"A harrowing intellectual biography and review essay devoted to the life and works of Giorgio Cesarano, interwoven with an account of the Italian "radical current" of 1968-1978, when revolutionary expectations ran high but, for the few consistent revolutionaries caught between the terrorism of the state and the armed groups, the hostility of the Stalinist and crypto-Stalinist political formations, and a ruthless and sweeping repression, the results were often madness, prison, suicide and a wave of disillusionment that devastated the revolutionary milieu."
-'Alias Recluse'

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Apocalypse and Survival

Reflections on Giorgio Cesarano's book,
Critica dell'utopia capitale, and the experience of
the radical communist current in Italy

francesco santini

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and self-reflective thought itself. The modern revolution gazes into the abyss of the instincts, of the unconscious, and of the repressed, in order to take flight towards the search for ecstasy, towards the supersession of individuality in the dialectic that connects us to the worlds that surround us. The decade of 1967-1977 irreversibly transformed revolutionary subjectivity and its mode of perception. In this sense, it returned to the paths of religious tradition and magic, in order to reveal knowledge that had been monopolized for centuries by the esotericism of pre-capitalist ruling castes.

These conclusions lead us beyond the limits of this discussion. However, in his texts Cesarano proposed a possible way of approaching this adventure of knowledge, rejecting the impossible return to traditions, without denying their profound kernel of truth. The supersession of capital implies the supersession of archaic traditions, which are now being extinguished under the degradation of everything to a mere economic function. The current resurgence of religion and of profound traditions linked to the people and the race, are only reworked versions of the internal conflicts of capitalism and, in reality, are always contrary to the interests of the proletariat, which does not have, and has not had for a long time, any national or religious interest to defend. Those who today present themselves as forces that embody tradition are only the most aggressive and bloodthirsty fractions of world capital, which are regimenting the proletariat in monstrous communities subject to totalitarian ideologies. None of the modern, grotesquely communitarian national-religious ideologies[56] have anything to do with the contents of tradition: they are only manifestations of the decrepit "modernity" of contemporary capital.

The essence of the current supersession of tradition—the supersession of the limits of the individual Ego—is everywhere and can be rediscovered. For this search as well, the *Critica dell'utopia capitale* contributes valid foundations. With regard to both its merits as well as its weaknesses, this perspective allows us to accede to a new level of reading, perhaps one that is more profound and authentic, of the work that we have just explored.

Francesco Santini
July 1994

56. As a curiosity, that would rapidly be revealed to be absolute foolishness, we shall cite the attempt to "rehabilitate" the religious pseudo-community undertaken in 1979 by Lotta Continua, which ended up in a feverish defense of the Shiite movement of Khomeini, who soon revealed himself as not only an obedient subject of international capitalist rationality, but also as an extraordinarily sadistic vampire of the proletariat and the oppressed nationalities of Iran, even worse than the Cossack torturers of Pahlevi and his son.

issues between 1977 and 1981. In Milan, a group of “radicals”, now united with the core group of Collegamenti, tried to form a radio station between 1979 and 1981 (Radio Black-out, with Rosso). We already mentioned the experience of *Maelström*. We should at least also mention the two notable contributions by Mario Lippolis: "Teoria radicale, lotta di classe (el terrorismo)"[54] and *Ben venga Maggio e'l gonfalon selvaggio*[55] (the latter text, among other things, offers a comprehensive analysis of the radical current, which delimits it historically by following a periodization that has obviously influenced our analysis).

Ultimately, these latter interventions belong to a new era, that of the great retreat that followed 1977: the last two issues of *Insurrezione* were almost entirely devoted to an analysis of this retreat; *Maelström*, like us, sought to set forth a critical balance sheet of the seventies, from which it sought to derive a new perspective.

In our current situation we are reliving, with all its tragic impact, the “questions of race and nation” and this will undoubtedly be a cornerstone of critique in the immediate future. The internationalist perspective, the need to abolish nations, religions, and racism, will once again arise with full relevance at a time when the world is devastated by nationalism, racism and the new religious fundamentalisms.

The Italian situation today is itself distinguished by localism and racism, which not only impose the issues that we will have to inevitably confront, but also impose the terms under which we shall have to address the question of communism, which is posed precisely as the antithesis of the particularisms that have been revitalized by the decrepit capitalism of our time.

That long historical period is now past when such questions appeared to have been superseded by a totalitarian capital that had managed to homogenize all the social classes and unify the entire planet under its rule, reducing the ethno-religious conflicts of Asia and Africa to the role of scarecrows of the news-spectacle. This was undoubtedly an illusion shared by radical theory (and by Cesarano himself since the time of “L'utopia capitalista”), which neglected the analysis of certain contradictions that had seemingly been overcome in order to seek a higher synthesis, far from the bloody terrain of history, in part escaping from the oppositions of the present. This analytical weakness was a product of the illusions generated by the subversive movement of 1968: at times, radical theory has allowed itself to be dazzled by “total capital”, which was capable of assimilating into its own image all the conflicts that had been left unresolved by the era of war and colonialism.

The revolutionary movement of the last few decades, however, must not be underestimated in favor of the classical revolutionary tradition, which also was confirmed by current events. This is true because this movement has contributed irreversible changes in the collective consciousness of a necessary supersession.

In particular, the experience of the “counterculture” movement of the past, even though it has for some time now been recuperated in order to make profits on the market and has been disseminated in the form of consumable products, nonetheless contributed a fundamental awareness, a knowledge of the first importance, developed in all its scope by radical critique and especially by Cesarano; but it is also expressed in feminism, in the youth movement—especially the American youth movement—and in all those who have explored the borders of madness, the attempts to expand human consciousness and potential: the modern revolution profoundly questions the principle of personal and collective identity, the ego as a separate and hierarchically ruling space,

54. In Raoul Vaneigem, Terrorismo o rivoluzione, followed by Wolf Woland, "Teoria radicale, lotta di classe (el terrorismo). Appunti per il bilancio di un’epoca", Nautilus, Turin, 1982.

55. Published by the Accademia dei Testardi, Milan, 1987.

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movement—which was quite effectively attacked by State repression (a repression that was openly supported by the PCI and the extraparliamentary left)—what was effectively expressed in the "creative wing" was the weakest and most opportunist tendency, which tended to oppose coherent and intransigent conduct, thus becoming one of so many "brakes" on the movement.

It must be pointed out that this collective experience in which we participated, once it was exhausted, had not reached the level of the previous five years.

