. 2) claim that revolt enacts a “suspension of historical time.” It belongs to the nature of the event that, for its participants, revolutionary ideology ceases to be a description of historical processes and becomes a static perceptual matrix that arrays friend and enemy around us in a “stilled” now-time. For committed partisans like Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, who enter the fight with clearly defined values and ideologies, the event of revolt does not dislodge or liquidate their existing identifications, but precisely hardens and transfixes them. The semiotic materials carried up into this experience thus come to define the symbolical plane of the battle, now transposed into the quasi eternity of mythic time.

It is important to recall that Jesi identifies revolutionary subjectivity with historical time, the time of long-term planning and preparation, the time of the party, of propaganda, political education, and revolutionary discipline. The ideological coordinates and self-understanding of the Spartacist league belong to this history as well. When the event of revolt erupts, it does not suppress the contents of history but operates rather like a collective perceptual machine “crystalizing” historical concepts, signs, and imagery into symbols that the temporalizing energy of the event lodges within the stilled time of Myth. Through this process, the historical revolutionary episteme of images, discourses, and projects is transformed into mythological materials that no longer appear as contingent, ephemeral products of this or that episode in history of class struggle but, rather, as ontological and even moral or theological determinations in terms of which all choices must now answer.<sup>4</sup> It is in this uptake, however, that counterinsurgency also drives its wedge and that false myths propagated by the bourgeoisie about the source of its own power—and reflected in the revolutionary consciousness that allows itself to be defined through their “opposition”—are able to creep in.

Wherever they become “subject to the indisputable power of fascination exerted by their capitalist counterpart,” insurgents will “strive to counter it by transforming themselves into organs that are basically similar to those

that characterize capitalism” (Jesi 2014: 67). This fascination, this ruse of symmetry directly impacts what takes place on the ground in political upheavals: once subjected to the epiphanic undertow of insurrectional symbolization, the selection of targets to be prioritized—ordinarily, a strategic calculus—can easily wind up delineated “within the ambit of symbols and pseudo-myths” propagated by the bourgeoisie about itself, such that “the institutions of capitalism appear to the exploited as non-contingent symbols of power” (67). Thus do revolts descend into Manichean bloodbaths for which partisans are willing to risk it all, come hell or high water.

The final texts of Liebknecht during the days prior to his murder offer a painful record of this process: every object, every act has become the symbol of an eternal battle waged now and forever between Humanity and its inhuman enemies. Liebknecht no longer speaks from within history; his words have been transposed to a plane of quasi eternity: “[The Spartacists] have spilled blood for a sacred cause, and their blood has been sanctified. From every drop of it avengers will emerge; from every frazzled fiber new fighters for the mighty cause will grow, a cause as eternal and as unfading as the firmament. The defeated of today will be the victors of tomorrow” (Liebknecht [1919] 2012: 123). According to Jesi, Luxemburg and Liebknecht perished from an incapacity to “dissociate” their “I” from the symbolic plane of *the* battle. Only this fusional engagement with the event can explain why the two remained in Berlin instead of taking the advice of nearly all their comrades and fleeing: “Luxemburg could not totally dissociate revolt from revolution. She could not totally dissociate the Spartacist revolt from her person. . . . Like a spell, it placed before her—she who had been such an incisive investigator of the economic structure of capitalism—the adversary as a demonic enemy” (Jesi 2014: 89). Where the strategic horizon of perception allows itself to be transposed onto a moral plane of eternity, even the most intelligent and dedicated partisans can be lured into relating to themselves as sacrificial “heroes”: “Dangerously underestimat[ing] the strength of the adversary,” they hurl themselves into battle in a “concentrated expenditure of energies . . . that could almost be regarded as a spasmodic preparation for triumph or death” (86).<sup>5</sup>

In the final analysis, the suspension of historical time in revolt does not suffice to point the path to a revolutionary overcoming of bourgeois civilization, for two central reasons: the energy of revolt depends on its tendency to separate and isolate itself from history, which (a) exposes it to capture within counterrevolutionary mythosymbolic forms and (b) ensures that any asymmetrical “uses” and “rhythms” that it is ultimately able to develop remain subtracted from the referential totality of everyday life.<sup>6</sup> Extraordinary feats

can be accomplished during an uprising, but it is exceedingly difficult to extend and continue this subversive energy into the duration of history and thereby render it habitable. Yet given that the experience of suspended time is not an aberration but an endemic phenomenological feature of uprisings, one issuing as much from within the depths of consciousness as from the relational dynamics on the ground, the task for insurgents cannot be to avert or avoid epiphany altogether, which would only condemn us to a reconciliation with the status quo. Nothing is more useless than a critical theory or philosophy that enjoins proletarians to disavow or denounce acts of mutiny, sedition, and rebellion. However, for those who seek to liberate a destituent potential from such polarizations, it cannot be enough to expose all the cynical maneuvers through which constituted powers (or constituent usurpers) co-opt and recuperate uprisings externally. A central lesson handed down to us by Jesi is that the danger of recuperation arises not simply from without but already from within.<sup>7</sup> The central task of any critical symbology must therefore be to neutralize the *religio mortis* (religion of death) that endangers uprisings internally, and above all for their most fervent devotees. Between 1969 and 1978, Jesi experimented with several approaches to this task. In what follows, I consider two of these: the theory of a “double Sophia,” which seeks a purification of mythic experience, and the mutation this theory underwent during the 1970s, from which emerged both a new theory of negative solidarity, or “espionage,” and a “dual outcome” epistemology that, I suggest, served as an early precursor to a destituent strategy for deactivating apparatuses.

