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# Anatomy of Autonomy

## Bifo

Franco Berardi, alias "Bifo", was one of the main figures of the Movement of '77 in Bologna. He was arrested at that time under the charge of "subversive association". We asked Bifo to write the following presentation on the context in which the Movement developed and the problems it had to confront up to, and after, the April 7 arrests.

On April 7, twenty-two militants and intellectuals from Padua, Rome, Milano and Torino were arrested. What they have in common is their participation, until 1973, in the group Workers' Power (*Potere Operaio*) which then dissolved and became an element in the movement of *Autonomia*. They were arrested on the charge of leading the Red Brigades, the strongest of terrorist organizations in Italy. And in particular, they are accused of directing the kidnapping and execution of Aldo Moro, head of the governing Christian Democratic party. There are no grounds and no proof whatsoever for these charges. And practically everyone in Italy who has read a newspaper knows it. It is not only false that the militants of Autonomy and the intellectuals arrested on April 7 directed the Red Brigades, but, in fact, the political and theoretical lines of the Red Brigades diverge drastically from those of the individuals arrested. Essentially what is clear in all this operation is that the prosecution—and thus its sponsoring agency, the government—has decided to make this group of intellectuals pay for the last 10 years of mass revolutionary struggle in Italy. The government thinks it can succeed, and that the balance of power may be shifted decisively to its advantage. But we can make no sense at all of the actions taken by the government during these past months if we do not understand at least some things about the political situation in Italy, and about the Italian revolutionary movement:

FIRST: The crisis of Capitalism and of the Italian State subsequent to the workers' struggle during the Sixties.

SECOND: The Historical Compromise, an attempt to get beyond this crisis and to defeat the revolutionary movement.

THIRD: The novelty of the revolutionary movement for Autonomy with respect to the historical Socialist and Marxist Workers' Movement; its theoretical originality and its political praxis, as seen in 1977.

FOURTH: The problem of the civil war, and of the Red Brigades.

The experience of the revolutionary movement in Italy, from 1968 to 1979, is unquestionably the richest and the most meaningful within the capitalist West. To comprehend the novel elements that this experience contains we have to look at the theoretical and organizational currents that come to a head in *Potere Operaio*—until 1973—and are then dispersed and articulated in various organizational forms within "Workers' Autonomy" (*Autonomia Operaia*).

It is precisely because the progress of the workers and of Autonomy constitutes the most interesting and essential element of the entire revolutionary movement in Italy during these 12 years that we should consider the repressive initiative on the part of the judiciary in Padua. It is the Paduan court which was responsible for the arrest of most of the militants and intellectuals who took part in the movement. And the court's action must be seen as a real attempt at a final solution, an attack directed toward the elimination of those forces that constitute the elements of continuity in the history of the revolutionary movement, those forces that have provided the catalyst for very significant theoretical departures.

I. In order to understand the history of the last 10 years in Italy, we must start with the wave of conflicts begun in 1968 at universities and at some factories (Montedison in Portomarghera, FATME in Rome, FIAT in Torino). Spreading then, throughout the following year, in the "troubled autumn" of 1969, the conflict eventually involved all the Italian working class in strikes, demonstrations, take-overs, and acts of sabotage. During those two years of struggle a division occurred between the Left and the Workers' Movement. And in the following years this division produced a variety of organizations to the left of the Italian Communist Party—outside the official Workers' Movement, at the local level, and in the factories and schools.

During the same period, the group Workers' Power (*Potere Operaio*) was formed at the national level; it was composed of smaller groups already in existence: the Workers' Committee at Portomarghera, groups for workers' power in Padua and Emilia, and a part of the student movements at Rome and Florence. In September, 1969, the PO consolidated itself and began publishing a newspaper by the same name.

But to understand the political and theoretical ferment underlying the creation of the PO, we should first of all say more about the new organizational experiments of 1968 and 1969, made by the working class in the larger factories of the North.

For the present we seek to identify the consequences which the class struggle during those years had for the country's economic and institutional equilibrium.

The struggles of 1968 had their greatest effects in the university, where they were waged hand-to-hand by the students and the young (as in most of the world, the West in particular). These struggles forced a definitive crisis for the politics of the Center-Left (an alliance among the Christian Democrats and Socialists) which throughout the 60's had made possible a government founded on the policy of vague reform.

The anti-authoritarian assault by the Movement of '68 made problems and ten-

sions emerge which the Center-Left could not absolutely control. And in a general way the Movement brought the politics of the D.C. under accusation—for being partly responsible for the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie in Italian society and for the nation's dependency on the Church and authoritarian elements.

The Italian Communist Party, meanwhile, maintained an essentially ambiguous link to the movement of the students and the young. While disapproving of their radicalism, and despite the claim to Autonomy from which the movement never wavered, the PCI nonetheless saw an opportunity, in the events of 1968, for breaking the Christian Democratic hegemony and pushing for a displacement of the political balance to the left.

Naturally enough, the vanguard of workers who were organizing in the factories had quite different aims. During those years, in fact, the worker's cause tended increasingly toward bargaining for equality (equally increased salaries for everyone; abolition of piece-work and salary differences; abolition of job classifications and against the interests of production (abolition of promotion by merit, of production bonuses; rejection of accelerated production, etc.). The cumulative effect of the workers' demands provoked a crisis in the economic balance on which industrial development, until then, had depended: that is, the balance between low salaries and intensive exploitation of the labor force, a balance maintained by high unemployment and a large labor supply. An important element in the social scene of that period was the initiation of an organizational campaign among migrant workers from the South. Until then these workers had provided the mass-base for controlling union pressures in the large labor centers; however, between '68 and '69, especially in Torino, they became the mass-base at the forefront of the union struggle (and the base, too, for organized political revolution).

Unquestionably the crisis over political control of the production cycle, and thus the economic crisis of 1970 as well, have their roots in the strength and continuity of this workers' struggle, and in the considerable results achieved by it (across-the-board salary hikes which in 1969 alone, increased labor costs by more than 20%, with continued wage pressures in the following years).

The dominant political class revealed its inability to deal with this struggle. Thus there arose in those years a policy—directed and supported by the D.C.—called the strategy of tension (*strategia della tensione*). This policy amounts to the artificial creation of moments of extreme tension through such means as incidents provoked by fascist groups or by agents that often have direct links to the government's Secret Service. The first large-scale act resulting from this strategy was the assault on the Agricultural Bank of Milano that killed 14 persons on Dec. 12, 1969—at the culmination of the Workers' struggle begun in the "troubled autumn." The bombs were placed (the deed was discovered and denounced by democratic forces, by groups on the extreme left, and by a large number of militant groups engaged in counter-intelligence) by a group of fascists connected to the Secret Service and protected by powerful Christian Democrats. But anarchists were accused of the bombing, and the revolutionary movement came under violent attack from the press and the courts. In the following years, these acts were frequently repeated: in every instance fascist crimes were used as an occasion to accuse the left of violence and to institute repressive counter-measures.

But the Movement was neither broken nor driven back by the "strategia della tensione." In the years following 1970, it grew in new sectors, among the youth and students. And the Movement gained continuity through the formation of revolutionary organizations which arose throughout the country. These quickly acquired the capacity to mobilize people, gathering the remnants of the student movement of 1968, and a segment of the workers reorganized during the struggles of 1969. The strongest of these groups were "Lotta Continua" (particularly among Fiat workers), "Avanguardia Operaia" (entrenched in Milan among workers in large factories and among students), and finally "Potere Operaio" — which was a major presence at Padua, in the factories of Portomarghera, and at the University of Rome.

