

Social Violence and Pacifist Movements

On April 9 in Bologna, Italy, a public meeting was organized by comrades who had found themselves together in the streets of Ferrara [February 22, 2003] in which, taking cue from the restrictive measures against four comrades denounced for the events that occurred during that demonstration, how to struggle against the arrogance of power and its false opposition was discussed. For years, there has not been such a numerous and interested participation in an initiative outside of and critical with regards to the usual managers of dissent. Clearly there is no lack of those who feel the need to build pathways for a different critical practice and that have the desire to meet comrades with whom to discuss how it is possible to smash the double siege of domination from the one side and of the movement of movements, anti-global at first and later pacifist, from the other. It is our intention to try to continue along this path also because it seems to us to be a good way to face the repressive question in a way that avoids falling into a mere self-referential protest.

Notes for discussion

The current system of domination has no fear that its supposed opposers criticize its most blatantly unfortunate aspects since such critiques are given in that separated manner which it has itself prearranged. As such, even the most sincere in fact represent half-truths and consequently can only be lies.

The idea of meeting together in assembly takes its cue from the repressive measures announced against four comrades following the events that occurred on the occasion of the demonstration at Ferrara on February 22, said to be against the war and against the preparation of lodgings for the NATO military in that city.

It is first of all necessary to make it clear immediately, that the police and judiciary aspect of the repression is only the physically manifest and unquestionably difficult to tolerate expression of the constant and widespread coercion the whole of daily existence through less obvious forms that are not for this reason less devastating.

The events of Ferrara, though we don't want to emphasize them excessively, are a good stimulus for discussion; that experience and its consequences allow us to touch on many questions all actively present or positively absent on that day.

If one wants to speak of repression unfortunately the beginning is clear but how it is dictated interests us confronting it in the perspective of the radical critique of the existent.

If one wants to speak then of the way in which the *movement of movements*, first anti-global and then against the war, goes down into the squares we can see how in its absence it has been possible to carry on an other practice of dissent in the streets.

If we want to speak of the vice of showing up at demonstrations harnessed with video-cameras as if one were at the zoo safari bah!, in that occasion the critique of this unfortunate habit has been carried out constantly along the entire parade, without respite.

If one wants to bring together a round of discussions in order to understand how to get out of this situation of the numerical growth of the demonstrations but of

clear qualitative reduction, not to say absence, of contents and objectives, the joyous sharing of this occasion gives us more or less the way to do so.

Of the sufferings and painfulness of life

The security measures deserve a little examination. It appears that this is the first time in Bologna that the keepers of order have had to manage measures that, in their totality, appear to say the least singular. We don't think that the judge in Ferrari was struck by a premature sunstroke when s/he decided to replace house arrest with a redundancy of alternative measures for special effects. Besides the obligation of dwelling in the city of residence, the daily signature and the confinement to the house from 2pm to 7pm, he thought well to require the investigated to be easily found at any time and place; essentially, they must communicate all changes to the anti-crime cops every day, about 1pm, with an abundance of particulars, pertaining to the following day.

This clearly seems to be in line with the control that the current capitalist technological system exercises, in a wide radius over the entire life of its subjects. We don't think it is necessary to speak again of the video-cameras, the telephone cards, the various cards used for payment and all the necessary methods that the current system of domination uses to from birth onward in all of our changes. Nothing more is required in order to understand how such a type of restriction of *freedom* ends up reducing anyone who is struck by it to a state of intolerable dependence through the confinement of their existence, down to the most intimate particulars, really into the hands of those who defend the disaster of life against that which revolts against it. Also in this regard, the original idea of the judge in question is not so far from the general framework that sees the most complete enslavement of the human being to the mechanism of the market which demands to be able to take account of behaviors, predicting them, guiding them, anticipating them, in order to insert them as mere parameters within the sole socially acceptable logic, that of the circulation of goods. Commodification has colonized every moment of daily human activity. A commodity among commodities, the human being is not only a raw material, within the productive cycle, at lowest cost, abundant and even *superabundant* and flexible, easily transported and malleable, used by capital at its pleasure, but *every aspect of her/his activity* has been put to *profit*. Nothing is left to the gratuity of any free relation between human beings. In every sphere of our existence commodities besiege us and become our sole necessity, clearly unlearned but still unfortunately introjected. An overwhelming mass of commodities also leaves us incapable of understanding what our desires are and how to go about realizing them. The false well-being ruins us and causes us to lose the strength to react. We are, as Anders once said, sovereigns of mere passivity "since that which we possess is only our being able to be refurnished." Even in so-called free time we are at the service of production that uses us as consumers, as allies in the liquidation of goods, necessary to the commercialization of others, and in the creation of further false needs really through the use of data revealed by our forced behavior.