### Weaponizing Myth

And again Sansai asked the Light Apostle: this world  
 where mankind lives, why does one call it birth-death?  
 —The Book of Giants

The event of revolt leaves the human psyche strewn between two worlds: it detonates the atomized walls of private life, but only at the price of walling insurgents once again into an otherwise closed perceptual experience. This is the inner darkness, the guilty secret of revolt that requires a mythologist such as Jesi to unearth and exhibit. How can philosophy and mythology contribute to dissolving the fascination with technicized symbols of bourgeois power? What relation to self, to language, and to action would allow actors to neutralize the undertow of the mythic ban not retrospectively but from within the chaotic throes of an upheaval?

Whereas revolt deactivates historical experience by transforming perceptual and ideological materials into symbols, the aim of the theory of double Sophia is to think the possibility of a revolt that would sustain its contact with history. Jesi was seeking a practice of self that allows insurgents to welcome, incorporate, and give consistency to the shattering of the I in moments of rebellious destruction, while limiting the excesses of its ban structure. If we can nullify our symbolic image of ourselves, perhaps we can sustain the concussion of the event's caesura without losing contact with the extended duration of historical time. In this way, we could limit not only the extent of our defeats but also our victories.<sup>8</sup> Only a technology of self that is capable of consciously accessing an immanent experience of self-abolition that remains in contact with its own historical being can accomplish this.

Whereas Luxemburg's fate attested to the dangers of mythological hyperidentification, the double Sophia is designed to help us disidentify with ourselves in the moment of conflict, not so as to flee the field of battle but so as to twist free of the traps that our own self-image holds in store for us.

At face value, the problem is aporetic: since mythic epiphany is defined precisely by its decommissioning of history, what could it mean to connect this experience to historical duration? Are we not dealing with two distinct phenomenological modes of experience? What could be the common point of intersection, the connective operator by which to forge a circuit between the destructive energy of the event and the duration of historical time?

(I ask the reader's indulgence for the next two steps of the argument, as Jesi's path is slightly winding.)

In *Spartakus*, Jesi locates this original common denominator between mythic time and historical subjectivity in the intimate consciousness of death. In previous epochs, it was the experience of death, approached through the "immobile hour" of emotion "abstracted from historical time" that served as the individual's point of insertion into an objective process of collective transfiguration. The elimination of this experience in the modern age provoked an irreparable loss of a traditional symbolic form facilitating an ordinary human experience of self-overcoming, one symptom of which is the characteristically modern tendency to treat the question of death as a principally subjective problem. The void left in its absence helps to explain the "dangerous and culpable" success that political ideologues have had in enlisting the irrational and unconscious components of the popular psyche in the service of sacrificial symbols of national or class interests. To the humanist Jesi, the solution to this danger—to which his former mentor, Károly Kerényi, had assigned the term *technicized myth*—lay in "purifying [the subject's] relations



with the irrational from all interest" (Jesi 2014: 156).<sup>9</sup> It is this immanent consciousness of death, which knows itself as historical precisely in the moment of mythic self-immolation, that Jesi termed *double Sophia*.

The search for a common element or point of intersection between the two universes of history and myth, life and death, leads Jesi back to a duality in human consciousness:

The self-conscious I is not a proper object of life, progressively eroded by death; rather, it is the synthesis of the element common to life and death. . . . The I, in the moment in which it is conscious of itself, is also permeated with death, and its sinking into death continually takes place during what we usually consider to be the life of man. The I therefore knows life and death, permanence and self-destruction, historical time and mythical time together. (Jesi 2014: 149, 157)

If the existential functioning of the I always-already exhibits both the constant historical process of self-identification (life) and the immobile stillness of self-effacement (death), then the twin temporalities of history and myth can find their common root in the synthetic character of consciousness. However, whereas archaic man drew from his emotional experience of the death of consciousness the intuition of an eternal present, one that allowed him to sever his relation to history by forcing the dissolution of the I to allude to mysterious realities that lie beyond, for modern man the task of the double Sophia is to actively affirm its own dissolution while maintaining conscious contact with its historical component. Jesi's preferred metaphor for such self-immolation is drawn from Rainer Maria Rilke (1993: II, 12): "Who pours forth like a spring is by knowledge herself known."<sup>10</sup> In this case, *pouring forth* refers to "destroying oneself in opening up to the reality that discloses itself in emotion" (stilled time of myth), while the conscious attention introduced by the double Sophia ensures that this destruction precisely maintains the dimensions of identification and preparation proper to the I (preparation being, of course, a distinguishing feature of historical time).

How Jesi imagined this working is not terrifically clear. The idea seems to be that, by consenting to its own self-destruction, consciousness participates simultaneously in mythic and historical time, resulting in what Giorgio Agamben (1996: 6) would later describe as a form of "disillusioned divination." If the divination in question here is a consciously disillusioned one, this is because its use of myth points not toward a renewed mysticism but toward a practical disidentification. To not leave itself disarmed, to remain in a waking state, double Sophia must hold fast to the preparatory time of historical

duration while transforming its meaning: history now becomes a site in which the I enters into an initiatory “preparation for death” (Jesi 2014: 160). Yet whereas mysticism traditionally tends toward the annihilation of the will by its submission to a foreign power that takes control of it, with the double Sophia the will remains essentially present and engaged. The subject “participates in a conscious way in his own expropriation and witnesses, like an initiate, his own self-abolition” (Agamben 2019: 1053), a cognizant mode of participating in one’s own nonknowledge.