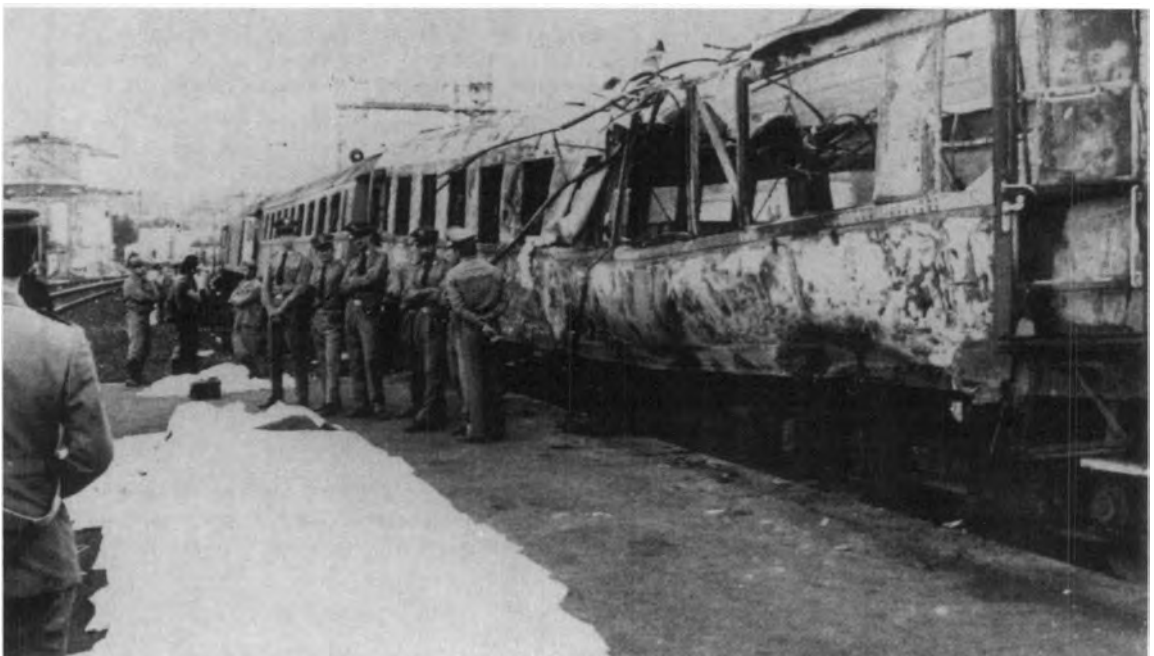
These groups organized in factories, schools, and at the local level (promoting political strikes, the occupation of schools, student demonstrations against the government, and occupation of vacant houses by homeless proletarians — in Rome and Milan especially). They assumed a position of opposition to the Italian Communist Party, which, after decades of Stalinist loyalty, was taking on the characteristics of a social-democratic party and was condemning the most radical working-class and student demonstrations in the name of unity with the middle classes and in the name of a policy of legality and respect for the fundamental rule of the capitalist order.

This position of opposition had already been manifest in 1968, when the PCI had been criticized and superseded by the student movement. And again, in 1969, the methods of the decisive struggle in the factories had been resisted by the PCI. But the antagonism grew more acute and became an open break when, in 1973, the PCI arrived at its choice of a Historical Compromise, that is, of an alliance with the Christian Democrats, and of subordination to the will of Big Capital in the name of economic revival.

Meanwhile other significant events took place that same year. The first was the occupation of FIAT by thousands of young workers. Acting with complete autonomy from union decision-making, they decided to occupy the factory and set up barricades in order to impose their demands for significant wage increases and reduced work loads. Revolutionary groups such as “Lotta Continua” and “Potere Operaio” were a marginal presence in this occupation. Thus within the takeover itself was contained the possibility of transcending those vanguard organizations that had come near to assuming the role traditionally played by the workers’ movement: a role of authoritarian leadership, of bureaucratic intransigence in the face of the passions and the new types of needs expressed, above all, by the young.

The workers had learned only too well to fend for themselves, and they began organizing autonomously. At the same time, the first armed cells began to be formed inside the factories (first in Milano and then in Torino and Genoa). They organized sabotage against machinery, disciplined foremen and guards, besieged the rotten bosses — in short, they brought into being embryonic stages of a workers’ counter-power.

All of Italian society was affected by this extremely vast network of counter-insurgency. After it had broken owner’s control, in the “troubled autumn” of 1969, and assaulted the rule of low wages and intensive exploitation, it began to deal



*directly with political problems — problems of power. But it is also true that the problem of power remained an indissoluble knot in Italy, on the theoretical even more than on the political level.*

What the struggles during all those years actually amounted to was a rejection of the wage-earning system, and a rejection of that exploitation which transforms human life into a working death on credit, forcing people to sell their own lives in exchange for their wages. And this rejection which entered into the social thinking of a culturally advanced proletariat continually better educated and endowed with an ever increasing technical and scientific expertise — evolved into the very real issues of power and liberation.

Labor's rejection of work expressed itself in many ways: the reduction of the work week to 40 hours: the right to rest periods and control over production time; the imposition of a counter-power inside factories; the rejection of the ideology of production; and criticism of the methodology of exploitation. But a more pressing need exerted itself within the struggle; that of transforming these objections into a program for the liberation of existing energies, into a program of self-organization of the production process and of the entire social cycle of production and consumption. In this lay the possibility for a liberation of repressed workers.

During those years the utopia of workers' liberation was a massive driving force, a power for organization and for calls to action. But the ideological baggage of traditional Marxism continues to be borne not only by the official Workers' Movement (primarily that of the PCI) but by the newer groups of the revolutionary left as well. As an ideology based on socialism—and thus on a form of organized social exploitation that is all the more rigid in its domination of working life—traditional Marxism could not contain the forceful energy and, above all, the radicalism which the movement displayed.

At this point, the groups on the revolutionary left itself entered a critical period of their own, and their forms of organization, from the bottom up, began to divest themselves of their own trappings. As a new radicalism expressed itself among the proletariat, especially among the young, these groups began an inexorable process of bureaucratization by which they became the small appendages of the official reform-oriented Workers Movement. They participated in elections, distancing themselves from tactics that could not be reconciled with the old modes of making policy. This new process of radicalization in which Power itself was brought under discussion, was already at work in the occupation of *Mirafiori* (FIAT) which took place in March and April of 1973. It is undeniable that the only ones to take cognizance of the course of this transformation on both the theoretical and political levels, were the militants of Workers' Power. In fact, the PO decided, in May of '73, to dissolve, diffusing itself throughout the committees, collectives and base structures which constitute the extensive network of Autonomy.

## **THE HISTORICAL COMPROMISE**

II. It was in 1973 that the PCI, guided by the lessons of the Chilean experience, worked out its so-called policy of Historical Compromise. The policy was based on the hypothesis that Italy cannot be governed except by an institutionalized political accord between Communists and Christian Democrats. This political "about-face" was already implied at every point along the Italian road to socialism and represented less a radical break with the tradition of Togliatti's PCI than a logical development of it. Yet the consequence of the "about-face" was the further exacerbation of the rupture between the official Workers' Movement (PCI and Union) and the new groups in the factories and large cities, who were organizing at the ground level, consolidating themselves and working together for the social and political realization of Autonomy.

The disputes between the PCI and the Movement toward Autonomy became increasingly more violent during the following years, and in 1975 particularly, when Autonomy emerged as a true mass movement which united young workers, the

unemployed, students, and others living on the margins of society. In Spring of 1975, Autonomy was put to its first test as committee members took on fascists and police in a confrontation in Rome. The conflict spread to Milan, where, in mid-April, a young fascist was killed, as well as a member of the "carabinieri." Thousands of young workers, mainly from small factories, joined with students and unemployed youth and put the inner city under siege, demonstrating and rioting. Other organized demonstrations occurred in Bologna, Florence (where a man was killed by police), Torino, (where a worker at FIAT was killed by an armed guard), and in Naples. These were heated days, in which Autonomy had its first experiences among the masses.

The State recognized, at that point, its principal enemy: Autonomy represented a new level of social organization which no longer accepted the union as a mediating agent, no longer accepted the line of the PCI and its strategy of compromise and acquiescence.

The State replied to Autonomy's efforts during that week in the severest manner: repression, the legalization of police violence, and the systematic use of arms in public confrontations. In May of 1975, the Christian Democrats and their allies in *the government passed a Parliamentary act called the Reale Law (Legge Reale)*. Its terms provide that police can shoot any time public order is felt to be threatened. Furthermore, jail sentences would be more severe for anyone found in possession of defensive weapons, such as bottles, molotov cocktails or handkerchiefs, ski masks and helmets that could mask faces in demonstrations. The law was explicitly directed against the youthful proletariat who were organizing within the ranks of Autonomy. And it was supported by every party, with the exception of the PCI, which feebly abstained from voting. But the Communists would not oppose the law and thereby endanger their intended accord with the Christian Democrats.

The day the law was passed marked the beginning of the most violent and bloody phase of the class struggle in Italy. Demonstrators, or the marginal and delinquent elements in general, began to be wounded or killed by police firearms. Citizens who did not come to a halt at police blockades, chance passersby who found themselves in the press of a demonstration—they too met their deaths by virtue of a law "for the public order."

