



PRAXIS

"Praxis" is perhaps one of the most polysemous lemmas of the Western cultural tradition. In fact, several others correspond to it with a similar or contiguous meaning: practice, habit, use, ritual, exercise, experience, action, work. Each of these lemmas has given rise to often divergent interpretations of praxis, starting from the Aristotelian distinction between praxis and philosophy: «it is also correct to call philosophy the science of truth, because the aim of theoretical science is truth, while the aim of praxis is action» (Aristotle).

Starting from Marx and Engels we appreciate an attempt to reconnect the pole of theory with that of practice, especially in the second *Theses on Feuerbach* when they put forward the question of subtracting theory from a purely speculative field and to rejoin it to the realm of praxis. Praxis though has played an important role not only in philosophy, since its notion has been also linked to a certain way of understanding action and to a more general principle of training which establishes behaviors, habits and actions of individuals and communities. As such, praxis has become a way to experience the happening of real forms of life.

The 20th in particular could be defined as the century in which the problem of praxis has most clearly emerged. Throughout the 20th century in fact, we have seen the emergence of two completely different kinds of experience which, often in an intertwined manner, have sealed the different notions of praxis: the revolutionary experience and the cinematic one. While on the one hand revolutions, such as the Bolshevik and Maoist ones, have been laboratories for a profound reflexive elaboration of praxis, on the other cinema, especially classical Hollywood, could not have gained its relevance without intertwining its cinematic narrative with the idea of praxis. Hence despite their apparent initial opposition, theory and practice can be profoundly interrelated: just as the former could not be without the experience of the latter, the latter could never exist without implying a moment of reflective elaboration.

Theory and praxis are two sides of the same coin. Indeed, each discipline has its own pragmatics, i.e. the exercises it performs to establish or disrupt the habits that give consistency to a

specific form of life. As such, the theme of praxis can be investigated from various points of view, be they conceptual, related to moving images, language, new media, revolutionary or artistic practices, as well as literature.

Starting from this theoretical framework, it is possible to identify some directions towards which orienting the reflection on the notion of praxis.

The cinema of praxis and the praxis of cinema. There is at least a twofold way of understanding the relationship between cinema and praxis. On the one hand we have a cinema that takes on the task of conveying political content, of representing praxis, making it the theme of filmic diegesis. On the other, we have a cinema that becomes a praxis «in reshaping the feelings that inhabit our “primary experiences”» (De Gaetano), as in a transformative exercise of our forms of life.

However, neither one nor the other way has been traveled alone and in the history of cinema there has often been an intertwining between such two dimensions. Can it really be argued that films such as *The Working Class Goes to Heaven* (Petri, 1972) have only a political content, without this also being accompanied by a praxis proper to the cinematographic medium? Exploring the relationship between praxis and cinema means, primarily, confronting the forms that the latter has taken over time and space, as well as with its genres and transformations. If it is true, for example, that American cinema could be seen as guided by the idea of putting praxis into form (Deleuze's action-images), we should also explore the various ways in which these forms have taken body. Comedy, for example, is a genre of great importance as, perhaps more than others, it accompanies, describes, and in certain terms disposes towards the mutations of habits and forms of life, through the characters and spatial constructions, the gap between rural life and metropolitan life, between stasis and movement (the "green world" mentioned by Cavell for the great American comedies of remarriage).

Therefore, as Dewey has argued, if practical experience founds and makes possible conceptual elaboration, as well as the formulation and transformation of our beliefs, cinema proposes itself as the central place of such an operation. In addition to comedy, all genres of cinema reflect and shape the forms of praxis. Because a genre is built on the analogy between individual works, which share similar ways of describing the world and what happens in it. The macro distinction between generic forms first of all concerns – Deleuze states in *The image-Movement* – two forms of praxis ("large" and "small") and their different relationship with the situation. The distinction between "large" and "small" form of action is so important as to be superordinated to the purely rhetorical distinction between genres. There may be more similarities between two "large" action films belonging to two rhetorically different genres than between a "large" and a "small" form of the same genre: *Johnny*

Guitar (1954) by Nicholas Ray is closer to a melodrama (as it focuses on the female figure) than to another contemporary western like John Ford's *Mormon Caravan* (1950) (focused on the community).

Inoperativity and gesture. In the Western tradition the term praxis has been subject to a double process: from Aristotle to Hannah Arendt, it has been placed, in its meaning of "action", at the foundation of politics, surrounded on one side (especially in modernity) by the model productivity of work, and on the other by the work in its ability to transcend time with the production of objects that "last". Rethinking the category of praxis can therefore be configured as an overall deconstruction of the "active sphere" of humans.