The double Sophia does not simply maintain contact between myth and history but aims also to reverse the direction of their relation. Instead of mythic time decommissioning the experience of historical duration, so that the truth of ourselves and of the battle is sought and lived through the eternal “now” of the symbol (the mythological machine is full), the double Sophia directs its *religio mortis* toward the destruction of the apparatuses that sustain historical structures of meaning, so as to clear a path for new ones (the mythological machine is empty).<sup>11</sup> Here the point of reference is no longer Eliade but the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin, for whom riots and revolt served as a battering ram against the course of history, with the attendant belief that the destructive drive is also a creative one (Jesi: 2014: 166). In this way, the act of destruction becomes the element common to both mythic temporality and historical duration. Once insurgency becomes not an affirmation or realization of a preexisting identity (the working class, the subaltern, etc.) but a projectual *Untergang*, a down-going, the subject is able to preserve herself at the threshold between stilled time and historical time. Since the destruction retains its negative valence, the double Sophia equips the insurgent to enter the event of *the* battle without losing herself in the eternity of archetypal identification. The riot, the clash of the battle, is regarded as an opportunity not to strengthen and affirm our historical destiny or our constituent title to sovereignty but, rather, to atheistically prove the emptiness of what such machines have to offer.

The theory of the double Sophia signals Jesi’s effort to place mythic time in the service of an ethics of insurgent self-abolition. Instead of treating revolt as the occasion to affirm or fulfill a social vocation, Jesi invites us to assume the position of a witness to the dissolution of the recognitive schemas and dispositives that model our knowledge-of-self. As Andrea Cavalletti distills it, what is in question is not a sacrifice of one’s life *tout court* but “a sacrifice and self-destruction [only] of the subject’s *bourgeois components*” (italics mine; Cavalletti 2021). Self-suppression appears as a ritual that prepares the way not for a dictatorship of the working class but for a new human community. The

arrival of myth in history no longer operates as a grounding force; rather it operates as a wind of destruction. Rather than holding fast to our symbolic identities, we attend to their suppression with open eyes: we let them go but remember them at the moment they are washed away. In this way, we extend the “waking state” of revolt into history, identifying ourselves (in two directions) with the destruction *in* history of the roles and vocations to which it has consigned us. Revolt becomes a violent refusal of all fixed representations of the self, one that clings to history precisely in order to attack its claim over us with the full force of the death impulse Mythic time carries within it.

By contrast with his later studies of festivity, it is important to note that this schema still relies on the sky of Myth. The difference is that, because the act of destruction now plants its feet in historical time, the energy released by mythic experience is both grounded and channeled as if by a lightning rod. Mythic time is not deactivated but purified, not demythologized but restored to its authenticity. In this, the theory of double Sophia belongs squarely within the humanist period of Jesi's thought, in which proletarian myth still envisions its restoration and purification into an image of properly human community wider than anything the workers movement could offer. In 1969, as the Hot Autumn ramped up all around him, Jesi believed the road to such purification lay in a hyperbolic destruction.

Despite the evocative maneuvers that accompany it, the double Sophia suffers from a number of serious limitations and obstacles. First, it is difficult to avoid the impression that, in the final account, *Spartakus* leaves the oppositions of revolt/revolution and myth/history unresolved, rendering the notion essentially incoherent.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the very term *double Sophia* indicates its status as torn between contradictory elements. Every attempt to bridge the two worlds only reproduces their separation at another level: in place of two extrinsic temporalities each carrying its own more or less coherent mode of subjectivation (suspended time/normal time), the subject finds itself traversed by the punctual overlap of two contradictory threads, neither of which allows a coherent experience.

Second, we are never able to understand how revolt allows us to make the pivot from suspending time to its reorganization or reconstruction, which would open onto a different form of duration than that of bourgeois time. For this, it is not enough to construct a bridge between mythic and historical time, especially if this ultimately means sustaining their separation at another level. The machine must be severed at its root.

Finally, it is difficult to avoid the impression that the strategy of the double Sophia was outfitted for a period in history in which we no longer

live. By taking as its model the Spartacist rebellion rather than May '68, Jesi's model plants itself within a period in which a metaphysical conception of action still obtained: acts appeared to their agents as grounded in ideal projections and programs, positive ends that governed the experience of social and political transformation.<sup>13</sup> In other words, the schema of *Spartakus* retains the conception of revolution proper to 1919, predicated as it was for the Spartakus League and the Kommunistische Arbeiter-Partei Deutschlands (KAPD) on robust and generally coherent ideological visions of workers empowerment and social transformation (factory committees, peasant soviets, proletarian communes, workers' democracy, etc.). The program was in hand, if only one could navigate the gauntlet of revolt. As Jesi would himself soon conclude, we no longer live in such a time.

### The Negative Festival

At certain moments in history, the proletariat has risked its own destruction . . . and this in exchange not for any present or future power, but against all power. This doesn't enter into any dialectic, forever unnameable, but somewhere this energy of death still appears today in the mockery of all institutions, revolutionary ones included, which thought they'd buried it.

—Jean Baudrillard, *The Divine Left*

Beginning in the early 1970s, a new problem creeps to the fore in Jesi's work: what becomes of revolt once the ideological matrices and revolutionary strategies drawn up by the proletarian and decolonial programs of the twentieth century fragment and implode? This question not only will push Jesi to develop a new strategic approach to disarming the sacrificial pull of revolt but also will serve as a key factor motivating his search for a new methodology for the study of Myth and man, a "mythological (and anthropological) machine model" (Jesi 2019: 1014).

In addition to forming the problem par excellence of anthropology in the twentieth century, the problem of the knowability or unknowability of festivity in non-Western cultures brings into relief a structure of feeling and experience that Jesi will shift to the center of the revolutionary problem today.<sup>14</sup> On the one hand, the archaic festival offered an immediate collective experience of the world, a visionary restoration of, and entry into, the "single world or 'cosmos' in which its adherents participate" (Kerényi 1964: 163).<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, festive acts and gestures can only be realized provided they are first transposed to an "other" plane of experience subtracted from the plane of

everyday life and economic rationality. The significance of the archaic festive machine lay in its peculiar way of fusing the problem of community to that of the event, establishing a durable link in the unconscious of our species between epiphany and collectivity, diremption and solidarity. Whereas many of his twentieth-century contemporaries (Whitehead, Simondon, Deleuze, etc.) embraced the category of the event as an antidote to the hylomorphic metaphysics of substance, for Jesi it is precisely through the ecstasis of event-like experiences that festivals evoke grounds for community. In this regard, what must be explained is not how a field of perceptual differences comes to be subsumed under a generic unifying ground or principle (the classical question of the *pros hen*) but how the diremption and alterity specific to evental time can itself become the conduit through which visions of a common life arrive to us as if from elsewhere. Far from being the signal of an-archy, the suspension of everyday life serves as an indirect path for installing an *archē* for the human community.