The revolutionary left and Autonomy had to pay the price for the increased violence of the State and of the police. The casualty list within the Movement is endless. It is enough to mention here Pietro Bruno (18 years old, militant member



of "Lotta Continua", who died in the spring of '75); Giannino Zibecchi (antifascist committee, killed in May 1975); Mario Salvi (worker for Autonomy, 21 years old, killed at San Basilio, Rome, during a housing occupation in October 1976); Francesco Loruzzo (23, "Lotta Continua", killed at Bologna, March 11, 1977); Giorgiana Masi (killed in Rome, May 12, 1977, a feminist linked to "Lotta Continua"). But these are only the most notable. It is estimated that the victims of the "Legge Reale" numbered 150 in the period between May '75 and December '76.

If we wish to understand the rise of "terrorism", the formation of militant organizations, the choice of clandestine armed warfare by an ever growing number of proletarian youth, then we cannot forget the role played by the "Legge Reale". Nor can we forget the role of that aggravated and general violence perpetrated by the State from the moment Autonomy appeared in the factories and streets of the country, as a socially diffuse and politically organized Movement.

We also need to remember the other side, the policy of the official Workers' Movement (chiefly, the PCI): a policy that was first of all dependent on the decisions of the Christian Democrats, and subordinate to the movement of repression. In addition, this policy sought to isolate the youthful elements of Autonomy, causing a division within the working class and the proletarian movement. The PCI became a sort of political police made up of enforcers, spies and stooges.

In the following years, rather than being resolved through the accord between the Communists and the Christian Democrats, the institutional crisis in Italy assumed an increasingly dramatic character. The impossibility of governing the country was highlighted. The basic reason for the crisis was the growing distance between representative political institutions (parties, the Parliament, and other structures of participation) and a population of hopeless young people. Autonomy was at once a symptom and a cause of this distance.

In the political elections of 1976 the PCI considerably increased its voting strength, posing a threat to Christian-Democratic power: the DC was no longer guaranteed a parliamentary majority with its traditional allies (centrist parties) without either the agreement or the neutrality of the Communists. On the other hand, Christian-Democratic rule could not be substantiated by a Leftist majority either, because the Left simply did not have the strength. Convinced that it needed to quicken the pace of an alliance with the DC, the PCI began in 1976, to press for the Historical Compromise. It supported the Christian-Democratic government without, however, entering into that government. The situation, then, was paradoxical: while the masses had supported the PCI, believing this was the best way to promote a policy of radical change, the policy of the Historical Compromise ended up bolstering the tottering forces of the DC.

In terms of Italian society at large, this meant that workers had to pay for the economic crisis (which continued to grow worse between 1973 and 1976, as a result of the oil crisis). The PCI and the unions explicitly assumed the task of forcing the working class to accept a policy of sacrifice, consumer restrictions, and reduced public spending. In the autumn of 1976, a few months after the elections, the Andreotti government instigated an economic offensive against workers' salaries, increasing the prices of the most essential goods—gasoline, bread, pasta, and services. The PCI and the unions were used in order to deliver this blow. Workers in the large industrial centers of the North reacted in a wave of furious protests, launched autonomously and against the will and intentions of the unions: at Alfa-Romeo, at FIAT, at ITALISIDER, and elsewhere, they waged independent strikes. But the "crunch" passed: living conditions worsened notably for workers; their faith in the unions collapsed. And from that time, rejection of the forms and directions of union organization increased. What is more, the policy of "sacrifice" which cut consumption and public spending and promoted worker lay-offs, rebounded back on those who were employed. It produced a constantly growing unemployment rate, which at the beginning of 1977 reached an unprecedented figure (1,700,000 officially; in reality more than 2 million).

## THE ORIGINALITY OF AUTONOMY

III. Finally we arrive at 1977. The point of arrival, in many respects, of ten years of class struggle. The point of arrival for the student struggle begun in '68, for the workers' struggle of '69. It is the moment at which all the fundamental contradictions accumulate and explode, provoking a profound crisis for State control over society, for party and union control over the masses of youth. But at the same time, the revolutionary movement produced its most mature form of expression, in which a fully articulated need is expressed for a communism that is the direct translation of proletarian society, without any necessity for external or ideological organization. The Movement of '77 represents, in all its aspects—social, political and cultural—the moment of culmination in the ascending phase of the class struggle in Italy. But for the very reason that it is fraught with contradictions, and for the very reason that it poses with unrelenting urgency the question of the transition to communism, the year 1977 is, for everyone, a definitive test. Italian society has been tested by ten years of uninterrupted social conflict. The masses are disillusioned and tired of the politics of the official Workers' Movement, of reforms and of compromise. Now they await a radically new perspective that will abandon and surpass the old categories of political institutions, a perspective that will at the same time produce a workable program for superseding capitalism. Such a program would have to be innovative compared with the Soviet type of socialist experience, which is authoritarian, bureaucratic, and based on a new socialized form of labor exploitation. The innovation is awaited everywhere, but the hopeful expectation can easily turn into passivity and disillusionment if signs of something new do not emerge.

The Movement of '77 gathers together the new proletarian strata: young proletarians in the big cities who refuse to devote their whole lives to salaried labor, who refuse any kind of work at all. The unemployed who issue from the schools or universities as possessors of a high level of technical-scientific knowledge, are compelled to waste their productive potential, or not use it at all. The forms of social behavior, of cultural identity that these strata produce isolate them from the political tradition; rather than speak of marginal living (*emarginazione*), we can talk at this point of self-directed marginal living. The cultural revolution of 1968, which upset forms of behavior, values, human relationships, sexual relationships, the relationship to country and to the home, has ended by creating a social stratum that is recalcitrant before the notions of salaried work, fixed residence, and fixed position of work.

Moreover, the enormous technical-scientific and intellectual potential that the education of the masses has produced—a potential which fermented on contact with the process of mass self-education that the revolutionary movement has represented for 10 years—all this renders even more insupportable that contradic-

tion of capitalism, according to which, as technological and scientific capacities increase, intellectual and creative energies are wasted, while the possibilities for innovations in production are suppressed so that the existing labor organization and the organization of knowledge crucial to labor's functioning are not disturbed. Cultural transformation, mass creativity, and refusal of work are the dominant themes of the Movement of '77. But only with difficulty could the Movement succeed in organizing all that potential constituted by the intellectual energy, technical-scientific expertise and innovative energy that the young-proletarian strata possess. The enormous richness that the Movement of '77 expresses could not succeed in finding a formal program and positive organization. This is because of capitalist repression, but also because of the inability of the revolutionary movement to adjust with rapidity its interpretive categories and its practices to the reality of a mature, post-socialist proletariat.

All during 1976, new forms of organizations—connected with Autonomy, but related to all aspects of collective life and cultural identity—were being established. The rejection of the family and of individualism had found a form of organization in the experience of proletarian youth associations. These associations were communes set up by squatters in certain neighborhoods of big cities; young proletarians thus organized territorially and experimented with forms of collective-life-in-transformation.

The storm that the feminist movement provoked in male-female relations and the subsequent explosion of homosexual collectives thus found a territory in which to consolidate, in which to transform the customs of living, sleeping, eating, smoking. In the same period, the movement for free radio spread widely. In every city, neighborhood and village the young proletarians, together with students and communications workers, used the occasion of a legislative vacuum (the result of which was that the State monopoly on information lapsed and was not replaced by any other sort of regulation) to give life to a network of small "wildcat" stations. The radio stations were operated with luck and very little money, but they could cover a territorial space adequate for the organizational forms and communication needs of the emerging proletarian strata. This was a truly revolutionary fact: with free radio it was possible to communicate rapidly the decisions and appointments of revolutionary organizations or base organizations. Through this channel circulated an uninterrupted flood of music and words, a flood of transformations on the symbolic, perceptive and imaginative planes. This flood entered every house, and anyone could intervene in the flow, telephoning, interrupting, adding, correcting. The design, the dream of the artistic avant-garde—to bridge the separation between artistic communication and revolutionary transformation or subversive practice—became in this experience a reality. The brief, happy experience of Radio Alice—which from February 1976 to March 1977 transmitted from Bologna—remains the symbol of this period, of that unforgettable year of experimentation and accumulation of intellectual, organizational, political, and creative energies.

The year 1976 is also the year of the great concert-festivals of proletarian youth: a last wave of pop music, which arrived in Italy five or six years later than in the U.S. or Great Britain, but which found here an extremely fertile cultural terrain. The sweet sound of pop immediately combined with a certain dimension of mass cultural transformation. It became the constituent element in a vision of the "soft" cultural and social revolution.