Some people resented the class that did not "want" to be revolutionary. Hence the analyses that denied the concept of the class struggle, that viewed the proletariat as counterrevolutionary and which praised immediatism, all the more so if it was aggressive, violent and insane. In general, it was this psychological-theoretical attitude that cleared the way for active, armed nihilism. Discouragement with regard to the revolutionary class—which was no longer the betrayed, but the betrayer—led to the substitution of the proletariat by the revolutionary vanguard itself, determined to take up arms on its own. This tendency tried to blackmail the entire world, spreading guilt feelings, in the cities where the confrontations were most acute, with respect to the victims that the repression rapidly began to produce in its ranks. This enterprise did not last very long, however, due to its weak organizational structure. Its glow was only a reflection of that of the Stalinists of the Brigate Rosse.[52]

Other people, instead, by assigning the preponderant role to theory, ended up identifying the revolution with the production of any pamphlet in which everything and everybody was criticized. This tendency, which had precedents in the passive nihilism described above, had a disastrous effect: revolutionary passion was replaced by grotesque intellectual ambitions. This attitude was most typically spread in the tranquil reality of the provinces, where any appearance of knowledge led to self-valorization. Or, in other circumstances, lacking occasions to criticize the leftism of the autonomists, the "theory" of the radicals drowned in sterility due to a lack of an object, and due to the practice of secluding itself in its accustomed isolation, satisfied with proclaiming just how real the red mafia was. These two tendencies could have found an antidote in the work of Cesarano, if they could have understood it. Among other things, Cesarano provides all the information for a critique of the processes of self-valorization of the ego and for the indisputable rejection of the putrid paths of art and culture. And in the *Cronaca di un ballo mascherato*—written in collaboration with Piero Coppo and Joe Falissi—he had undertaken a prescient and exhaustive critique of the development and destiny of the ideology of armed struggle.

19. Conclusions

Of course, when we speak of the radical experience we want to set forth a historical balance sheet, and seek to depict a current in order to supersede it. This does not mean that those of us who formed part of this current will not continue to act within the confines of and to develop the same perspective; in fact, the absolute intransigence of the radical communist current in the face of all the attempts to recuperate it is what has allowed a revolutionary tendency to continue to be expressed to this very day.[53] *Insurrezione* produced a total of five

52. Red Brigades [Note of the Spanish Translator].

53. We would also like to mention, as recent reference points outside of Italy, the following journals: Encyclopédie des Nuisances, Les mauvais Jours finiront..., La Guerre sociale, La Banquise, Le Brise-Glace, Mordicus, Théorie Communiste, and Temps Critiques.

repression that followed the events of March—demonstrates the enormous potential that opened up for the revolutionary movement, on which the latter was unable to capitalize.

Autonomia Operaia of Rome, which had a significant organization, supported by a very articulate and deeply-rooted social base, placed its considerable technical resources, primarily Radio Onda Rossa, at the disposal of the "radicals", so great was its hunger for theory and its need for ideas and perspectives to confront the attempts to isolate it and silence it after the battles of March.

The autonomists of the Via dei Volsci were too brutal and direct to be digestible even by the iron stomachs of the professional recuperators. The latter completely lacked the ability to convert them into intellectuals, and their arrogant fifties-style militantism rendered them incapable of introducing new fashions into the movement, which is why they tried to fit them into the very modern role of cultural workers. Inevitably, the autonomists had no other choice than to tenaciously oppose everything that did not serve their primary goal: to set fire to the city of Rome a couple of times a month, in the course of a series of confrontations with the police that were conducted with great intelligence and a perfect tactical sense of proportion.

These were people who had nothing to do with radical theory: they went to war with great organizational capacity; their encounter with the supporters of radical theory was positive and constituted an exception in those years of shameful surrender.

In these very favorable circumstances the only outlet for the radicals was the journal, *Insurrezione*, whose production, among other things, was the responsibility of the few elements who published it as a complement to the frenetic adventure that had opened up in the beautiful Italian cities in revolt.

It is also true that a high price had to be paid for their "active nihilism": just when the young people of Autonomia Operaia were leaving the organizations, sick and tired of being used as tools by the opportunist leadership of Toni Negri, there was a component of radical provenance that entirely misunderstood this exodus and, instead of satisfying the widespread need for theoretical support, of experience and lucidity—which the movement, which was extremely disarmed from this point of view, very much needed—allowed themselves to be trapped by their inferiority complex vis-à-vis the militarists of political terrorism, and tried to compete with them on their own terrain. The case of Azione Rivoluzionaria was the clearest example of this self-lacerating trend, and its disastrous result bordered on self-destruction. There were also other cases—fortunately not so spectacular—of grotesque and impotent imitation of that militarism that was one of the weakest aspects of 1977.

The movement of 1977 was almost entirely composed of very young elements. The reappearance of a "creative wing" expressed the profound need to break with the political sphere, in order to seek new theoretical tools that were adequate for the subversion of all the roles of survival. In the absence of the radical current, which had melted like snow in the summer sun in the first months of 1977 when it faced the first concrete difficulties of the

perspective did not go beyond that of survival. This is surprising, because the journal A/traverso, at least before 1977, had offered critical evaluations of the movement with some absolutely excellent interventions, at least compared to the theoretical level of the rest of the autonomists. Radio Alice, ultimately, was simply brilliant, and was the real central motor force of the movement in Bologna. It was, evidently, a group that knew how to express the demand of the enormous mass of the students and deviants of all stripes who gravitated around the university milieu in Bologna, helping to initiate a real chain reaction. From that moment on, they began to fear the fire that they had done so much to start. They therefore fell entirely into Cesarano's category of "self-valorization": they only tried to use their identity as revolutionaries in order to accede to that other identity, that they so coveted, that of cultural workers, and thus really fell into Toni Negri's category of the most prosaic "self-valorization". Once things reached this point, their meetings with the "radicals", according to what we have heard, were nothing but dialogues of the deaf.

Translator's Introduction to the Spanish Edition

"I tell you: the insufficiency of our language is the yardstick of our inertia in our relations with things, which can no longer be transformed when they have lost their meaning" (*"Parigi, andata e ritorno"*)

At least in Latin America, up until only a few years ago it was still hard to get any information about the great revolutionary wave of the 60s and 70s in Italy. Before the internet, with enough luck one could find some mention of the topic in the Iberian libertarian press, or a reference in well-intentioned but superficial texts like Cohn-Bendit's *La révolte étudiante*. But usually one had to settle for the dubious recollections of Toni Negri or, worse yet, of the Stalinist Macciochi. If my memory serves me right, the first serious analyses of the topic available in Spanish were the texts translated by the Archivo Situacionista Hispano in the early nineties. Although the vast majority of them are about the movement of '68 in France (for example, "Enragés y situacionistas en el movimiento de las ocupaciones", or "El comienzo de una época"), it was always possible to get a glimpse of the intensity of the movement in Italy by way of one of Gianfranco Sanguinetti's or Debord's writings (for example, Debord's Preface to the 1978 Italian edition of *The Society of the Spectacle*). During this same era the tedious exegeses of the autonomists began to be disseminated, while, at the same time, the murky spell cast by the folklore of the guerrilla struggle grew more intense, and even today enshrouds the memory of the Red Brigades. And superimposed on this colorful background one may now and then discover the odd paragraph that provides glimpses of such enigmatic and interesting things as "Metropolitan Indians", "Radio Alice" and a movement that wanted to abolish mental hospitals. Something had undoubtedly taken place over there in Italy.