So much for the archaic festival. But what happens when myth recedes? The central premise of Jesi's mature theory of festivity is that the ancient link between epiphany and derogation still persists today but has undergone a qualitative displacement. Our time is marked by an exhaustion of the symbolic resources for genuine collectivity, all of them subject to a perpetual colonization and capture by bourgeois culture. Although the manifold crises and contradictions of our time continue to engender tumultuous ruptures in the fabric of history, their origination in a social and political context deprived of the joyful experience of collectivity leaves them "devoid of allegorical implications or metaphysical symbolism" (Jesi 2021: 49). It is for this reason that, in the opening pages of his 1976 *Il Festa*, Jesi characterizes our time not as postfestive but as the age of the "cruel festival" (49). As Mattia Schiavone (2020) notes, the cruel festival names any experience that "refers to the authenticity of the real festival, but only to highlight its present impossibility." Examples offered by Jesi include catastrophes such as disasters and pandemics, but also insurrections, such as the Milanese bread riot-turned-lynch mob in Alessandro Manzoni's *Betrothed*. Of course, negative or catastrophic festivity is by no means unique to our time. Both the plague in Lucretius's *De rerum natura* and the Lisbon earthquake in Voltaire were cruel festivals, for in them was "excluded *a priori* the possibility—peculiar to the festival—of taking part in the free play of the gods" (Jesi 2021: 52). However, in a manner analogous to the state of emergency in Agamben, Jesi suggests that in late modernity the cruel festival has ceased to be a marginal historical case and instead has become the primary paradigm through

which suspensions of historical time are experienced. This displacement from the margins to the center signals both a continuity and a rupture with the authentic festivity of epochs past. On the one hand, the fact that the cruel festival is still a festival and not a catastrophe pure and simple means that it retains an essential reference to the ancient festival, even as it denatures and cancels its conditions of realization. On the other hand, the addition of the term *cruel* indicates that festivity has changed its sign, that it has ceased to be a reservoir of social rejuvenation and has become something closer to a mutilation or capture into which the psychic life of mass events and crises tends to become ensnared.

That our time is unable to produce durable images of collective life does not erase the passion for community and continuity within us. As a result, we still look to the interruption of historical time for signs of an other life. *Cruelty* here refers less to the empirical fact of pain than to the absence of a path for such drives to be realized. It is as if our search for community were marked by a sort of tragic unnaturalness, a prolapsed impulse spinning idly in the absence of the conditions for receiving it. Anyone who has ever found herself looking to catastrophes, riots, or pandemics for an experience of collective contact otherwise unavailable has felt something of this cruel expectation. As Jesi (2021: 51–52) writes, “As for our attempts to adapt to mirages of a festival of our own—almost as if such mirages were latencies to be actualized—, they can only bring us to ‘something dead, grotesque even,’ resembling the performances of those who might insist on dancing not only having lost their hearing, but in the objective absence of music.”<sup>16</sup> What does it mean that the cruel festival is the “empty mold” of the authentic one? Although deprived of its conditions of fulfillment, the gnoseological web of the archaic festival still imposes itself on collective outpourings of emotion nonetheless. Mass suspensions of history continue to occupy the same position within the economy of psychic life assigned to them by archaic society, but these events are today experienced as withholding a mysterious secret, inviting their most fidelitous devotees to dive ever deeper into them in the hopes of forcing them to “show that which cannot be seen” (Jesi 2008: 118). As a result, any time the crises of our day reach the point of suspending historical time, we recognize that we are supposed to dance but the song remains inaudible, since all that can appear must assume the dead or artificial form of “merchandise subject to appraisal” (Jesi 2019: 1005).

If the global cascade of uprisings over the past decade must likewise be characterized as a series of cruel festivals, this is because, in spite of their rich practical ingenuity and tactical intelligence, the truths that propel them

are overwhelmingly negative. As Sean Bonney (2015) put it, today's riots are "a work of vast and incomprehensible mourning." From Tahrir Square to Gezi Park, from Hong Kong to Minneapolis, contemporary uprisings are mass experiences of perceiving the intolerable; however, they have proven unable to oppose the humiliation and depravity of this world with asymmetrical symbologies of their own. While the ideological slogans and imagery of last century's revolutionary tradition are still trotted out by a zombified Left, the visionary experience these afforded in their day has long since dried up: a dance without a song. Today's far Right *and* far Left both traffic in "ideas without words," a motley assemblage of slogans, catchphrases, and symbols treated by their devotees as autointerpretive, despite the total absence of any substantive prophetic or visionary content. It is enough to witness the desperate lionization of American democracy by young insurgents battling the Chinese Communist Party in Hong Kong, the nonsensical evocations of "insurrection" after the right-wing riot at the capitol building in Washington, DC, on January 6, 2021, or evocations of the French Revolution during both Occupy and the Yellow Vest uprisings to recognize that radical politics today has become an "atmosphere . . . that does not ask to be 'understood' in any sense" (Jesi 2011: 140; see also Manera 2019).

By usurping the place occupied by revolt in *Spartakus*, the theory of the cruel festival signals the definitive closure of the humanist phase of Jesi's work. With it, any hope of leveraging a purified myth in service of a rupture with bourgeois society is abandoned.<sup>17</sup> This abandonment calls for a new understanding of the relation between violence and solidarity, one suited to a postideological epoch.