The harshness of organizational life in the Workers' Autonomy was united and merged with the sweet experiences of cultural transformation and the easy flow of information. Lambro Park, 1976, in Milano: 18,000 proletarian youths performed a gigantic sun dance, the likes of which had never been seen before—then fought with police for several hours.

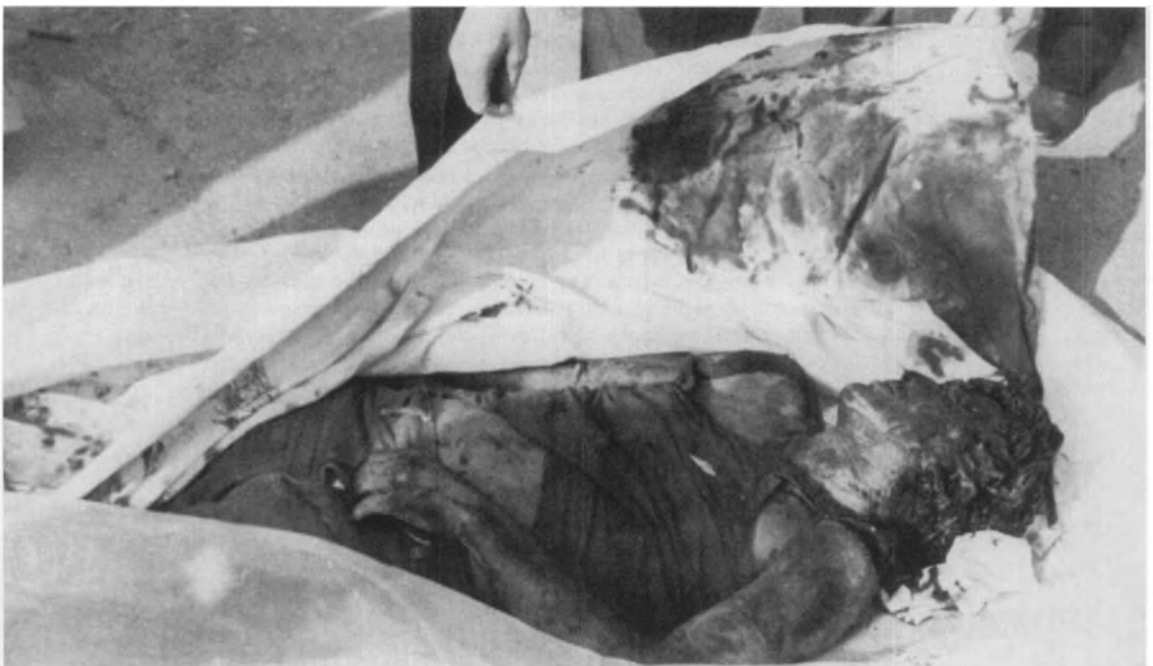
The autumn of 1976 saw an explosion in the movement toward "autonomous price-setting" (*autoreduzione*). Tens of thousands of young people, organized in associations of proletarian youth, came in from the suburbs of Milano, Rome and

Bologna, laid siege to the city centers, confiscated merchandise from luxury shops, “autonomously reduced” the prices of movies, theaters and restaurants (that is, they paid what their politics required—a third or a fourth of the usual price). But the final test of the movement toward “autonomous price-setting” was a violent clash, a forerunner of the violence that would explode in 1977: the battle of La Scala, on December 7, 1976.

La Scala is the bourgeois theater of Milano. December 7 marks the inauguration of the new season, the “opening night” gala. But young Milanese proletarians said that they would not permit the Milan bourgeois to stage this yearly provocation with its pomp, finery and 80,000-lire tickets. They declared war on the Milan bourgeois and their festival. The government accepted the challenge, and thousands of police in battle formation defended La Scala. Hours and hours of conflict, 300 imprisoned, dozens arrested, 7 gravely wounded. The youth movement reflected for a month on this battle and on its catastrophic outcome. But only in order to be better prepared the next time.

The next time was in February of 1977.

The struggles that exploded in 1977 were completely out of proportion to what occasioned them: they began with a small university campaign against a Christian-Democratic “reform”. On February 3, the fascists wounded a student in Rome, and the university was subsequently occupied. First in Rome, Palermo, and Naples, then in Florence and Torino, finally in Bologna. The occupation of the universities was a pretext: the academic institutions were occupied not only by students, but by young workers who worked in small factories, and had no other possibility for organization and concerted action. Then there were the unemployed, those who lived in the city outskirts, the juvenile delinquents, the disenfranchised. . . University communities became general quarters for a wave of social struggle that had as a fundamental theme the refusal of the capitalist organization of work, the rejection of that system which generates exploitation and unemployment as the two poles of socialized work. “All work for less [time]” became the watchword for this wave of struggle of young proletarians—a group heterogeneous from the point of view of productivity, but homogeneous from the point of view of culture. “All work for less” is a watchword which has nothing to do with questions such as “the right to a job”, or the right to a full-time position. Work is necessary evil—or at least remains so for a historical period that we wish eventually to surpass and extinguish with collective force. What we want is to apply, totally and coherently, the energies and the potential that exist for a socialized intelligence, for a general intellect. We want to make possible a general reduc-



tion in working time and we want to transform the organization of work in such a way that an autonomous organization of sectors of productive experimental organization may become possible. These sectors would give rise to experimental forms of production in which the object of worker cooperation would not be profit, but the reduction of necessary work, the intelligent application of technical and scientific knowledge, and innovation.

This program actually existed among the young proletarian social strata that in February 1977 filled the cities with their demonstrations.

The cultural transformation and the rejection of prevailing values that the cultural experience of '76 (radio stations, associations, journals, "grass roots poetry") had accumulated, exploded with a wave of anti-institutional creativity. The critique of power is the critique of the language of power. On the 17th of February, the critique of power, the critique of representative institutions, and the critique of institutional language were united in a unique action. 7000 young proletarians who (a fact without precedent in the Movement's history in Italy) expelled, with uncontrollable rage and fury, the most important figure among Italian labor leaders, Luciano Lama, secretary of CGIL and exponent of PCI, from a lecture hall at the University of Rome, where he was delivering a policy statement. The PCI accused the young proletarians of being "enemies of the working class" and tried to divide them from factory workers. But this move did not succeed; no factory supported the great union leader. Instead, the young workers of the Northern factories expressed sympathy for the young proletarians of Rome who had expelled Lama. The split between the PCI and the Movement reached its apex at this period, and will likely never be repaired. On the 17th of February a mass sector of the Italian proletariat was liberated with violence from socialist traditions, both Stalinist and reformist. The autonomy of the movement had been assured, in the consciousness and in the organization of ever-growing strata. And the stage was being set for the insurrection of March.

March of 1977 was the moment of greatest intensity in the explosion of the struggle for autonomy. The social strata that were mobilized in this month were the young unemployed intellectuals, together with "off-the-books labor and seasonal workers"—that is, all sectors of irregular or marginal workers. At the same time, March was the moment of the greatest tension and distance between the new movement for autonomy and the Communist Party. The act of expelling Lama from the University of Rome established a precedent from which the people at the University of Bologna proceeded in the days of March. The occupation of the entire university zone by huge numbers of young proletarians coming from every area was transformed into a true insurrection when on March 2, a youth was killed by police. But Bologna is also the city in which the PCI has always been strong; the local government is a leftist coalition and bosses and organizations of the Workers' Movement collaborate to ensure social peace. The exploitation of young workers in Bologna is controlled by a network of little bosses and bureaucrats, often linked with the Communist Party. In brief: Bologna is the city of the realized Historical Compromise. And for that reason (as well as for the reasons of the Movements' extraordinary creative vitality) the Bologna experience marked a moment of absolutely central political importance.

The extraordinary violence of the days in March, the mass following attracted by the Movement, and the radical nature of its objectives created a crisis for the city's Historical Compromise by offering evidence of the government's inability to function as an instrument of control over vast proletarian sectors.

For ten days, two large cities (Bologna and Rome) were in the hands of the Movement—in very violent conflict in Rome on March 7; on the 2nd and the 12th of March in Bologna. On the 12th, Rome was the theater for a six-hour battle in which tens of thousands of youths were engaged, while 100,000 filed by in demonstrations. And then in the following days at Bologna the Movement invaded the city. The Italian bourgeoisie recognized at this time the serious danger that its design for institutional order faced, and saw that the PCI's ability to guarantee

order had been undermined. Consequently, the PCI lost credibility both as the governing party, and because it had let control of so vast a movement slip away from it. The State was forced to resort to brutal repression: hundreds of arrests in Bologna, and then the unleashing of a campaign of repression all over Italy that struck most heavily at groups that worked on the cultural level: radios, journals, publishing houses, and bookstores were closed and searched.