In the last few years some publishers have made serious efforts to fill this gap. Traficantes de Sueños and Klinamen, for example, have published various books that offer quite a few elements for analysis: *La horda de oro. La gran ola creativa y existencial, política y revolucionaria (1968-1977)*, *Los invisibles* and *The movement of '77* and *The History of Ten Years*, to mention a few of them. But the most important book is *A Terrorism in Search of Two Authors (Documents of the Revolution in Italy)*, published by Likiniano Elkartea, which features numerous texts, produced in the heat of the struggles, that provide a clear overview of the most advanced sector of this movement. The essay that follows, *Apocalypse and Survival*, also addresses the experience of the most radical groups that took part in that revolutionary rising. But unlike the texts compiled by Likiniano, this document was written almost twenty years after those battles in the streets of Italy, when the steamroller of the counterrevolution had reduced a large part of that experience to a pile of ashes and rubble. Of course, even though it is a retrospective balance sheet of a period concerning which the author himself says that it is "already history", it is by no means the account of someone who is expressing his disappointment or disenchantment.

Apocalypse and Survival, by engaging in an in-depth analysis of the relation between theory and practice during this era, expresses a dimension that is almost always passed over by radical critique: the fact that, in periods of intense revolutionary activity, the exalting experience of breaking with the old world was combined in people's lives with the fear of plunging into the unknown, with the suffering entailed by seeing the security of their own habits and relations destroyed, with the need to make sacrifices and commitments, with the unpleasantness of political intrigues and ideological clashes … all those things that make revolutions more than just a "great big party". Instead of repeating the typical simplifying litany that places the proletariat on one side and reaction on the other, the author addresses the explosive tensions that shook the lives of the revolutionaries of that era, as well as the tumultuous relations between various currents within the proletarian movement.

For these very reasons, this analysis cannot be impartial: the author sides with his friends, without any pretense

of "objectivity". This attitude imbues the text with a passionate enthusiasm that is simultaneously its greatest strength but also its greatest weakness: his personal involvement in the experiences he examines allows Santini to provide us with a profound and detailed view, but at the same time it prevents him from maintaining a balanced perspective on the factors in play. In particular, I think that he grants too much importance to the personal figure of Cesarano (despite the author's caveats to the contrary) and to his theoretical work. There can be no doubt that Cesarano was a remarkable person who made a great contribution to the movement, but the way Santini insists on his importance is surprising coming from someone who came of age in a current influenced by the Bordiguist tradition, which is a great enemy of personalism and of the importance granted to "great men" in history. It is strange to find, in a text so full of lucidity, that the author can occasionally slip and make such peculiar statements as the following:

Quote:
"*Critica dell'utopia capitale*, had it been completed and disseminated in time, would have played the role of a valuable antidote against many of the ideological poisons … which infected the so-called 'creative wing' of the movement of '77 from its very inception."

Or like this:

Quote:
"….These two tendencies [self-valorization and isolation] could have found an antidote in the work of Cesarano, if they could have understood it."

It is one thing to recognize the value of a theoretical work for its radical and clarifying features, but another one entirely to attribute to it the ability to change the course of a social movement. A theory may of course seek to help the proletarian movement avoid being "poisoned" by ideology, but it can only act as one partial influence among many others. With respect to both the case of communist minorities as well as the proletarian movement in general, ideologization is the result of the complex interaction between innumerable factors—among which, the content of immediate social practice occupies a central place—rather than of intellectual errors that are spread by contagion from one mind to another and which can be counteracted by the "antidote" of a correct theory. The practical content of the movement can be analyzed and predicted, but for the most part it is beyond the scope of formal theory, since it responds to its own laws and evolves in accordance with what its protagonists perceive to be immediate necessity. Although theory formally expresses the content of human relations, it only expresses a negligible part of them; it is one mediation among others, and as such cannot by itself alter the material conditions that produce ideology or its supersession. The purview of theory is in fact much more modest: in the best case, it can publicly explain aspects of reality or relations that were not normally perceived, or call attention to the risks and the opportunities of a situation that affects everyone. Everything else depends on the men and women dedicated to action and struggle.

The overestimation of the power of written theory is not the only feature that can be criticized in Santini's article, but this did not discourage me when it came time to translate it. I do not think that in this case the author was trying to argue in favor of personalism or of idealism. I believe, rather, that he permitted himself some exaggerated claims, inspired by his great affection for Cesarano and for the experience that he recounts, which is of course debatable, but does not invalidate the contribution made by the text taken as a whole.

The same is true of the emphasis that Santini places on the need for revolutionary regroupment, an aspect that,

18. The great opportunity of 1977

Towards the end of 1976, while the few "radical" core groups present in various cities of Italy had a tendency to adopt a vapid attitude of superiority that made them incapable of carrying out any effective interventions, there were occasions when they had the opportunity to meet with the Circoli del Proletariato Giovanile and with the incipient Autonomia Operaia.

To mention only one example of this attitude, we have already considered the unfortunate results obtained by *Provocazione*, the journal that replaced *Puzz*, with such great theoretical ambitions.

Beginning in late 1976, on the occasion of the experience of the Circoli del Proletariato Giovanile, foreshadowed by the confrontations in the spring of 1975, the Italian situation rapidly began to open up, offering the revolutionaries rich opportunities of communication with the social.

The appearance on the political stage of the politics propagated by Autonomia Operaia is not in itself anything new. In fact, one may consider Autonomia Operaia as a form of consistent leftist militantism. Its success can be basically explained by its clear choice of illegality and violence. The confusion that was thus unleashed in the political schemes of the autonomous groups opened up a breach through which the metropolitan *incontrolados* were able to erupt.

At the end of 1976, proletarian expropriations took place one after the other on a massive scale. The Circoli del Proletariato Giovanile led the young people of the outer suburbs of the cities to carry out occupations of houses in the downtown areas. In Milan, the State University, a temple of Stalinism, was mercilessly attacked.

The great movements of Rome and Bologna during the first few months of 1977 realized the dreams of the great armed revolts in a way that was contrary to and separate from the political-trade union mafias, revolts that the radicals had dreamed of for so many years. 1977 never attained the scale, the social profundity or the duration of the previous movement of 1967-1969; it did, however, lead to a situation that was more favorable for radical communism.

This time, the militant politics of the splinter groups that had for so many years constituted an obstacle and a ball and chain on the movement, and with which we either did not want or were incapable of settling accounts, unexpectedly embraced the fierce and intransigent critique that emerged from the movement that expressed as its own the premise of the demand to fight for themselves, for the life of each person, against sacrifice, against boredom, against work, in order to immediately transform themselves, openly confronting in this struggle the state of siege of the world of commodities.

Also, this time the Stalinist bloc of the PCI-CGIL was identified as the enemy: the latter openly took up positions against the movement, and for the first time completely lost control of the streets.

The situation in Bologna, which was at first very promising, witnessed the entrance on the stage of Radio Alice-A/traverso, which, with its formula of neo-dadaism even dared to resurrect the ideas of the situationists. This fact —disregarding for now the extreme ambiguity of this collective,[51] which returned to the ranks of order after the

51. This group, representative of the "creative wing" of Autonomia Operaia, made contact on various occasions with the few radical communists who during this period were interested in the trivial questions that were considered to be part of the real movement. The human elements that composed Radio Alice, however, were interested in playing the role of intellectuals, seeing the possibility of using this role in the future to integrate themselves into the culture industry. Their

activity of a community or a group. Instead, this concept was popularized as subjectivism, individualism and praise for isolation (against which Cesarano had carried out an energetic struggle), which led to the typical cases of the "self-valorization of the Ego" fomented by the roles of creative and intellectual and highbrow critic, roles that are obviously quite seductive for those young people who came to radical critique armed with a careerist spirit. Evidently, some of them were to settle into the most ancient litany of artistic self-valorization and philosophical regression. The worst possible use of Cesarano! His theory was betrayed by seizing on that feeling of emptiness produced by the excessive scope of his vision, which made his exposition too abstract, which at times made it seem to be dealing exclusively with philosophy. This characteristic that confused the revolutionary reader of his texts, who strove to understand Cesarano in a balanced way, was used as leverage by those who wanted to create for themselves a role as authors of moral aphorisms. Thus, the regression towards the terrain of philosophy, intellectuality and art was complete, a terrain that Cesarano thought that he had irreversibly destroyed.