### Solidarity as Espionage

The disappearance of revolutionary horizons presents a conceptual problem for Jesi's phenomenology of revolt. As we saw above, in the presence of a revolutionary program, the eruption of revolt does not liquidate but hardens and transfixes existing social and political vocations. The sacrificial fascination and hyperidentification that claimed Luxemburg's life was the result of living one's ideology symbolically in crystalized form. How does this crystallization proper to suspended time express itself in the epoch of the cruel festival, in the absence of a durable revolutionary episteme?

In "Knowability of the Festival," Jesi describes a mutation in the visionary character of festivity that (it seems to me) allows us to venture an answer (Jesi 2021). Under the regime of cruel festivity, solidarity with one's peers no

longer stabilizes through the crystallization of preexisting revolutionary roles and identities but is now forged and discovered in and through the act of plunging the bourgeois order into otherness. Jesi's term for this mode of partisan apprenticeship, this solidarity discovered through violent subtraction and disorder, is *spiability*.

Jesi's theory of espionage originates in an effort to account for the disposition of those "civilized" ethnologists who, lacking any noncruel capacity for festive experience of their own, use their observation of the festivals of "savages" to deduce indirect truths about their own humanity (Jesi 2021).<sup>18</sup> Although the aim of traditional ethnology was to produce the distinction and contrast between the "savage" and the "civilized," this purportedly scientific endeavor also concealed another ambition. According to Jesi, what the civilized "spy" seeks is a new mode of relation to the collective experience that he no longer enjoys with his peers, as well as a new knowledge of self that is proffered therein. Generally speaking, true knowledge of self always demands a form of self-distanciation, the capacity to "split oneself and face one's 'I' (self) as if facing an *other*" (Jesi 2021: 90). At the same time, for those moderns who know only cruel festivals, "nobody [is] truly *alike*, but only 'formerly alike'" (65). Espionage bridges these two insights: what the ethnologist seeks is a perspective sufficiently removed from his life from which to develop a solidarity with his "semblables." By spying on the festivals of others, "modern man has set about finding his own 'civilized' peers, turned into *others*, through the 'savages'" (66). Solidarity in the modern world depends on a circuitous deconditioning of our relation to ourselves, a reprieve from the burden of "having to be." In short, by plunging the known world into otherness, the apparatus of spiability converts alterity into a mediating circuit by which democratic man can recover and validate images of human community. Only in this way can he imagine deliverance from the burden of his atomized social identity.

How does this theory of a "solidarity through espionage" inform our understanding of revolt in our current era? Although Jesi's premature death prevented him from fully developing this connection, I wish to propose one possible interpretation.

It is not entirely precise to say, as Schiavone (2020) does, that "the condition of the cruel festival is that of a shared pain or condition that we nonetheless cannot share." The sharing of pain in revolt can produce a sense of community—it does so precisely by "plunging the other into disorder" (Jesi 2021: 70). The other in question here is not a "savage" community but, rather, the oppressive bourgeois order that sustains our atomized I. In such guilty or death-driven sequences, solidarity is rooted not in a mutual recognition based



either on preexisting social identities or on ideological aspirations of insurgents but grows within the negative hollow opened up by a nonrecognition of the bourgeois world from which one is actively decivilizing, which we spy upon from the elsewhere of the event. The cruel festival names a condition, therefore, in which intimacy with one's semblables is measured only through the depths of disorder introduced in concert with others.

The machine of spiability that configures this cruel solidarity has two fundamental valences, depending on whether the contents plunged are assigned positive or negative value: Is the machine empty or full? Are we dealing with a war festival or a peace festival? Let us consider two case studies that, through their diametrically opposed orientations toward the mythic ground of community, allow us to bring into negative relief the twin poles of the mythological machine of revolt.

In his 2018 study *Hinterland*, Phil A. Neel argues that what distinguishes revolutionary antagonists, or “ultras,” from the third positionist far Right is not the commitment to a material and pragmatic conception of power (shared by both) but the contrasting “oaths” that define how each engages in struggle. Whereas the far right “oath of blood” is rooted in an exclusionary ecotribalist vision of communitarian autonomy (white people “restarting the world” by returning to their “kindred roots” in nature or European culture), Neel’s (2018: 154–55) proto-communist “oath of water” is defined by nothing other than a “fidelity to unrest itself,” the “inclusive flowing unity of those who wish to push the rift open, to spread it further, to extend it longer.” For Neel, any and all action “taken on behalf of a ‘community’ to be defended or actualized” belongs to the war festivals<sup>19</sup> of the far Right—the mythological machine is empty, and it is time partisans turned their backs on it. Consequently, if we wish to affirm the festive fervor of near-hinterland revolts like Ferguson, Missouri, only one posture toward the battle remains: revolutionaries must pledge themselves to destruction itself, to the party of anarchy that “seek[s] nothing but further erosion, the growth of the flood” (155). To avoid being swept into the symbology of white American machismo, communist ethics demands an atheistic oath.