But the Movement was not broken: in Milano, Turin, and then once more in Rome the mass demonstrations continued. The summer began with a violent polemic—inspired by an appeal launched by French intellectuals against the repression—on the repressive nature of the Historical Compromise as an institutional design for the elimination of all dissent.

Also at that time, there began in Italy (and here the Movement was behind the times) a critical analysis of socialism of the Stalinist type (of which, in the last analysis, the PCI is only a variant). On the strength of theoretical reflections developed in France by those such as Foucault, Deleuze, and Guattari (a more critical and doubtful reception was given to the Nouveaux Philosophes, who were too removed from any concrete experience with the critique of institutions and with class struggle), and a new front was opened in the struggle against the State. Thus new forms of totalitarianism were seen developing as the historical left was assimilated by the apparatus of power. And so the critique of the institutionalized Workers' Movement acquired a new connotation: according to the PCI, all the years after '68 had been marked by gains for social democratic and reformist causes. But now one began to discover that social democracy, even though introducing new elements into the communist worker movement tradition of the Third International, was not necessarily in contradiction with totalitarian, violent and Stalinist trends. In fact, the two aspects were mixed in the PCI, which had become a component of bourgeoisie democracy by abandoning every type of violence against the existing order and at the same time a violent force of totalitarianism against the revolutionary movement.

Confronted with the wave of repression that followed the events of March, and mindful of the discussion that had developed on the nature of the State after the Historical Compromise, the Bologna movement set forth a proposal for a Convention to be held at the end of September. At the Convention, all components of the Movement in Italy could come together, along with all the European intellectuals or political groups that were interested in the Italian revolution as a forerunner of things to come. The September Convention was the great opportunity—missed, however—for the Movement to overcome its purely negative, destructive connotations, and formulate a programmatic position for the autonomous organization of



a real society against the State, an autonomous organization of social, intellectual, and productive energies that might make possible a progressive liberation of lives from salaried work. Unfortunately, the Convention turned into a reunion against repression, and this greatly reduced the theoretical importance and the possibilities of this period. Nonetheless, 70,000 people were present at the convention and the attention of the whole Italian proletariat (as well as that of vast numbers of intellectuals all over Europe) was directed toward the Convention. But the gathering concluded without producing any direction for the future, any new program, and without advancing the Movement. Instead it was restricted to hearing tales of repression and then defining, in negative terms, its reaction. A long phase of crisis had begun for the Movement, a crisis that involved dispersion, disorganization and above all, the lack of prospects.

#### **CIVIL WAR: THE RED BRIGADES**

IV. Up to this point, we have completely ignored the problem — absolutely central to the analysis of class struggle in Italy — of terrorism. Armed struggle was a form of agitation that grew ever larger after a certain point, and finally became preponderant in September 1977. The problem of terrorism probably cannot be dissociated from the whole complex of experiences connected with the Movement's organization in factories and in society.

On the other hand it is also true that the entire rapid analysis we have made of the most significant moments of the class struggle in this decade remains incomplete and spotty. We have neglected, on purpose, an analysis of the relationship between the mass movement and clandestine organizations or armed actions. The reason for this omission is that we would like, within the framework of our necessarily simplified "history", to view the experiences of the armed struggle as a symptomatic fact, as a symptom of the problems not resolved by the mass movement.

This is certainly a valid enough viewpoint today. In recent years, the armed struggle has more and more assumed a "terrorist" connotation; no longer within the mass movement, it has completely replaced the Movement and occupies all the available space.

The first and most important armed organization in Italy — the Red Brigades — was born out of the workers' struggle in the first years of the 70's. The militants of the Red Brigades come from the large factories in Milan, Turin, and Genoa. The first armed actions (the kidnapping of managers of factories, together with acts of sabotage) were linked to the workers' struggle against the factory hierarchy. But after these first actions (1971, 1972), the Red Brigades evolved rapidly toward a strategy of frontal, "political" — in the worst, most abstract sense of the term — opposition to the State. From this point they began to behave like an actual party, whose actions and objectives are neither related to, nor dependent on, the times and on the forms of the mass struggle. In this new phase the Brigades reached a critical point, at which the extreme "ML" (Marxist-Leninist in the most dogmatic and avant-garde sense) types of thinking prevailed in the fighting organization. Moreover, the theoretical-political grounding of the militants in the Brigades is distinctly Stalinist. Part of their background, especially their social context (the factories) comes from the "hard" Stalinist base of the Communist Party. The social contexts of the Brigades — even more than their selection of a clandestine *modus operandi* — set them apart from others even as early as 1974; by 1977, the differences between the evolving Movement for Autonomy and the Brigades had become even greater.

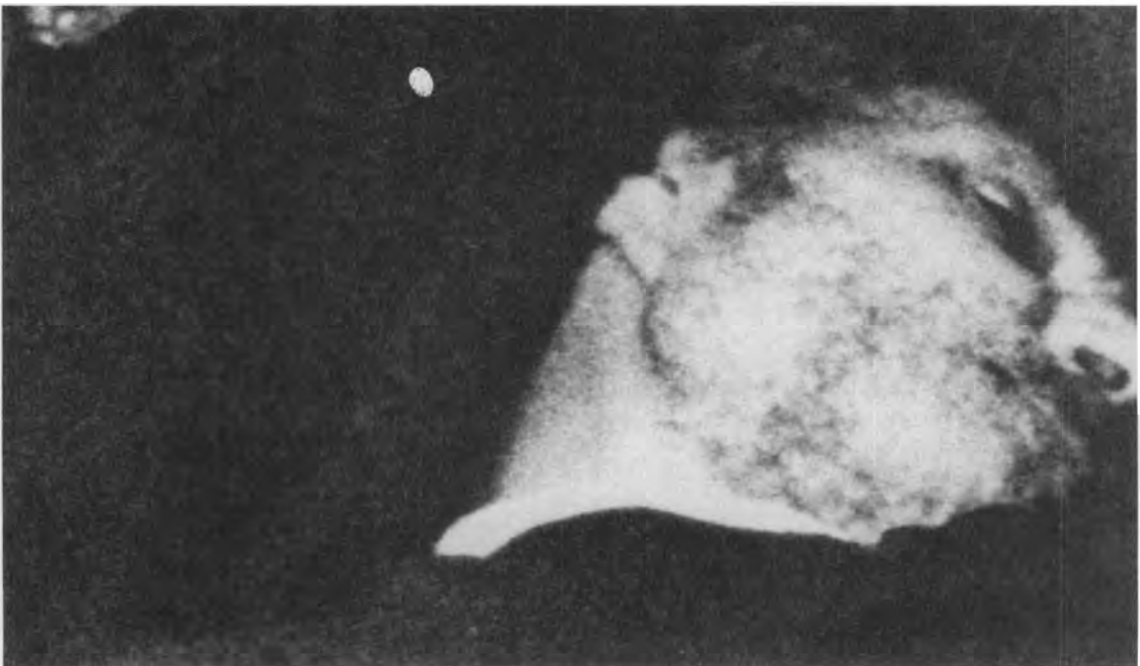
The highest point in the career of the Red Brigades was the kidnapping and murder of Aldo Moro, President of the DC. These events took place at a time when the Movement found itself in a state of crisis and immobilization, largely because of the "failure" of the September Convention. It was precisely the immobilization induced by the Convention that led ever larger sectors of the Movement, especially those harassed by repressive measures, to choose a clandestine life. Many other fighting organizations smaller than the Red Brigades were formed. These smaller organizations had objectives that were closely linked to social

struggles (acts of sabotage, burning of employment offices), while the actions of the Red Brigades had an effect almost exclusively political, directed as they were at the DC or at the headquarters of the majority party.