In Cesarano's work, the reckless attitude that privileged the gestures of violence, revolt and madness, was necessarily less elaborated than his analysis of the enemy's theories. It was therefore a simple matter, perhaps by adding a dash of the critique of contemporary nihilism, to consider as obsolete his few formulations that clearly defended the revolt of the insane or the criminals, extrapolating those that instead kept their distance from the manifestations of the existing movement, or which emphasized the partial nature of the particular conflict or its recuperation. This is the basis upon which some people justified their withdrawal towards a separate critique, hostile to the real, but without even a shred of Cesarano's destructive passion, which at times armed his critique with a heroic furor. These caricatures of Adorno, which pursued the exercise of critique as a kind of careerist pastime, did not even notice the blind rage that animated the autonomists who chased Luciano Lama away at the University of Rome; nor did they see the brute necessity that drove the unemployed of the metropolis to occupy houses, loot supermarkets, and to exploit the contradictions that had momentarily been reopened in social reproduction by assuring their survival by means of theft, throwing themselves into the confrontations with the police with a joy born of long-repressed rage and an accumulation of frustrations. The problem certainly was not that they were too violent, or that the movement often had too many guns. However, even these elementary critiques emerged from the radical current when it was in decline in 1977.

There were also misunderstandings concerning the question of "total capital".[50] This point, of central importance, for example, in the *Critica dell'utopia capitale*, was assimilated without a minimum of caution by the fastidious radical neo-critics, who wanted to make people believe that the revolutionary process was a strictly internal fact, that it involved a struggle oriented solely towards stripping the capitalist carapace from oneself. This perspective sought to concretize a set of relations between autonomous individuals "at the highest level of theory", as *Invariance* had sought to do in its time.

Isolation thus became a factor of self-valorization: each member of the theoretical elect carried within himself his seed of value, reflecting the self-complacency of the others. In the midst of the events of 1977 this attitude implied passive nihilism, neutralism, and the abandonment of the revolutionary camp, now stripped of all meaning. This hyper-subjectivism led to the pure and simple abandonment of the individual front of the struggle (the critique of everyday life); the final result was invariably passive nihilism.

50. Capital can no longer be identified with any particular separate economic or structural sphere, but is identical with the social, having become the alienated subjectivity of the species.

in my view, he does not subject to a profound enough analysis. Considering the indisputable dispersion of revolutionaries, it seems to me to be of little use to call for their regroupment as if this were itself enough to solve anything. In reality, it is not so much a question of getting the people with revolutionary ideas to associate with one another, but to know for what purpose they would do so, besides the enjoyment of their mutual affinity. To do this, however, does not by any means require that one be a "revolutionary": we proletarians have a tendency to unite spontaneously because this is what our social nature demands: it is not a question of choice. If such a regroupment has some special purpose, this is another question, but it only makes sense to debate this question in relation to each specific case. Whether it involves organizing a potluck dinner, a strike picket at work, the publication of a text of radical critique or agitation in support of imprisoned comrades … there are a thousand things that can be discussed and acted upon, without losing sight of the fact that each person participates in this or that activity because it directly affects his personal existence. But a general appeal to revolutionaries in order to convince them to regroup in accordance with their ideas, is another matter entirely, which basically is oriented towards transcending concrete determinations that link each person to a specific kind of activity. I shall pause here to examine this point more carefully because I believe that what Santini expresses in his article is symptomatic of a very widespread perception.

What Santini says is true: the retreat of the working class to defensive positions or to mere helplessness only aggravates the devastation produced by capitalist development, and in such conditions isolation cannot be defended with the delirium displayed by the apologists for theoretical purism in the early seventies. But there is also another question: as long as social atomization persists in the proletariat as a whole there will be limitations to the regrouping of radical minorities, since their activity inevitably tends to reproduce the conditions in which their class lives and acts. This must have a repercussion on their practice, which will tend to focus on one particular issue to the detriment of others, with the exclusionary effect this entails. Thus, it is by no means strange that some revolutionaries undertake solidarity actions on behalf of prisoners while others concentrate on rebuilding nuclei of agitation in the workplace; likewise, it is logical that some would prefer to respond to the need for independent media, while others devote their efforts to preserving the historical memory of the proletariat … and so on. It would be absurd to expect that each person should assume responsibility for all the practical necessities of the movement, nor does it make any sense to demand that all those who are engaged in different activities should converge in a single perfectly integrated collectivity: this would be enough to render their co-existence impossible, assuming with justification that a certain degree of dispersion is the inevitable effect of the way one lives in this society. In these conditions, it is normal for those who are trying to develop a "total practice" to end up absorbed in an overwhelming flood of tasks and relations where what they gain in terms of extension is almost always lost in terms of depth. The dissatisfaction that this generates is usually expressed in a recriminatory discourse that makes the radical minorities themselves responsible for the dispersion and weakness of the proletarian movement. Each group or individual therefore discovers reasons for underestimating the others because they are "only" devoted to labor issues, or counter-information, or prisoners' aid, or theory, etc. Ultimately, from this point of view all of them are culpable for not being sufficiently revolutionary to have an impact on the general situation. Such an attitude is equivalent to putting the responsibility for industrial pollution on the shoulders of the ordinary consumers. In both cases what is expressed is a feature of radical democratism, which relies on the moral power of good intentions to resolve the problems that can by no means be resolved under capitalist conditions.

The preferential dedication to certain tasks will only cease to be a problem in a revolutionary context, in which

human relations will possess a new dynamic corresponding to new social problems; and in which the resulting polyvalence will not be a distinctive trait of "revolutionaries", but of broad sectors of the population. As long as this does not take place, and perhaps even after it has occurred, it is inevitable and even desirable that some should devote themselves with more enthusiasm to one or another type of activity. If the preference for one activity instead of others today appears as a limitation this is not due to the actual content of this activity, but due to the fact that the collective capacity for harmonizing the diverse activities in a coherent community has not been sufficiently developed.[1] This is only a reflection of the way the population as a whole relates to the instruments of production and to the products of their activity. Communism, however, does not impose the abstract demand that each person should occupy himself indiscriminately with everything; instead, it allows for the harmonious social coordination of individual aptitudes. The communist production of the "total man" is not the production of the isolated individual in possession of infinite abilities, but the total community: in this community, man does not need to do everything that the others do, but he has the opportunity to do anything because he no longer encounters arbitrary impediments that separate him from his own inclinations. This has nothing to do with the madness of the "new man" that justified the spectacular protagonism of certain revolutionary leaders, and which is today still nourishing the desire for fantasy and the moralism of those who want to see their own personal requirements rule the lives of everyone in the entire world.