Adding insult to injury, the delegation of the control of our daily lives is still given when we are invited, in a presumed humanization of punishment, to become the prison guards of ourselves thus obliged to supply, grateful not to be in jail, detailed notes on where we go and what we do in the same way in which we *voluntarily* adapt ourselves to moving in the places appointed for our *free* time.

The logic of profit is spread out over the entire space of existence and the repression of that which might oppose it is constantly active.

Thus there is no dissonance between the meaning of inflicted restrictions and the treatment that is reserved for us in our, apparently free, daily life.

Control is merciless since there is no sphere in which it is possible to escape it; we are always under surveillance and, what is most tragic, is that we predispose ourselves to control, firmly enclosed as we are by the use of technological sirens. The totality of the harmfulness that poisons our daily life ties its asphyxiating circle around our throats. Inundations of commodities, control and physical and mental repression, exploitation of the human resource in all its potentialities produce alienation from oneself and from others, while at the same time the various forms of toxicity lead toward alienation from the natural world.

One does not think that one can live in any sort of mystical refusal of contact with the waste-bin of harmfulness that afflicts nor even of being able to create a separate world in which to experiment still human methods of relation, but of properly not ever losing sight of the fact that the definitive crushing of the human under the boulder of technological domination is imminent.

It is from here that we intended and intend to set out in order to carry our attack against those who are the artificers and those who make themselves the guardians of the current state of things. Capital is now managing the disaster that it has generated, but we don't want to get carried away in analyses of an economic type since we know that there will always be some economic form that will act as support to the will of oppressive power. In substance, we understand that the desire for possession of black gold wreaks havoc on Iraqis as the necessity to create a way for the conduction of natural gas wreaks havoc on Afghans, that there are *market conflicts*, between North America and Europe, and so on, squalidly, but let's avoid falling into the trap of a discourse that leads us to distance ourselves from the focal question.

Still we take into account the necessity of knowing in what way capital moves its pawns, but not in order to make ourselves experts among experts. Our task is to carry out a critical practice in every moment of our daily lives that aims at the reappropriation of the meaning of life, and to the grasp of the awareness that domination, which in this historical phase is expressed through the ruthless logic of profit appropriate to capital, is bringing its full conquest over the human being and the natural world to completion. This is why we have no interest in taking sides for partial objectives, such as the labeling of genetically modified foods or UN approval for possible future wars, since in acting in this way one loses sight of the fact that

this world as it is not reformable. This is not because we are utopian radicals, but because whoever tries to carefully discuss with us cannot avoid noticing the if the very basis on which the system rests is not attacked, it will always end up finding the way to recuperate any attack carried out. We consider the anti-globalization positions and we quickly see how so many, among the most diligent and far-seeing supporters of the western capitalistic world, are devoting themselves to making the critiques their own in order to then relaunch them clearly misrepresenting their real intentions: hastening to the find the** ** remedies** ** before the system ends up really tottering. The recuperative logic always has this end: to integrate in order to reduce subversive potentiality to nothing. Dissent lacking revolutionary range, as separated critique, is predisposed to offer new ideas later recycled by capital in order to support itself.

Of partial critiques

To separately denounce immediately perceivable appearances as catastrophic or “bad in themselves” without putting them in relation to that which at the root produces them and also produces that which is considered, with well-meaning resignation, the “lesser evil”, is equivalent to not opposing the existing state of things. The little that that remains of human reaction to the world quickly becomes, and is allowed to become, more fuel for the market. In the face of the public indignation of those who protest about this or that harmfulness demanding its intervention in order to pose a remedy for it, the techno-industrial apparatus immediately sets about securing for itself the honor (the profitable honor?) of the “elimination” of the damage that it caused itself, thus surviving through the vicious circle that due to the necessity of facing an source of harm passes through the invention of its palliative that in its turn will turn into a new source of harm into a renewed palliative... and into dazzling profits.

Thus, even those who apparently don't immediately ask the help of the butcher in order to save the victim, but themselves take action, as in the case of boycotts, fall again into a basic error. What sense is there in launching a campaign against a specific brand of food, clothing, etc., just because it is visibly more compromised in the generation of the horrors of “civilization”? Proceeding in this way, one does not go very far; one only goes as far as giving capital and its products for discount. For example, since the war in Iraq started, various boycotts against Esso with which the boycotters wanted to denounce merely that aspect of economic involvement in the present war. In reality Esso is responsible, along with its sister companies, of quite another, no less bloody, war, because multinational oil companies contribute every day to the perpetuation of a system concentrated on a techno-industrial development that asphyxiates us with its toxins. Again, to propose, as ecologists do, renewable and sustainable energy sources means confronting only the technical aspect of the problem, and not the political and the social. So doing, one remains within the framework of industrial society, thinking that one could sufficiently correct its defects. Then, the question to pose in order to focus the matter is: energy

for what? It would be necessary instead to define the word “energy” as the capacity of human beings to retransform the world into a place of life. Rather than seeking physical energy in abundance in order to go on feeding the industry of domination, it would be better to find the moral energy again necessary for affirming that the world in which we live does not please us and that the problems with which it seeks to harness us are not ours, in the sense that they are those that we endure but that it doesn’t concern us to resolve, and they are not those we intend to pose ourselves.