The question of the "armed struggle" gave birth in these years to a number of dubious theses, whether within the Movement, in the press, or in propaganda emitted by the forces of the regime. Terrorism came to be considered a direct expression of the forms of struggle of the Movement. The Movement has certainly expressed and practiced forms of violent struggle, when violence represented a necessary means for the defense of organizational levels (taking to the streets, occupying buildings, picketing), but it has always refused to see the military organization as an autonomous political body, or as an "armed party." The strength of the Red Brigades is thus directly proportional to the weakness of the Movement. And so, as the repression of the regime weighs more heavily on the Movement, the power of the armed organization increases. On the other hand, we must also recognize that, beginning in the Spring of '77, when the strength of the mass movement brought about a crisis for institutional equilibrium and the Historical Compromise, the State undertook to reconstruct its stability and institutional equilibrium on the basis of the opposition to terrorism. The policy of "national unity" — amounting to a reinforcement of the Christian-Democratic government (always a fragile majority) with uncritical support from the PCI — was adopted as an emergency measure in the face of the Red Brigades' assault. And on the same day that Moro was kidnapped the PCI decided to support a DC government that was completely unacceptable. For this strategy the PCI paid, with its electoral losses in June, 1979. But this is of little interest. What is interesting is that terrorism created a situation of crisis for the revolutionary movement, or rather inserted itself into a pre-existing crisis of the Movement. And thus inserting itself, it accentuated and consolidated the crisis, reinforcing the repression from the one side and, on the other side, restricting the revolutionary process to a pathway without egress, without alternative routes.

This said, then, we have to recognize that the extension of the armed struggle and the great impact of armed terrorist action (to be differentiated from a practice of mass violence justified by the needs of the proletariat) are directly linked to that crisis in the Movement which evolved after '77. We can say that armed terrorist action is a symptom of the revolutionary movement's inability to put a program into effect, as well as a symptom of the Movement's cultural impoverishment.

After '77, and especially after the Moro affair, sectors of Autonomy began to



realize all this. And here our study must become more complex, if we wish to comprehend the most recent period of Italian history, that is, the events of April 7, 1979.

In '77 the positions taken by the Movement on the armed struggle were imprecise. The entire Movement had rightly refused to condemn (as the bourgeois regime and its parties requested) mass violence. The March insurrection had been a virtual explosion involving tens of thousands of proletarians and young people, and that level of violence was an inevitable stage which gave to the Movement the maneuvering room always denied it by the institutions. But on the subject of terrorist action the debate was always more confused. All the components of the Movement recognized the proletarian and revolutionary origins of the fighting formations (a few idiots actually sought to excommunicate the armed formations, or to declare them agents of foreign secret services or of reactionary groups—but everyone knows that the militants in these formations are comrades who come out of agitation in factories or in the slums, out of experiences we all had in those years). So the problem was put in terms of “legitimatization.”

Within the Movement, there are two opinions on this question of “legitimacy”. One faction considers armed clandestine action as a simple “extension” of mass violence, an “extension” of proletarian restiveness at the legal limits imposed by capitalism. But others demur, claiming that this outlook underestimates (in the name of spontaneous sympathy) the radical contradiction between autonomous behavior on the part of proletarian strata (who are the bearers of a potential for liberation) and the Stalinist politics, or even State-like behavior, of the B.R.

Positions on the legitimacy of terrorism differ within the various components of the Movement. The Bologna movement (the so-called “creative wing”) recognized without hesitation the contradiction between terrorism and the mass movement. The committees of Autonomous Workers (*Autonomia Operaia*) at Rome (the “Volsci”) forcefully criticized the politics of the Red Brigades, while other groups maintained more problematic position in order to avoid lumping together terrorism and the most radical practices of the Movement. But while the “ideological” discussion of terrorism continued, people lost sight of terrorism as spectacle, of its capacity to occupy progressively more space on the stage-set of class struggle. And when this aspect of terrorism was considered (after the Moro kidnapping) a new operation began: one did not attempt to condemn or exorcise terrorism (as the great bourgeois journalists did, and behind them the little journalists of *Lotta Continua*), nor even to support it in order to gain something from it. Instead, one sought to supersede it. Superseding terrorism became the true problem for the revolutionary movement. Given that combat formations represented a product of a faction which the Movement had not been able to supersede, it was necessary to supersede this faction and its terroristic manifestations. It was necessary to engage oneself in this effort. We can say that the intellectual and militant segments of Autonomy were concerned after the death of Moro with finding methods of superseding terrorism. Superseding terrorism did not mean becoming involved in the Nazi extermination that the super-policemen (like General Dalla Chiesa, plenipotentiary of the anti-terrorists) tried to effect with dragnets, with indiscriminate arrests, with corruption and stool pigeons, with torture and internment camps. Instead, superseding terrorism meant creating a foundation for pacification and for the reconstruction of conditions needed for the class struggle. To pacify obviously meant to remove the obstacle constituted by the more than one thousand political prisoners. Liberation, then, of the political detainees, along with amnesty, elimination of the camps, and dismissal of Dalla Chiesa. All these are objectives of pacification originating within the Movement, objectives that the political planners of Autonomy want to make into the aims of a mass initiative capable of setting up the conditions for a resumption of the class struggle in a strategically autonomous form, no longer determined by the difficult straits of a civil war.

But suddenly, just when the possibility of superseding terrorism began to be perceived and began to mature, State repression intervened with all the power that it could put into the field. We have reached the events of April 7.

The desire of the State to eliminate every attempt at superseding terrorism became yet clearer when the editors of *Metropoli* were arrested and the publication suppressed. *Metropoli* in fact is a journal devoted specifically to the goal of surpassing terrorism and reconstructing autonomous conditions for the class struggle.

### **THE SEVENTH OF APRIL ARRESTS**

For quite some time to come, the revolutionary movement will have to deal with the actions taken by the State on April 7. Even beyond the question of liberating the comrades who were arrested, some fundamental doubts have been raised, and the possibility of making a transition to a new epoch in the process of liberation from capitalist domination has been jeopardized in a dramatic way.

To divest oneself of these last ten years and at the same time to uncover the continuity inherent in the process of liberation—these are two apparently contradictory moves, but moves which must be effected simultaneously. This is the problem facing us at the moment. But the actions of the government were aimed at rendering any transition impossible.

### **THE SIMULATION OF POWER, THE POWER OF SIMULATION**

In the campaign which the power structure has launched against Autonomy, everything is false: not this or that detail, not this or that assertion, but everything—the evidence, the proof, the circumstances. Everything is false, and the power structure knows it, even declares it. It is of no importance to the power structures whether something is true or not. This is the spirit behind the government operation. The deterrent power of the operation lies in its capacity to unleash a violent campaign of immense proportions, a campaign based on SIMULATION. The real operatives of the offensive are not the judges, but the press, the TV, and the Performance. Thus the offensive is beyond politics, freed finally from any remaining link to truth, liberated from any correspondence with actuality. Simulate an infinite number of war scenarios and project them on the screen of the mass imagination—this is the strategy. For in truth it is in that territory of the imagination that the real war is being fought. On one side of the battle is Dissuasion (the infinite power of the State, the all-seeing eye, the all-knowing brain, the all-imagining mind), on the other is Liberation of the creative energies of a proletariat whose intellectual potential is immense, but whose conditions of material existence are cramped and miserable. This is the real contradiction, the real war.

So; the Performance of April 7 has shown that the power structure can win the war today by invading the realm of the imagination. And, having conquered the realm of the imagination, the power structures now run rampant, demonstrating a violence that has no precedents, and arrogance that is totalitarian.

## THE PARALYSIS OF ORGANIZED AUTONOMY

How can one deny that the power structure “seems” to have won? Hasn’t it, after all, with that stroke of simulation, arrogated to itself the right to put an entire decade on trial? It has set itself up as a trial judge. And so the decade of egalitarianism and solidarity, the decade of collectivization and rejection of work are now on trial. What better introduction, what better premise to a “backlash” that promises a return to normal production, to the usual, day-to-day violence that occurs in the family and on the job?

Meanwhile, as the power structure prepares to try our entire decade as criminal, subversive and paranoid—well, here we see the forces that *represent* the existing Movement unable to understand the meaning of this Operation Simulation launched by the power structure, unable to understand anything in fact, and unable to react in any way.

So it goes for Organized Autonomy. Its paralysis is complete. As of April 7 it has been shunted into the Wax Museum of politics. In the face of the power structure, in the face of that game of mirrors which is Simulation, the good little bad boys of Autonomy have replied with the conviction that their party (with all its holy, eternal principles such as “active abstention”. . .) can match the State regiment for regiment. But the State operates on a hundred battlefields, while the party of Autonomy cannot even operate on that single field it has chosen for itself—the streets are off limits, and for those incapable of thinking in any terms but street campaigns, the streets themselves have become unusable. Those who want to respond to the simulation-filled power structures with the power (but does it exist?) of truth and of counter-information will find their words turning to dust in their mouths.