Returning to Santini, I think that his overestimation of theory as well as of the current possibilities for revolutionary regroupment are related to the insufficiency of his criticism of the point of view elaborated by Cesarano and *Invariance* during the seventies: a point of view in which the crisis of capitalism presents such apocalyptic and unfavorable features for communism, that revolutionary possibilities no longer seem to be contained within the social contradiction of capitalism itself, but elsewhere. Thus, theory appears as a means capable of expressing possibilities situated beyond the immediate social contradiction (which actually amounts to a new esotericism); while regroupment seems to provide access to such possibilities, without taking into account the fact that the revolutionaries themselves are immersed in the social contradiction and in history, from whose limits in any event they can hardly escape.

In Europe the eruption of '68 was followed by a deep decline that took longer to become apparent in Italy than it did in France, but which had an impact on the entire proletarian movement. Camatte and Cesarano, who had grasped the depth and the regenerative power of the movement, saw how the latter fell apart, and left in its wake a wreckage of desperation and bitterness. This led them to endeavor to theoretically prove that the revolution had lost a battle, but not the war. On what basis, however, can such a claim be made, in the midst of all the signs of a generalized defeat? It seemed obvious that the social contradictions inherent to capitalism were not enough to assure the victory of the revolution, but, in that case, what force can determine that communism will be imposed sooner or later? The very fact that the problem of the revolution was formulated in these terms was already the proof that they had lost touch with their fluctuating movement; the answer to this problem would, in the best cases, express the desire that the revolution is still possible, but not an understanding of why it should still be possible. And the answer, of course, was in the human species itself, but no longer in its social and historical becoming, but at the level of its existence as a biological species. The revolution was no longer perceived as the result of the ongoing social contradiction, but as a necessity of a natural order: it would ultimately be imposed by homo sapiens' need for survival.

1. I have discussed a possible way of addressing this problem in immediate practice elsewhere: http://comunizacion.org/2010/08/21/sobre-el-sentido-de-este-sitio-web/ (page no longer available -ed)

use of Cesarano himself. One typical blunder was made by those who arrived at the "critique of politics" at the very moment when—from 1975 on—the social situation began to open up once again. The sabotage of *Puzz* was part of this deviation (see the two issues of *Provocazione*). Partly as a reaction to the Comontist crypto-group that collaborated with *Puzz* (Comontism, although it had dissolved, still existed informally until 1977),[47] some of the journal's contributors imitated the attitude of *Invariance*: the destruction of all organizational forms, even informal ones, as well as of all collective expressions, including any practical activity or intervention in collaboration with the broad-based social movement that was then beginning to develop. It is certainly the case that the resurgence of the social effervescence that had so encouraged Cesarano at the end of his life was liquidated under the accusation of being mere "politics" or "nihilism", a typical discovery of those who had recently encountered radical theory.[48] Likewise, the fragile group, Quarto Oggiaro, formed by very young boys (who were moving to other cities) was sabotaged, in order to advance "critical subjectivity".[49] Cesarano's work contains the notion of "self-creative genesis", but not as something that is opposed to the coherent and collective

47. During the mid-seventies Comontism's ideology of crime, which until then had been an indignant provocation for the left—hence the incredible calumnies, repeated on other occasions, which in 1975, two years after the dissolution of the group, blamed the Comontists for the destruction by arson of the PSDI headquarters in Milan—had been transformed into a diffuse practice among the incontrolados of the urban periphery. The original core group of Comontism continued to exist even after the formal dissolution of the group, and made a major contribution, among other activities, to the theoretical development of Puzz, which ultimately convinced even Cesarano, who was anxious to discover a human solution that could effectively help spread his ideas.
Toni Negri was a diligent recuperator of Comontism, which provided him with the material for his new proprietary theory of "proletarian self-valorization" (sic!), which was his warhorse and also that of the "reds" in the years when Autonomia Operaia enjoyed its greatest success. This delayed recuperation practiced by Negri—who once refused to defend Riccardo d'Este from the calumny that he was a fascist, despite the fact that he had known him from the days of Classe Operiai—gave way to an apology for the illegal violent youth gangs of the days of the proletarian expropriations. If we use the word, "apology", it is in order to make it perfectly clear that the Negrist vision completely lacks the notion of "ridding ourselves of all the old shit", which was very much present in revolutionary theory and Comontism: the idea that the revolution implied the critique and abolition of the proletariat.

48. We do not mean to say that we had rediscovered the Nietzschean theory of nihilism and its application to phenomena of contemporary social life. One of the main characteristics of the journal Provocazione and its precursors was the use of the category, "nihilism" to designate all the manifestations of the movement of 1977: the Red Brigades, Autonomia Operaia, theyouth movements in general, violence (invariably baptized as "aggression", insofar as real violence was a "good" concept),social confrontations (always "false" and defined as "an absence of confrontation"). Positions of this kind may be summarized in the following way: all practical struggle was reduced to active nihilism; "theory" consisted in destroying everything and in using the "correct" terminology (although often without knowing its meaning: the typical foolishness of Provocazione wouldhave been laughable had it not been part of a tendency that exercised such a disarming influence).

49. The same thing basically happened to the political left, within which, just as it was beginning to perceive that 1977 was serious and implied the risk of throwing overboard years of preparation for a political career, witnessed a massive exodus to pacifism, legalism, reformism and the Radical Party: the haste of this flight suggested that during those years everyone had access to a television, which inevitably showed the blank stare of Lotta Continua disguised as a leader of the most varied programs of cultural entertainment. Scalzone and Piperno (former Potere Operaio) complained for many years that they had suffered an injustice because they were not properly recompensed for their long years of service to leftism. After all, everyone else had been rewarded with well-paid positions! But to have a right to enter into such competition you have to be perfectly clear—once March of 1977 came around—which side you were on. The pleadings for admission to the gravy train of professional ideologues presented after the deadline were not considered valid. To continue in the vein of macabre humor, we shall recall that even Re Nudo, the arch-enemy of Max Capa, as the temperature of 1977 rose a few degrees, was also enlightened with "creative subjectivity", but not so as to use it to engage in a hyper-critique like that of the always-revolutionary Capa, but in order to associate it with the eclectic religiosity of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, so as to clear the way to resignation. Overall, everyone, from John Travolta to the Brahma, was used to demobilize the violent and pitiless youth movement of 1977 and to protect the good name of the holy asshole (all of this was denounced at the time by Insurrezione, in a pamphlet entitled, "Proletari se voi sapeste...", Milan, 1980).

innovation at any price, and the lack of practical, social solutions, which degenerated into a passive nihilist attitude.

Cesarano himself, and along with him, a considerable part of the membership of Ludd, perceived the revolutionary movement as something completely new, and by no means as the heir of the preceding revolutionary tradition. This perception produced in him the demand for a new grand synthesis that would clearly supersede the contingent limitations of the moment, and to which he devoted himself with the passionate spirit of an explorer, completely submerging himself in a great theoretical battle that was fought simultaneously on the enemy fronts of the economy, psychoanalysis, linguistics, etc.