In precisely inverse fashion, members of the Liaisons collective theorize the insurrection of the Gilets Jaunes in France as an authentic recovery of “savage” festive experience. By contrast with both the anesthetizing separation of democratic life (where partying is merely one more means of forgetting) and the “strategic machines” of left- and right-wing unions and political organizations (which insist on affirming their historical vocations and symbols), the Yellow Vests developed a politics of “inner experience”

understood as a decivilizing suspension of historical vocations by authentic mythic time (Liaisons 2018). As the authors explain, “The families birthed through the roundabout occupations are in themselves a new experience of the world that coincides with the suspension of social having-to-be, giving place to a feeling of fusion (in this suspension) between space, time, and the bonds formed therein”—a fusion for which participants were “ready to die” (292–93). Drawing explicitly upon Jesi’s concept of espionage, Liaisons (2018) argues that the Yellow Vests in their roundabouts quite simply *are* the authentic savages that the ethnologists (today’s politicians and media) spy on with a mixture of condescension and longing. In their “immediate experience of revolt,” in which beings are no longer connected by “exterior aims” or ἀρχαί but by a “pure medium,” the Yellow Vests announce return of the true peaceful festival in which “having to be” is suspended. If there is a cruelty in question, it lies not in the disappearance of the horizon of revolution today (the fact that “the more the word is chanted, the less we understand it”), or in the movement’s grotesque retrieval of the symbology of 1789. The cruelty, according to Liaisons, does not affect the inner truth of the festival but, rather, enters only later, when the state represses the movement through brutal violence, forcing it back into the historical plane of democratic political strategy and dual power (296).<sup>20</sup> The mythological machine is full.

We see here two basic dispositions toward the community evoked by the suspended time of revolt, arrayed like the prongs of a binary machine. Whether we identify or disidentify, believe or disbelieve, there are risks either way. The recognition of these risks serves as a practical introduction to Jesi’s destituent methodology.

What is the meaning of the “void” that the machine guards behind its impenetrable walls? When we believe in its secret—when we say Myth is *there*—the true community becomes something we spy upon only within the walls of the machine: it is a “family” discovered only through our exceptional subtraction from history.<sup>21</sup> Whether on the roundabouts or in the riot, the positive bond lived in revolt emerges only by first subtracting itself from the spatiotemporal conditions for consistency, and to this extent, it exists only under the sign of loss and defeat: “In order to remain a tradition, the tradition of the defeated must stay defeated” (Liaisons 2018: 302). When the repression sets in, and one is forced to choose between a regressive affirmation of democratic-constituent politics or a postfestive nihilism, the faithful have no choice but to live through the memory of the epiphanic images, or else to prepare for new suspensions, a process that will repeat itself indefi-

nately as long as victory is imaginable only as permanent revolt, as “indefinitely prolonged interruption of time” (308).

By contrast, seeing in the affirmation of community only an affirmation of the status quo, Neel's oath of water accords no truth to the visionary world afforded by revolt, asking only after the means to throw the vortex of unrest open ever more widely. On this negative or faithless prong of the machine, the danger is that, by stabilizing myth's inaccessibility, we ultimately reinforce our dependency on the apparatus of festivity by dint of its absence. In keeping with the Western practice of “appropriating what one no longer manages to feel” (Coupat 2020: 14), Neel's atheistic refusal of the war festival pledges itself to a community it is unwilling to name or even experience except negatively, reducing the common to a promise positioned on the other side of a wall of fire (“guns cocking over trap snares unrolling to infinity” [Liaisons 2018: 175]). To posit the emptiness of the mythological machine—to declare that it is not there—does not liberate us from the need of myth. It merely staves off our hunger for it, without delivering that after which we long: “The machine becomes itself a form of nourishment, while the subject starved for myth can never reach that *other* object of nourishment, the very lack of which sustains his appetite for it” (Jesi 2008: 112). The symbolic emptiness of bourgeois power, Jesi (2021: 90–91) cautions us, might even turn out to be the “camouflaged” secret of its parodic survival: “Alluding to an unmoved prime mover, precisely in order to be disbelieved, thus inducing belief solely in them, in machines, voids, barriers”.

Deprived of its ideological banister, the oath of water leaves insurgent consciousness with nothing other than a consciousness of death and destruction. Without an autonomous proletarian symbology capable of introducing another dynamic, the search for another idea of life and community can find no other outlet than in the violence of riots, blockades, and clashes. Nothing is more exemplary of this danger than the interviews taken over the summer and fall of 2019 in Hong Kong (PBS 2020) in which the rebel youth who transformed the glittering cityscape into a months-long war zone speak feverishly of their “readiness to die” for their cause, despite being convinced of its probable futility. Their passionate testimony serves as a cautionary portrait of the *religio mortis* of the insurrectional ban structure in the age of the cruel festival—a fact not lost on certain participants in the movement, who, citing Jesi explicitly, observed that “the popular slogan taken from Hunger Games, ‘if we burn, you burn with us’ is a perfect demonstration of this policy of mutually assured destruction” (Chuang 2019).<sup>22</sup>

## Nonknowledge of Revolt

How can theoretical practice disarm the forced choice thrust on us by the mythological machine? By contrast with the epistemological imperative of Jesi's humanist phase, which sought to reconcile myth and history, the mythological machine model works to exhibit the void on which this division rests. In this, it offers a radically different approach to the deactivation of the insurrectional ban.

As we have seen, both the affirmation and the negation of the "void" concealed by the perceptual machine of revolt only result in our deeper dependence on it: "Neither revolt nor revolution contradict on a conceptual level the model proposed by the mythological machine" (Jesi 2019: 1015). What is needed, Jesi (2021: 69) argues, is a "dual outcome logic" that renders this choice indifferent, thereby forcing the machine to spin idly: "The knot is severed." Such a logic should not result in the production of a new knowledge but should proceed through a practice or gesture eliciting a "nonknowledge" of what the machine offers. Nonknowledge refers neither to ignorance nor to atheism, nor is it designed to unearth subjugated counterknowledges relegated by the machine to the margins. Rather, it is a question of deactivating the forced choice on the existence or nonexistence of Myth or human nature per se, thereby restoring to anthropological and mythological discourse the "singular modalities of non-knowledge that constitute the incised form of their objectivity" (Jesi 2008: 77). Faced with mythological images and symbols that appear to arrive to us as if from elsewhere, we must learn to say of the "common place" to which they allude neither that it is there nor that it is not there but that it not-is there (*ci non-è*). Where the case of revolt is concerned, the aim of the gesture is to deactivate the power of epiphanic images to sequester the experience of community either behind the walls of the event, or out of reach altogether. Dual outcome logic aims to release us from having to decide on the existence or nonexistence of what the encounter confronts us with: is the festival a reality (an otherness foreign to us), or is it merely a fiction produced by the ethnologist who seeks unconsciously to use it to rediscover "solidarity with his peers"? While deactivating this alternative might not suffice to inaugurate an other properly destituent sense of commonality between us, Jesi's ethics of nonknowledge gets us halfway there, by exposing the machine that mutilates any possibility of "acceding to our own festival" here and now, with our peers. It is undoubtedly for this reason that Jesi's *ci non-è* gesture served as the explicit precursor to Agamben's destituent concept of the *hōs mē*.