By deactivating the means-ends relationship that characterizes both action and being-in-work, «a form of human activity that cannot be reduced to production, praxis or work» (Agamben) becomes visible. A kind of praxis that we could call "inoperative", distinguishing it both from inaction and from the renunciation of any work, and which is configured, rather, as the internal void of each operation, which suspends its determinations, giving back its power to a new possible use.

Furthermore, inoperativity could be translated into a theory and a practice of gesture, a «pure praxis» which assumes and carries out, but neither acts nor produces. This appears right from the articulation of the binomial action-happiness with regard to the great classical forms of tragedy and comedy (Aristotle), and takes on a new statute in cinema which, starting from slapstick in the silent era, from the gesture opposed to the action, from the comic attraction opposed to the narration, from the "pie" opposed to the "chase" (Crafton), lets emerge the fracture between the suspension of the gesture and the effectiveness of the action. Suspensions that we also see in the mimic gestures which are represented by the expressions of the faces, which suffer without being able to react (*The Passion of Joan of Arc* by Dreyer). Or that we see in gestures and ritual practice, in which everyday life becomes a "ceremony", as in much ethnographic cinema (Jean Rouch).

But even in "static" images, painting and photography, we can see all of this at work: in everyday (let's think of pouring milk, sewing, in Vermeer) or exceptional gestures of painting, like the great rhetorical gestures of the imperial figures in Roman art (index fingers or raised arms), or in the meaningful but measured gestures of the Christian art, such as the sacred figures with the hand on the cheek, or slightly outstretched like the hand of the *Annunciata* by Antonello, or even the arms crossed on the lap, etc.. All these gestures indicate an action that has already taken place or is to take place, while no action is in progress.

This all fully concerns the photographic image, suspended between snapshots of everyday life and large symbolic gestures (Barthes), which condense possible actions.

Thinking and acting in the face of catastrophe. One of the themes – if not the theme – of contemporaneity is certainly that of the future catastrophe. Catastrophe, presenting itself as unavoidable and definitive, seems to prevent us from thinking of the future as the space for a possible praxis. If in fact modernity has been characterized by the possibility of imagining the subject of the action projected into a future beyond to be built, often understood in its autonomy and individuality, today it seems more central than ever to redefine the terms of such an agent subjectivity, so like the ways we imagine he or she. The praxis to come, faced with catastrophism, will then have to rearticulate the individuality of action, its closed and autonomous form of life, starting from the cosmos that not only surrounds it, but in which it is itself included and from which it is structurally affected (see Benasayag, Cany, 2022). A movement of this type, from the individual to the cosmos or ecosystem, opens the way to imagination, given the insufficiency of logical-rational elaboration alone, in order to explore the most remote and radical possibilities of the possible, heuristically testing otherwise unexpected affective adhesions. A possible exploration of this theme is linked to the cyberpunk imagery. By imagining the exhaustion of modernity, submitted to neoliberal oppression, in the face of the ecological, economic, political and psychic catastrophe, it attempts to outline the escape routes, otherwise interrupted, from such an imagined future (see Berardi, 2013). In fact, several mainstream cultural products of recent years are going precisely in the direction of cyberpunk, from cinema to television serials, from videogames to literature. Just think, to give a few examples, of the intermedial – as well as transnational – success of works such as *Ghost in the Shell*, *Altered Carbon*, *Ready Player One*, *Cyberpunk 2077*, *Cyberpunk: Edgerunner*, or the creation of a sequel to a cult like *Blade Runner: Blade Runner 2049*. If cyberpunk has been an underground movement for decades, destined for a niche of enthusiasts or cyberactivists, today it seems central to imagine the consequences, if any, that such a generalized explosion imposes at the level of construction of an alternative imaginary and praxis.

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Deadline for the submission of the essay: June 4, 2023

Essays should be expressly written for the journal and should strictly respect the following word limit:

***Focus:* Min 5000 Max 6000 words (including spaces and footnotes)**

***Rifrazioni:* Min 2000 Max 3000 words (including spaces and footnotes)**

Send to: redazionefatamorgana@gmail.com

Redazioni: Dipartimento di Storia Antropologia Religioni Arte Spettacolo - Sapienza Università di Roma -
Piazzale Aldo Moro 5, 00185 Roma • Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche e Sociali - Università della Calabria -
Campus di Arcavacata - cubo 17B V piano, 87036 Rende (CS)

E-mail: fatamorgana.rivista@gmail.com / redazionefatamorgana@gmail.com