But Cesarano, even when he left behind the confines of classical revolutionary theory—which he thought was being superseded or was on the way to being superseded by the "new" theory that would inevitably emerge from the new revolution—not even then did he abandon it to proceed to the terrain of reformism, of pacifism or any other "conciliatory" ideology of capital.

Many other people, on the other hand, considered theoretical innovation not as a means to expropriate the science of capital, but as a means to expropriate revolutionary principles themselves.

Following this tendency, many revolutionaries began to pursue one theoretical novelty after another, one discovery after another, until they completely and definitively renounced all revolutionary premises and perspectives. Among those who were closest to Cesarano, we have already mentioned the 180-degree turn taken by *Invariance*. We may also cite the case of Gianni-Emilio Simonetti, decidedly opportunist in his search for a way to leave revolutionary theory behind, a way he found in the "critical" deep analysis of all the cultural and philosophical tendencies of the moment.

The dissolution of the movement into society favored the retreat of many of our comrades into passive nihilism. We have already emphasized how in Cesarano the critique of the ideology of everyday life did not lead to any kind of relaxation of individual tension, or to any reduction of the level of the critique that was always directed against alienated "life". In many cases, however, the loss of social commitment simply meant a surrender even in everyday life, a return to all the old habits, to the powerful inertia of the provincial and family structure typical of Italian society.

Frequently, the ideological terrorism of the communists was opposed by an attitude that was nothing but its mirror image; that is, a legalist and conformist, passive attitude, incapable of discovering the reasons for revolt in the moment in which one no longer felt the hot, lively atmosphere of the struggle and the collective social critique. For many, the dissolution of Ludd, for example, meant a return to their previous ways of life, or their insertion into university institutions, etc.

In some cases, Adorno and the Frankfurt School—two of Cesarano's main theoretical reference points—exercised a negative effect in this sense. While it is true that for Cesarano the dialectical tension that distinguished him from the German "critics", separated from the revolutionary movement, was always very clear, it is also true that their attitude of critical distance became the object of vulgar imitation, which was the preliminary stage to a conformist acceptance of the present and of mere survival.

We could refer to many individual cases, but what interests us in this context is emphasizing the general weakening of the revolutionary current. In this situation it was even possible to make a "counterrevolutionary"

It must not be forgotten, first of all, that these claims, disregarding for now their debatable theoretical validity, expressed the firm resolve to support the revolutionary proletariat at the moment when the contours of a brutal bourgeois counteroffensive were already beginning to be discernible. Nor could it be otherwise, since communist theory, like any other theory, is the product of a society ruled by class antagonism and operates as an active element in this conflict. Secondly, before we consider whether Camatte and Cesarano were mistaken by proclaiming the biological basis of communism, it would be of interest to understand why they sought its explanation in biology rather than in the immanent limitations of the capitalist mode of production, as Marx and Bordiga had previously done, for example. For now I will have to leave these questions unanswered, because this is not the place to examine them in depth. What I would like to emphasize is that, in *Apocalypse and Survival*, Santini himself, even though his balance sheet of an entire period of struggle did not pursue the critique of its theoretical results far enough, has nonetheless posed a whole series of problems which have a great deal of relevance for us today.

Is the proletariat the expression of a biological force that is strong enough to prevent capitalism from destroying humanity? Is the instinct of survival enough to revolutionize the current mode of production? Is communism a mere mechanism for the survival of the species, or is it something more than this? What exactly does it mean to say that it is by way of the communist revolution that humanity will be "reconciled with nature"?

I will not, of course, attempt to answer these questions here, which is beyond my abilities. But in any event I would like to outline some reflections that I think may be able to serve as an approximation to such an undertaking.

To begin with, the idea that the social contradiction itself is no longer enough to assure the revolutionary future and that this future must be based on other foundations, constitutes a theoretical regression with respect to the Marxist critique of political economy. Marx's merit consists in the fact that he formulated the communist revolution as a possibility engendered by the very development of class societies, and not as the result of biological evolution or any other supra-historical process. It is true that the critique of political economy starts from a reflection on the condition of man as a generic being in relation to the physical world and with the biosphere; but a premise is not the same as the guarantee of a result. It is one thing to say that the process of humanization renders the communist transformation of society necessary, and something else entirely to claim that communism is inevitable due to the evolution of the species. This second notion, which has led to the identification of the revolutionary future with the immediate affirmation of a primordial "life force" in personal and collective experience, undoubtedly expressed in the era of *Invariance* the firm determination to resist counterrevolutionary onslaughts, and has since functioned as a powerful pillar of support for those revolutionaries who are cut off from the revolutionary tradition. But it has also served to cloak with a seemingly revolutionary aura certain kinds of behaviors and representations that this society spontaneously gives rise to everywhere and have nothing revolutionary about them. The vitalist concept of communism arose to express the tenacity of a working class besieged by reaction, but it was no longer relevant: it was no longer so much a matter of resisting, but of re-launching communism on the basis of its social and historical premises.

When Cesarano claimed that "the irreducibility of the biological foundation of the revolution guarantees the invincibility of the species", he was grasping at straws. What is this "biological foundation"? The process of humanization? We do not know much about this, except that as an evolutionary process it does not unfold in accordance with a predetermined goal, but is the result of a very complicated network of interactions and

evaluations in which physical and biological as well as cultural and social factors play a role. The primordial life force, then? It must be recalled that western civilization has forged notions like "force" and "life" (as well as many others) to designate the unknown, or that which cannot be defined because no one knows what it is. These notions have never been precisely defined by either western philosophy or western science, and they have been employed to designate not a set of phenomena that are well understood in terms of their own existence, but certain ideas that men have developed with regard to the cosmos and their place within it. These ideas have been transformed in accordance with the ideological prejudices and requirements of a series of systems of class rule, and have even displayed significant variations within one and the same era. It is not the same thing to appeal to the "natural basis" of man in 1510 as in 2010, nor is it the same thing to invoke this "natural basis" with reference to Goethe as it is with reference to Darwin. Up until now the "natural" and the "biological" are far from reflecting the ideal of objective scientific knowledge: to a large extent, they have not transcended the status of ideological constructs. To rely on the social transformation of such "realities" means to make that transformation depend on the dominant prejudices of our time. Ultimately, to make communism depend on economic development is not so different from making it depend on the "life force of the species". In both cases communism is depicted not as an intentional product of human activity, but as the effect of a force that is external or prior to human activity.

Nor should one understand the "biological foundation" of the revolution in the sense of the *Prana* of the *Upanishads*: this concept, which designates the primordial cosmic energy, comprehends the succession of transmutations and metamorphoses in all orders of existence as well as the functioning of every living thing on an immediate physical level; but it does not provide any solution to the problem of determining the concrete contents of these metamorphoses, nor can it by any means serve as the basis for a teleology. To assert the truth of communism by basing it on a foundation that is prior to the social existence of man, or by dispensing with man's historical determinations, is to plunge into a dead end.