## INTELLECTUALS, LEGALITY AND LEGITIMACY

Let us also examine those whose business it is to be concerned about guarantees of freedom. The intellectuals—yes, even they seek to reaffirm their role by seeking out the “truth”. Take a look at what Umberto Eco has to say in the April 22 edition of *La Repubblica*. After having sought the “truth” for half a page, using methods worthy of a detective novel, he announces that the boundary between legality and illegality can shift depending on the moment, on the circumstances. Power relationships, he says. Of course! It’s true: legality is determined by the power relationships that obtain between old and new, between the liberation of the possible and the dictatorship of the present. The greater the strength of that Movement which strains to liberate the possibilities compressed within the present, the farther the boundaries of legality will be pushed. Because legality is only the sanctioning (by structures, by judges, by the police) of the present state of affairs, of the present’s right to suppress the energies, the creativity and the inventive powers of the proletarian segment of society. Good thinking, Eco. Except that the people who set those boundaries of legality are people (like Eco) who write for *La Repubblica*. And the people who decide where the boundaries should be shifted are truth-seekers of Eco’s ilk—as if it were possible to continue with that attitude of the entomologist which he shows, the attitude of someone examining historical processes, struggles, programs, passions and defeats as though they were natural phenomena, as though within them were not the pulsation of a subjective intensity and the possibility for a disruption and overthrow of the entire scenerio. Today, after the events of April 7, it is the power structure which simulates the scenerio in which power relationships are determined. The truth determines nothing.

## UTOPIA, MESSIANISM, BREAKDOWN OR BARBARISM

Or take the case of Luigi Barzini, who on April 10, on the front page of the *Corriere della Sera*, defines the comrades arrested on April 7 as Messianic visionaries who provide an irrational movement with a program that constantly feeds the utopian impulses of the masses of young people, who would otherwise be scattered, desperate or resigned. Well that’s true enough. But that obstinate anger with which revolutionary thinking in Italy has nourished the desires and wants of the masses of proletarians and youth has nothing irrational about it. It is the reality of the social contradictions in urban areas, the dramatic reality of the contradiction between man and nature, which is the radical element—not our wants. It is reality which sets before us the choice between utopia and barbarism, between a

breakdown of the present system and the permanent threat of destruction, ecocatastrophe and psychocatastrophe. And the choice will have to be made very soon, very quickly. The acceleration of pace in urban areas, the mad inhumanity of relationships between people, the hallucinatory quality of every form of expression and every form of existence, and the increase in militarization—all these developments combine to set an urgent choice before revolutionaries: breakdown or barbarism. And even if the possibilities for a breakdown were very limited, even if everything were tending in a direction opposed to the possibility of liberating humanity's technical, scientific, creative and inventive energies from the destructive domination of capitalism and ecocatastrophe, even if the idea of liberating these potentials were a utopian one—well, even so, the only realistic choice would be revolution. If we are interested in life, then only revolution is a realistic alternative.

**THE NON-CENTERED FORM OF THE POWER STRUCTURE AND PRODUCTION**

The situation in Italy provides a social laboratory of exceptional interest, both from the point of view of capitalist domination and from the revolutionary point of view. The most important fact for understanding the present situation is that centralized and coherent forms of control over the social sector have come to an end, and thus the society and the forces which circulate in the social sector are no longer governable by politics.

The real mystery of the Italian situation is how an apparatus of domination over social beings can be maintained by a functioning which must deal with and organize the most varied and contradictory types of behavior imaginable. The real problem is how the functioning of domination and the capitalist system's assigning-of-value can be established by means of unfocused conflict. There is a thread of functioning which runs through discontinuity, fragmentation and conflict. The question is how can the labor market continue to function, when an enormous quantity of surplus-value is produced by a segment of the labor force which is politically and culturally insubordinate, extremely flexible in terms of its mobility, unwilling to accept the fixed arrangement of salaried output, and obliged to accept a relatively high rate of confiscation of the surplus value produced. The marriage of insubordination and productivity, of conflict and functioning, is the point of departure for a new alliance between capitalistic development and the proletarian liberation movement. This alliance provides the only possible means of resolving the present crisis, the only way in which conditions for a productive autonomy, rather than an ossified subordination, can be established.

The present situation—in which a totalizing functioning exists without the totality, and in which power exists without a government—has in fact seen power present itself as mere tactics, as “day-by-day politics”, capable of functioning only



under that guise. The functioning of this type of politics is not guided by any coherent strategic planning, but by a game of internal self-regulation. To oppose this mechanism of self-regulation (in which the official declarations and the announced strategies are only simulations of tactical scenarios that cannot actually control the forces they summon up)—to oppose this mechanism of self-regulation by offering a coherent alternative strategy—as Organized Autonomy has sought to do—only amounts to remaining ensnared in a game, the rules of which none of the players can make operative. So: there is no strategy, no criterion of truth in tactics. But there is a point of contact—at least on the tactical level—between the proletariat’s importunate desire for liberation from the slavery of work and capitalism’s interests in increasing the relative rate of surplus-value and increasing social productivity. It is at this point of contact that one can occasionally break the power of that Domination which wishes to forestall Autonomy, which restrains the intellectual energies of the proletariat, which organizes Knowledge and Know-how in a functional design aimed at reproducing the form of Capital and the form of Value, so that the road to the liberation of life from work is closed off, so that the potential contained in the intelligence and activity of the individual is held in check, while he is compelled to de-individualize himself and submit to being made into Abstract Work.

**THE INDETERMINACY  
OF LAW AND THE  
SELF-REGULATION  
OF THE IMAGINARY**

Thus we stand before the paradox of a domination which is exercised without any government, a controlling of the system without a governing of the system. When a system becomes very complex and has numerous independent variables, then the adage “an empty mind is an open mind” seems to apply. It is the absence of “planning” which makes the system controllable. The “full weight” of an articulated plan tends to polarize society by making people erect “walls of judgement”. In complex systems polarization is eliminated and the means of regulation tend to be in conformity with the indeterminacy of the system. This rule of thumb prevails even on ideological and judicial levels. So let us examine once again that judicial campaign launched on the 7th of April.

The “castle” of accusations built up has no “foundation”. But this is exactly what the government actions were designed to show: “justice” reveals its lack of foundation in “law” in a way that is nearly obscene. Only in this manner can “justice” enter into a “crime-accusation” relationship with social beings that are very different from one another.

Illuminating for the study of this phenomenon are the revelations of certain intellectuals who would have us believe they were once “plants” within the Movement. Consider some of the more dignified confessions: “Forgive me if I insist on this point, but that version of “Potere Operaio” (i.e., the Veneto-Emilian branch to which Cacciari belonged) has nothing at all to do with the version which arose after 1968.” (Cacciari, in an interview granted to *Repubblica*, 10/4/79). Or this: “I had my last political discussion with Negri more than ten years ago. . . Since that time I haven’t seen him. . .” (Asor Rosa, in *La Repubblica* 24/4/79). You know the saying—“People betray themselves”! And this is the mechanism which the forces of “justice” want to set in motion: individuals must autonomously come to feel a need to exculpate themselves, or a need to separate themselves from the accused in order to savor the “pleasure of having survived”—to borrow a phrase from Canetti.

The law’s lack of foundations becomes strikingly apparent when the “law” lives in a state of “emergency”, when it becomes a “judicial emergency measure”. But emergency means a cut-off of rationality; thus the hype must show itself as hype—it can only be effective if it is *lived* as hype. The “law” feels the need to make itself indeterminate in order to be able to prosecute all those beings who are determined by society, in order to control every determination.

The indeterminacy of the “law” in fact amounts to the indeterminacy of social types: what, after all, is *the* typical revolutionary of today? This indeterminate “law”, in spite of appearances and in spite of the price that has been paid by the vanguard movements, is not intent on hounding these movements (if it were, then

the “law” would be a quite determinate thing, would have foundations—this is the position of the PCI), but rather directs its attentions toward indeterminate elements. An American researcher wrote in a recent analysis of the phenomenon of terrorism that “the ‘moral sensibility’ of the normal citizen is not very different from that of the terrorist” (Jan Schreiber), since, in a complex system in which “mediation” as a structure has failed, every group, down to the level of the individual, tends to define itself autonomously, and not see itself in relation to “others”. In a similar vein, Brian Jenkins has defined terrorism as the “instrument for gaining political objectives that have been set autonomously.” The indeterminacy of the “law” serves as a means for pursuing social beings who autonomously define themselves to the extent that they are no longer identifiable by their social “status”. To “prosecute” social beings thus means that the law must make itself “im-personal” to such a degree that it becomes a symbolic representation, a performance or spectacle of accusation and trial. Rather than prosecute private citizens, it aims at prosecuting symbolic figures, products of a collective imagination; the Guilty Party is a product of everyone’s imagination. At this level of abstraction of beings, the law can no longer sustain itself and has need for abstractions promulgated by the mass media. Indeterminacy requires a relationship with the mass media—only then can the “theater of cruelty” be staged.