Let’s say it once and for all: the western way of life is a human and social misery. More than boycott, it would, in truth, be necessary to speak of sabotage of the very foundations of this system.

Of the ethical aspects of the pacifist movement

Italian windows are increasingly decorated with peace flags, *signs of opposition* against the war in Iraq. But if it is quite clear that the majority of Italians are against the war, the lack of discussion about the content of this protest renders it purely symbolic: say peace and all is said.

There is opposition to the war because it causes slaughter, pain and drama.

But modern warfare produces something else: it produces, to put it briefly, technological progress. When the United States wins the war in Iraq, this will allow them to appropriate Iraqi oil. The case of the French government is exemplary: it is officially opposed to the conflict and at the same time so attracted by Iraqi oil as to want to be an active part of the “post-Saddam” period. It is thus a contradiction, or at least an inaccuracy, to speak of war without dealing with the theme of the arms industry and of military research. People protest against the war and against the United States, but consider it normal to live together with products that would never have existed without war (there is no nuclear industry without Hiroshima), or are actually presented as passionately desirable (there is no Internet without the Pentagon).

The current pacifist movement is quite far from the level of awareness reached, for example, in the United States at the end of the ‘60’s. It is true they do not stand out from the totality of movements that originate in accordance with the fashions (from the safeguard of the monk seal to that of Art. 18). “Not one damned thing remains that one can do that cannot be transformed into war”, Jerome Letvin, of MIT, could declare in the New York Times Magazine of May 18, 1968. The lacks of the current pacifist movement can be emphasized starting from the refusal to distinguish the things in daily life that produce war, for example the use of oil on the industrial scale, the production of war machines and scientific research.

Once these points are clarified, one could speak of another aspect for which to refuse the war: it is inhuman, it is the worst thing that could happen. We are at the *ethical* aspect, meaning the refusal of war for what it is. This is the face of pacifism that interests us more because, even when sincere, it is based on a profound error: the distinction between a state of peace – that would be the one that we live in mercantile democracy – and a state of war. It’s a question rather of two sides of the

same coin, not only because of that which is said above about the misery of daily existence, but also due to the fact that the war is found again in our houses in the form of products from the *same* industries. One is horrified in the face of chemical weapons, but accepts the use at low intensity of the same weapons in daily life: from pharmaceuticals to discharged gas to poisons in food. Depleted uranium in the Iraqi desert and in unloading a little everywhere. Of course, this "economic war" that we live every day is more insidious, less spectacular, but certainly *not* less violent. The auto industry that kills thousands of people with statistical precision, preferably Saturday evening, the carcinogenic substances scattered everywhere, the desperation that annihilates life, are not less violent than a bombing. And this daily life is no less imposed than war is. Behind every protest there is the fact that the modern citizen is basically willing to live with war, as s/he is predisposed toward adaptation to all the new necessities of economic growth. An ethical behavior would consist first of all in the attempt to combat this daily war and the things in our life that produce war. Otherwise, one reaches the indecency of joining protest to impotence. It would be necessary to begin to consider how to escape the energy-growth-need for energy circle of dependence, and act in consequence.

On the question of violence or nonviolence, aided once again by Anders, we can say that "violence is not only permitted, but also morally legitimate until it is used by constituted power. Besides, power itself, always, is based on the possibility of exercising violence. We people of today however – who are not interested in anything but definitively preventing all violence – are reproached for thinking of the use of violence; although in truth when we take it into consideration, we aim at nothing other than the situation of nonviolence."

Inadequate action is a renunciation of action and the pacifist movement with its generic calls for a better world by building with the hands lifted sinks into its consequent impotence.

"None of those – and I am referring first of all to politicians, generals, scientists and journalists – none of those who prepare the mass atomic threat and mass slaughter, threatening or even just accepting the possibility of mass slaughter through the so-called peaceful nuclear installations none of them could or should any longer feel safe for their lives. Since they, in a programmatic and professional way, hurl us headlong into an unending anguish, now, finally, they too should be made to live in anxiety. Those who threaten us should be threatened by us. And putting our threat into practice here and there, not only should they be threatened, but also frightened; So that they are brought back to good sense and induced to change course. So that in the end no one is threatened any more, neither us nor them. I do not know if this will succeed, I do not know if with our counter-threat we will still be able to neutralize the danger that hangs over humanity. But I know that without our counter-threat, we will not be able to do it." - Charles Meunier, in Le Canard Dèchainé, Montreal February 1986

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