Even if we admit the vitalist concept of communism—recognizing for example in the revolutionary process the autopoietic action of the elemental force or *prana*—we still have to confront the fact that this force is not only insufficient as a basis for communism, but that it does not even assure the survival of the species. Every day, dozens of animal and plant species are annihilated by human activity, which means that their life forces—or whatever you want to call it—were utterly powerless against the destruction wrought by industrialization. Is it not true that men, were they to rely on their mere "life force", are just as defenseless against the gigantic nuclear arsenal that looms over them, or against the catastrophic consequences that could be unleashed by widespread genetic modification of the food supply? There is no "irreducible" biological foundation that can guarantee the survival of our species or any other species. The communist revolution is a fundamentally human affair: of course it pertains to what we call "nature", but above all it involves what distinguishes homo sapiens from the other species. Only humanity has developed its sociability to the point of constructing civilizations and letting them die, and to the point of conceiving the necessity of abolishing and superseding the society that it has itself created. Only human beings are capable of imagining something beyond their immediate conditions and producing themselves in accordance with what they want to be. This distinctively human trait is what led to capitalism and it is the same one that can lead to communism. Such a possibility is a product of the historical development of modern society, and it is upon this possibility that not only the continuation of the humanization process depends, but also the survival of what we call "nature".

In the radical theory of the seventies the mystification of the "biological" and the rise of immediatism reflect, on the terrain of social subversion, a more general change in society: the end of the wave of capitalist expansion that

once seemed to be left behind in a previous epoch of capitalist development have returned to occupy the historical stage. Capital has resolved none of the problems that it unleashed during the period of its planetary expansion at the end of the nineteenth century. Within the citadels of capitalist hyper-development the unresolved pathologies of society (crime, blind violence, psychosis), the symptoms of a profound crisis, are established as the daily nightmare of millions of proletarians.

More than ever before it is becoming obvious that we need theoretical weapons capable of destroying the deception of the false alternatives that have been given new life by the conflicts and the chaos that have engulfed the south and east of "civilized" Europe, and which now are infiltrating its ghettoes in the form of racism, Islamic fundamentalism and fascism, all the things that at the beginning of our history appeared to be residues of the past, condemned without any hope of resurgence. The principles of the communist program must serve to analyze and fight them, points of reference that we cannot only derive from our present, from the museum of horrors that besets us. The communist positions on world war, on internationalism, and on racial and national questions, are all completely relevant today; outside of those principles there is no perspective that does not lead to war and massacres. And together with these principles, the complex and varied "radical critique" constitutes the most complete synthesis of the recent revolutionary movement in the metropolis of capitalism. This movement, globally more rich and extensive than radical communism itself—which is only a component, which is besides limited in time—expresses the new contents that have enriched the communist perspective.

With notable coherence, Giorgio Cesarano, contributing his own historical perspective on the movement of 1968, spoke of "radical critique" to refer to the precursors embodied by the Situationist International—and to a lesser extent by Socialism or Barbarism—in France, and by Ludd—and to a lesser degree by the Organizzazione Consigliare and by Comontism—in Italy. Cesarano was interested in the new and different manifestations of the workers movement and the revolutionary tradition. Our current focus is different. Today we must seek a greater historical grounding in the face of the storms of the present, and therefore we situate ourselves more profoundly in space and time, resuming the study (which was temporarily frozen in its provisional conclusions) of the theory of Marx and of its partial resurgence during the twenties (in the sixties, for example, it was inconceivable that the Balkan crisis or the Turkish-Armenian conflict should occupy the front rank of our concerns and dominate the headlines in the newspapers).

Clearly taking into consideration his own historical premises, Cesarano's theory indefinitely opened up towards the future, towards the revolutionary perspective, and was devoted to the immense task of contributing his own reasons and his own instruments to the future revolution, which was sensed to be much closer than we can sense its presence today. In this open-ended labor he believed that he was implicating the radical journals and groups of his time (*Invariance*, *Errata*, *Négation*) and a whole mass of individuals and situations—at the center of which was *Puzz-Situazione Creativa*—which seemed to be making headway during the mid-seventies. As a result, we must not be deceived by the false impression of anachronism that his writings might display: they comprised an open, inconclusive quest, anxious to confront other contributions. Instead, Cesarano remained isolated. The theoretical current of which he was a part had faded away. The decline after 1968 seriously weakened the radical current, which, towards the end of the decade had become almost incapable of producing critical analyses, and during the eighties was only capable of making sporadic and isolated contributions, that were no longer—in our opinion—attributable to a collective point of view.

The gradual disintegration of radical theory was marked by two basic deficiencies: the desire for theoretical

3. In the short term, we have to avoid repeating the error that was made at that time and that would be totally unthinkable today: the valorization of isolation (which transforms theoretical activity into something abstract and unverifiable). To the contrary, the experiences of the revolutionaries in the workplaces, in the rank and file proletarian organizations, and in the social centers, must be very carefully analyzed without making any exceptions, since they constitute a vital element, without which not even the preliminary formulations of the revolutionary tradition would be viable. One lesson that may be immediately drawn from the radical theory of the seventies is that the revolutionaries cannot omit the concrete relations with the social struggle without swelling the ranks of so many brilliant former revolutionaries; and at the same time, they cannot renounce the concrete and living critique of everyday life without eventually succumbing to passive nihilism.

4. There is no need to fear the organizational and institutional solutions that could serve to attain full practical efficacy. In the current conditions of the profound crisis of capitalism, in which the best elements of the international revolutionary proletariat are not, however, prospering—and there is not even a prosperous class movement capable of self-defense—the revolutionaries face all the typical dangers of the previous periods of retreat, but they still do not possess any historical relation with a recent movement of generalized struggle. Thus, in a certain sense, today much more than in the seventies, we move along the edge of the abyss, threatened by the snare of desperation, deception, and the "catastrophic" crisis of devalorization, in which it is becoming ever more difficult to find a solution in attack and revolt, a solution that, after all, in comparison with our current situation, used to be within reach. So that now, no one may allow himself any kind of indulgence on the terrain of isolation. Revolutionary community, organization and solidarity are urgent necessities, whose absence is dramatically obvious, but whose realization is terribly distant. All of which calls for strong bonds between revolutionaries, without any kind of sectarianism. The current period of "preparatory" work, of clarification of principles, requires not only coherence and intransigence, but also an enrichment of contacts, of sources and discussions. The revolutionary milieu is in itself too weak, it is too much of a "nostalgic" parody of what it once was, to be capable of constituting by itself a valid point of reference. That is why it needs all the contributions it can get, in order to create some degree of circulation of ideas, of research, of study, that would at least establish the minimal conditions for a resurgence.

There will be no movement without principles and without theory, nor will there be any movement if we reproduce the narrow-mindedness that characterized the decline of the radicals.

17. The exhaustion of the radical current during the period of reflux

We are now living in tragic and bloody times. The current crisis simultaneously displays the classical features of an economic recession in the strict sense of the term (unemployment, overproduction, overexploitation, unbridled competition, export of disaster to Africa and Latin America) and also in a broader sense as well (inability to control the world situation,[46] financial collapse, starvation, war, and the demented destruction of the environment and natural resources).