Furio Jesi's name makes no appearance in volume I, 2.I, or 4.I of *Homo Sacer*, where Agamben's theory of the state of exception is first fully developed, or in *The Time That Remains*, wherein his revised conception of revolutionary violence and time receives its most sustained treatment to date. However, Jesi surfaces at a decisive juncture in an often overlooked preparatory study for these works, titled "The Messiah and the Sovereign." First delivered as a lecture in Jerusalem in 1992, Agamben's (1999: 174) aim in the essay is to distinguish sovereign violence, as typified by the state of exception, from a messianic violence that, while "belong[ing] to historical time and its law," manages nonetheless to "put an end to it." How, Agamben asks, can we think a messianic response to the state of exception that would be *in* historical time without being identified with it? Is it possible to think the appearance of "another world and another time" within this world, without surreptitiously reproducing a relation of exception between them? It is in the course of searching for such a "bi-unitary figure" of time that Agamben interrupts his commentary on Benjamin and Scholem to draw the linchpin of his argument instead from Jesi, citing the latter's 1972 essay, "A Reading of Rimbaud's 'Bateau ivre.'"

The central problem posed by Jesi's work in the mid-1970s, and which Agamben takes over from him, concerns the possibility of thinking a violence that dislodges historical time neither by alluding to nor transposing us into, an extrahistorical world but by deactivating the social vocations that make such otherworldly allusions necessary in the first place and that prevent us from "acceding to our own festival." As Agamben (1999: 168) wrote:

One of the paradoxes of the messianic kingdom is, indeed, that another world and another time must make themselves present in this world and time. This means that historical time cannot simply be canceled and that messianic time, moreover, cannot be perfectly homogenous with history: the two times must instead accompany each other according to modalities that cannot be reduced to a dual logic (this world / the other world). In this regard Furio Jesi, the most intelligent Italian scholar of myth, once suggested that to understand the mode of Being of myth, one needs to introduce a third term into the opposition "is / is not," which he formulated as a "*not-is there*" [*ci non è*]. Here we are confronted not with a compromise between two irreconcilable impulses but with an attempt to bring to light the hidden structure of historical time itself.

Although Agamben makes no mention of the urgency of overcoming the opposition between revolt and revolution in this talk, a short introduction

accompanying Quodlibet's 1996 reissue of Jesi's "Rimbaud" essay foregrounds the issue clearly:

The entire text proceeds along an unresolved opposition between revolt, which is always the experience of a suspension of historical time, and revolution, which is instead defined as the complex of actions directed at changing a determinate situation *within* historical time. To the opposition revolt/revolution corresponds that between "this world" and the "other world" produced by the "mythological machine" . . . the ineluctability of which condemns both revolt and revolution to shipwreck.<sup>23</sup>

While it is not possible to develop a full interpretation of the destituent logic of revocation here, suffice it to say that, by exposing the machine that presides over the opposition between revolt and revolution, between suspended time and historical time, it is Jesi who most directly sets the stage for the strategy of messianic deposition that Agamben will fulfill in his deployment of Gustav Guillaume's theory of operative time, itself likewise intended to subvert this same opposition.<sup>24</sup>

By retracing this conceptual lineage from Jesi to Agamben, my aim here has been to restore the theory of destituent power to its original matrix of problems within the revolutionary tradition, that is, to the fraught relation between revolt, community, mythic time, and violence. In addition to allowing the urgent political and ethical stakes of Agamben's and Jesi's work to appear more clearly, I have attempted to call attention to the decisive distinction between the suspensive energy of revolt and the destituent revocation that was conceived, first of all, as a means to neutralize and counteract its sacrificial dangers, in the hopes of ultimately outstripping the exceptional logic of revolt entirely. Finally, I hope to have shown how Jesi's late work restores the problem of festivity to its rightful centrality in the contemporary debate over the question of revolution in our present moment. By contrast with those who champion the subversive power of the Event as a moment of vital becoming, of committed fidelity to an Idea, or an instance of radical democracy, Jesi asks us to consider whether the autonomization of time might not instead be a sign of our servility to mythological machines, one last dance to the tune of those other worlds that we've long been unable to hear. As long as our model of emancipatory community depends for its appearance on the exceptional space-time of the Event, the festival will remain the limit-problem of contemporary revolutionary politics.