The law turns into a combination of emergency and mass media, exists in the form of emergency as it becomes identified with the mass media, is the one in virtue of being the other.

Court action operates in the realm of contingencies not only because it is a system of tactics which shifts the boundaries of legality according to individual circumstances—as Umberto Eco asserts—but also because today every boundary is outside the scope of classically codified law, because there is no longer any point in prosecuting “private” beings. What matters is not so much the outcome of the court action, but rather the symbolic trial set in motion through the mass media. And the objective of court action is not so much the maintenance of order, but rather the immediate creation of a collective recognition of the “boundaries”—a recognition that can be created *only* when disorder prevails. There is no more “personal” penalization, only symbolic penalization. The traditional trial in the courtroom has become irrelevant in the face of the imaginary trials (i.e., enacted by the imagination) staged by the mass media. What cannot be penalized in physical terms is instead penalized by means of a universal sacrificial rite, that is, the symbolic trials which the mass media stage in the imagination of the collectivity. It is the imagination which is actually on trial. The



trial is aimed at creating certain attitudes and insights, at forcing indeterminate social beings to assume, autonomously and of their own accord, an identity defined for them by the courts.

To this end, *lexical items* from Negri's texts and ideas have been put on trial; it is of no interest *whose lexicon it is— rather, it is the lexicon, the* ideas of the imaginary social being which have been charged. The prosecution is not seeking a single guilty party, but rather the Guilty Party— the collective imagination of the Guilty Party. The deconstruction and construction of texts and lexicon are functional elements in the establishment of the lexical and linguistic Guilty Party. It is not accidental that Umberto Eco feels the need to use ambiguities in his article. Putting words on trial is not possible in the courtroom; it is done instead in the mass media and in the symbolic process.

## CONCLUSIONS

Having come this far, we now need to construct an operational synthesis which is capable of overturning the premises which the power structure imposed by its actions of April 7 (as well as all the other premises which the power structure has imposed in recent times). The goal which the revolutionary element has been seeking to attain (more or less consciously) in recent years is the liberation of that potential for autonomy which has been propagated in society by the efforts of the present form of organized Autonomy. This goal is equivalent to the aim of undertaking a passage from the 1970's to the 1980's while maintaining structural conditions that ensure the liberation of life from labor and that avoid the logic of extermination and ecodestruction promulgated by Nuclear Age capitalism.

The offensive undertaken by the power structure during recent months is directed at making this passage impossible— that is, it is aimed at restoring the initiative to the State while preventing the continued existence of the structural conditions needed for revolution.

Power exercised without an attempt to govern accepts a very high level of conflict. Thus the power structure has learned to survive on a discontinuous terrain, reconstructing the continuity of its functioning across this discontinuity. Revolutionary impulses are permitted to operate in every social milieu, in every type of production function except for that fundamental function which is the function constituted by Knowledge. Present urban society may in fact be conceived as medieval fiefdoms: highwaymen and madmen can roam about seeking booty or indulging in fits of insanity, but only if they stay in the countryside, in the desert places and in the woods, and do not come onto the manor grounds. The manor in the metropolis of the 1980's is the place where Knowledge is produced, the technological heart of production. The access routes to this manor are closely guarded, while in the streets and homes of the metropolis, anything goes.

The center of the social organization lies in that zone where Knowledge is produced and functions. But it would be simplistic to conclude that the revolution therefore needs to substitute a Leninist seizure of Knowledge for a Leninist seizure of the State. The problem is in reality much more complicated, since not only the properties and use of Knowledge, but also its structure, are determined by its capitalistic functioning. And the process of overturning the functioning of Knowledge (today Knowledge functions to control and to assign value, but within it lies the possibility for a self-transformation into an infinitely productive force capable of progressively freeing segments of social existence from the constraints of work)—this process of overturning is linked to a repeated, long-term (perhaps extremely long-term) dislocation of the modes, the procedures and the instruments of the production of Knowledge (a passage from the power structure to an autonomous social arrangement). And only this long process of repeated dislocation and appropriation of the modes and instruments of the production of Knowledge will be able to modify the epistemological, and thus the operative, structure of Knowledge.

But the forms and the politics involved in this process are still entirely unknown to us. That is to say, we have not elaborated any theory of "transition" (to use

that horrible and imprecise word). The only theory of power and transition that we possess, the theory to which we must constantly refer—perhaps in order to deviate from it, though always remaining in some ways entrapped within it—is the Leninist one. Essentially, the Leninist theory can be formulated as follows: the proletariat must take possession of the State, bolster the machinery of the State and the domination of the State's will over society in order to abolish capitalism (only afterward will the extinction of the State be possible). We have had the dream of realizing this program on our minds for fifty years now, from the time of "war communism", from the time of the NEP, through the period of Stalinism, up to the Chinese experience, up to the awful reality of present-day socialism. Capitalism has been neither abolished nor transformed, but rather has become ossified, inasmuch as the State, which ought to incarnate the will to supersede, has instead been nothing more than the reification of those relationships of production inherited from capitalism. In other words, the State has represented a terrorist-style forced recapitulation of the existing modes of production, a throttling of every possible move toward autonomy in the social system.

Thus the time now seems ripe to formulate an hypothesis concerning the "transition". The hypothesis which we advance as the premise for further theoretical work is an exact reversal of Lenin's theory. That is, we seek to reify an "ignoraction" toward the State" ("ignoraction": adapted from the German *ignoraktion*—an action which ignores, does not recognize those formal boundaries which the State imposes), to reify an abolition of the mechanism of State control and to reify a political formalization of the alliance between mobile strata of the labor force and dynamic capitalism, between capitalistic, post-industrial, electronic development and proletarian insubordination to the work ethic. It is interesting that at present renewed attention is being given to neo-libertarian hypotheses in economics. The interest that many revolutionary Marxists have manifested for economic hypotheses of neo-libertarian tendency thus becomes understandable.

## ON THE TRANSITION

Revolutionary thinking must focus its critical skill on the problem of transition, if only to liquidate and supersede the concept. As L. Berti has said, the concept of "transition" and the system of categories which it involves can "produce" a real scenario—can produce a vision of the revolutionary process which gets in the way of liberation. Divesting oneself of this concept means divesting oneself of a practice and an ideological projection, and thus, in the end, divesting oneself of an effect of reality. Freeing oneself of the idea that capitalism and communism are systems which succeed each other in a diachronic scheme amounts to recognizing that in a revolution from the apex of capitalism lies the only possibility for a Movement of Autonomy from capitalist domination. This Movement of



Autonomy involves liberation from work, and suppression of the general formal conditions of capitalist domination. The breakdown of this domination can thus be conceived (and put into effect) as a subjective mode (in the Movement toward Autonomy) of a process in which capital determines the material conditions for the reconstruction, without reproducing the formal conditions of the previous system. Separating the material organization of Know-how from the form of Value then becomes—not a natural tendency, but the strategic objective, the plan of operation of the revolutionary movement.

*Translated by Jared Becker,  
Richard Reid & Andrew Rosenbaum*

ii/1 BO-1-8/41974-Bologna, Italy: A view of a wrecked car on the Rome-Munich Italicus Express. After two explosions and a fire in a tunnel through the Appenine Mountains south of B., Police said a time-bomb apparently exploded in a toilette, triggering a second blast and the fire, which killed 12 persons and injured more than 30 others. In foreground 12 bodies covered with sheets. (UPI/ANSA)

ii/2 ML-603-4/17/75-MILAN, Italy: a priest blessing the body of Gianni Zibecchi, 26, killed during the riots today in Milan. (UPI)

ii/3 Fiat Mirafiori plant, Turin

ii/4 Pier Paolo Pasolini Photo A.F.P./Agence France-Presse

ii/5 *Tables for 34 Persons*, 1974-75 Mario Merz Installation in an abandoned factory near Stuttgart, Gallery Hetzler & Keller GmbH

ii/7 Photo: D. Cortez

ii/8-9 via Fani

ii/10 Super-8/photo: Seth Tilet

ii/11 ROM 1205101 DRUM BEATERS ROME: Lending emphasis by pounding on metal drums, striking metal workers stage a noisy demonstration demanding higher wages and a 40-hour week. More than 50,000 persons took part in the biggest labor march of the year, Nov. 28. Despite fears of police authorities, the manifestation was orderly. (UPI) 12/5/69