## Notes

- 1 On the growth and eventual implosion of revolutionary organizations in 1970s Italy, see Balestrini and Moroni 2021.
- 2 The tendency among readers of *Spartakus* recently has generally been to lionize the moment of revolt, while adding a perfunctory caveat that, “of course, one must also demythologize.” Yet the nature and possibility of this task are rarely explained, nor is Jesi’s eventual decision not to publish the book in the first place. In my view, such readings trade on the misconception that the suspension of history afforded by revolt somehow replaces the task of revolution for Jesi, which misconstrues the significance of what his work sought to articulate. Happily, this fact becomes far more explicit in his work from the 1970s.
- 3 On the relation between rhythm and revolt, see Karmy 2020b.
- 4 On the overlap between revolt and theology in Jesi’s work, see Tabacchini 2019.
- 5 In a similar spirit, see Vaneighem 2019.
- 6 Andrea Cavalletti ([2019] 2009: 9) appears to reach the same conclusion: “[Revolt’s] character of pure suspension does not in any way disprove society. Rather, it condemns revolt to failure.”
- 7 Whence the inadequacy of a strategy that depends on a clean distinction between a purely destituent revolt and its constituent deviations. On this distinction, see Invisible Committee 2017: 76.
- 8 Although Jesi does not address it, the double Sophia would, in principle, also aid in warding off the inverse danger of a victorious insurrection that descends into a terror through the spirit of revenge. In this respect, Eric Hazan and Kamo (2015: 107–9) are undoubtedly right to insist on the importance of a “dispassionate” deposition of power that refuses all retributive reprisals. The dispassion in question here presupposes the capacity of revolutionaries to dissociate from the immediate circumstances of the battle (to which reprisals would answer) in order to maintain a long view of revolution as a process, and thereby to release the historical self who needs revenge into the becoming of the event.
- 9 The concept of an “interested” reception of myth already formed a major theme in Jesi’s *Secret Germany* (1967).
- 10 On the metaphor of “pouring forth,” see Kerényi and Jung 1959: 1–4. The image had a slightly different meaning for Kerényi, for whom it was a question of the “right attitude” of the critic toward mythology, which demands a form of familiarity and tact by which we “let the mythologemes speak for themselves and simply listen.” For this, “a special ‘ear’ is needed for it, just as for music or poetry. . . . Here as well, ‘ear’ means resonance, a sympathetic pouring out of oneself” (4).
- 11 I return to this distinction between full and empty machine below.
- 12 This opinion seems to be shared by both Cavalletti and Agamben. By contrast, Chilean philosopher Rodrigo Karmy (2020a) appeals to it as a functional model, on condition that it be read through the Averroist conception of the imaginal.
- 13 The same is true of Jesi’s 1971 article on Arthur Rimbaud, in which the Paris Commune formed the model (see Jesi 2019).
- 14 On Jesi’s position within the anthropological discourse on the festival, see Vallos 2010.
- 15 The same is generally true of Eliade’s work.

- 16 The metaphor is borrowed from Kerényi 1959: 48.
- 17 Already by 1969, the complex relation between revolt and revolution one finds in *Spartakus* required a subtle subversion of Kerényi's more rigid opposition between "genuine" and "technicized" myth. By arguing that the Spartacist rebellion had afforded an authentic collective experience of technicized myth, Jesi revealed the inadequacies of a reduction of political myth to sheer propaganda or organized lying. However, the reliance of insurgents on the grotesque and falsified symbols of enemy power at the same time highlighted the difficulty of rescuing a proletarian use of myth from its colonization and banalization at the hands of bourgeois culture. On Jesi's "faithful transposition" of Kerényi's terminology, see Cavalletti 1999.
- 18 As a fierce critic of the racism implicit in much classical ethnology of festivity, Jesi employs the term *savage* exclusively in scare quotes.
- 19 As Jesi (2021) shows, the contrasting values assigned by ethnologists to "savage" festivity in states of peace versus states of war represent two sides of a single apparatus. Whereas the inoperativity of work and responsibility exhibited in the primitive "peaceful festival" displays (to the I of the ethnologist) the festival's "virtuous" and humanistic tendencies, in the war festival exemplary duties are ritually confirmed and represented, such that "the structure of . . . an exemplary 'having to be' will be *represented* by all in front of all" (74). Such festivals are generally assigned a negative value by ethnology, and tend to verge on unknowability by the civilized eye.
- 20 There is an unresolved tension in Liaisons' argument concerning the status of symbols in this experience of revolt. Unlike the affirmation of social and ethnic vocations that characterizes the far Right "war festival," the authors insist that the Yellow Vests have suspended symbolic self-identifications in favor of the intelligence of the heart. It is this rejection of symbols, combined with an ostensibly "material" insight concerning the institutional rather than personal sources of power, that resolves concerns over Manichaean sacrificial undertow or far right fascist resurgence. At the same time, however, the authors acknowledge the pervasive presence of the mythic symbology of the French Revolution—"the *Marseillaise*, the guillotines, the severed heads . . . the 'people' and 'Macron-King'" (Liaisons 2018: 307)—a symbology they claim was "incarnated in the *roundabouts*." Yet, if there was an incarnation of the myth of 1789, was it not rather in the Saturday riots, fixated as these were on sites of parliamentary authority that appeared to the insurgents precisely (as Jesi cautioned) as "non-contingent symbols of power" (Jesi 2014: 67)? This tension between immanence and transcendence, fascination and fulfillment belongs to very essence of the insurrectional ban structure of revolt, whereby a practical continuity of experience with the world (the decisional commune freely willed by participants) cannot be disimbricated from, or opposed to, the transcendent ecstasy of the symbolic event one commits oneself to.
- 21 "Solidarity is not prior to the struggle, but . . . occurs only with the suspension of having-to-be" (Liaisons 2018: 302, 304).
- 22 A similar concern ought to be raised in regards to the martyrological discourse surrounding, for instance, the state murder of Portland, Oregon, activist Michael Reinhol during the George Floyd rebellion in the United States (see Robinson 2020). On the question of martyrdom, see also Karmy's contribution to this issue.
- 23 Three years later, right around the same time as the first series of *The Time That Remains* lectures, Agamben and Cavalletti (1999) curated a special issue of *Cultura*



*tedesca* dedicated to Furio Jesi, the editorial introduction to which announces the discovery amongst Jesi's papers of the lost manuscript of *Spartakus*.

- 24 On revolt and revolution, see Agamben 2005: 32–36; on operative time, 62–72. On the *hōs me* gesture, Guillaume, and the theory of destituent power in Agamben, see Aarons 2020.

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