Together with all the other aspects of general bankruptcy denounced by the radical theory of the seventies, by way of the demystification of the "apocalypse" of capital, all the inter-ethnic, racial and religious conflicts that

46. Some zones of Africa have been abandoned to chaos (Zaire, Uganda, Burundi, Liberia, Angola, Rwanda). The fiasco of the American "New Order" in Somalia is obvious. In other parts of Africa, there has been a total economic collapse. The disaster in Algeria directly threatens Europe. In Latin America, guerrillas operate in extensive regions. It is doubtful whether Russia can contain the wars in the republics of the former Soviet Union.

began after the Second World War, which in turn led to a form of class rule that was more deeply rooted than ever before in the control of populations conceived no longer as merely social realities, but above all as biological forces. The theory of revolution took part in this, for, despite the fact that it assumed the point of view opposed to that of state control—or the point of view of proletarian insubordination—its deductions proceed from the same ideological premise: the socio-historical dimension of man had become secondary compared to his biological dimension, which is now seen as the "fundamental" factor. Thus began a search for the answers to the great questions not in the history—dry and complicated—of the social modes of production, but in more nebulous zones, largely unknown or misunderstood, and for that very reason so much more seductive: in the prehistory of man, in vitalist philosophies and in the opaque surface of the immediate present, where the fashions of the moment are self-validated: situationism, neo-Darwinism and the New Age. This abandonment of the study of history and of the ongoing process of capitalist contradictions—with an exception made for a few militant formulas that are still linked to the revolutionary tradition—might have something to do with the subsequent rise of primitivism, and with the fact that ahistorical immediatism was imposed not as a reaction to the delay imposed by ideology, nor as one form among others of experiencing life, but as the only acceptable way to live. I trust that the article that follows below, now that some critical observations have been set forth, will help to distinguish these unfortunate ideological consequences left in the wake of the defeat of the proletariat, from the really positive contributions that are bequeathed to us by that beautiful and inspiring revolutionary uprising.

Carlos Lagos Paredes
April 2010

1. Foreword

The publication of the *Opere complete*[1] of Giorgio Cesarano, which commenced in the summer of 1993 with the publication of the first comprehensive edition of *Critica dell'utopia capitale*,[2] is the fruit of the activity of a group of individuals who were directly inspired by the radical critique of which Cesarano was one of the pioneers.

In 1983, a group of comrades who came from the "radical current" founded the Accademia dei Testardi,[3] which published, among other things, three issues of the journal, *Maelström*. This core group, which still exists, drew up a balance sheet of its own revolutionary experience (which has only been partially completed), thus elaborating a preliminary draft of our activity, with the republication of the work of Giorgio Cesarano in addition to the discussion stimulated by the interventions collected in this text.[4]

In this work we shall seek to situate Cesarano's activity within its historical context, contributing to a critical delimitation of the collective environment of which he formed a part. We shall do this for the purpose of more effectively situating ourselves in the present by clarifying our relation with the revolutionary experience of the immediate past. This is a necessary theoretical weapon for confronting the situation in which we find ourselves today, which requires the ability to resist and endure in totally hostile conditions, similar in some respects to those that revolutionaries had to face at the beginning of the seventies.

The republication of texts from this period is playing a particularly important role in the discussions in which we are currently engaged at the Centro d'iniziativa Luca Rossi,[5] and in the relationship we would like to establish with the revolutionary presence (although a very limited one) in the vicinity. In the first place, as we have already pointed out, we are directly inspired by the central theoretical expression of the last period of acute social conflict in our country (the decade of the so-called "rampant May" of 1968 to 1978). In the second place, we have no intention of claiming any historical continuity that does not exist: the "radical current" reached the high point of its direct participation in the revolutionary movement between 1968 and 1970. After that time the reflux of the social movement had such a powerful impact that the radical current was incapable of taking advantage of the occasion offered by the unforeseen explosion of 1977, nor was it capable of recovering from the failure of that outburst. We shall therefore study, integrate and attempt to derive profound lessons from the contents this brief historical period have produced, in order to thereby provide its contributions with a definitive historical demarcation. Although for us, at the present time, the balance sheet of this crucial historical period is fundamentally positive, it is necessary to settle accounts with the past. The historical horizon that we now face

1. "Complete Works" [Translator's Note].

2. "Critique of the utopia of capital" [Translator's Note].

3. "Academy of the Obstinate" [Translator's Note].

4. This activity was carried out at a time when the principle texts of the "radical current" were finally being made available. In this connection, we must particularly emphasize the appearance of the first complete translation into Italian of the journal *Internationale Situationniste*, published this past year by Nautilus, in Turin.

5. This center was named for a leftist militant who was murdered in February 1986 by the police in a confused automotive incident in the streets of Milan (the police who killed him claimed to have shot him "in self-defense"). The website of this organization can be found at: http://www.ecn.org/lucarossi/625/

issues a warning against the new forms of self-valorization that transform "psychotic" or "neurotic" experience into a new spectacular role.

Certainly, from many points of view, things have been simplified today. Capital has now gone beyond the phase when it could extract new cultural and artistic forms from the psychedelic experience or, on another level, when it could incorporate vast sectors of the new generations that have a spontaneous predilection for rebellion. What is absolutely fashionable today is the individual described in the *Critica dell'utopia capitale*, who dizzyingly perceives his own belonging to an Alien world and who is rendered absolutely incapable of communicating with others, who, participants in the hallucination, appear to him to be masks. It is this description, among others, of the hallucinatory character of this continuous flux of alienated relations that forms the everyday reality of capital, in which the individual gradually internalizes the roles of its cycle of valorization—at work, in the family, in codified "sentimental" relations—where Cesarano writes some of his most powerful pages, immediately comprehensible by the revolutionary who is "lost" in today's reality.

Now, more than ever before, the danger of a total uprooting and surrender exists, since the link with a recent past of generalized revolt is entirely lacking.

16. The activity of the Centro d'iniziativa Luca Rossi

This is why an activity like that undertaken by the Centro d'iniziativa Luca Rossi is relevant, which we may summarize as follows:

1. Clarifying the revolutionary tradition, which is necessary in order to establish some principles that transcend the waves of barbarism that capital has unleashed on the world that it has colonized (racism, war, the bloody resurgence of national conflicts like those of the period before the First World War, the belligerent expansionism of the old religions), with special attention to the ultraleft current of the epoch of fascism and Stalinism. This labor implies the resumption of the projects that were underway in the seventies and which could not be concluded: the affirmation of communism and its positive description. Because we must confront the mystification that accompanied the collapse of that which seventy years of counterrevolution falsely passed off as "communism", while fascism and racism no longer just play the role of spectacular scarecrows but have become gigantic zombies armed to the teeth.
2. Drawing up a balance sheet of the Italian radical current, because the revolutionary eruption of those years "set fire to" a series of questions without actually answering them, and got stuck in a dead end just when the time seemed to be most favorable for its activity (1977). This is why it is necessary to demarcate that historical experience in order to extract the requisite lessons from it. There is a clear necessity, among other things, of making accessible the results of this endeavor, but it is unthinkable that this should be done outside the boundaries of a discussion that would make it comprehensible and that would make it an object of criticism for today's revolutionaries. It is therefore necessary to confront a double task: to spread the principle texts of the seventies and to try to draw up a critical balance sheet of that period.

1994, and are inevitably completely unknown by the young people today, who cannot even easily find the publications of Autonomia Operaia, which were so widely distributed during those years. This shortcoming, added to the gross distortions introduced by the restructuring of culture and intellectual life—which, unlike 1968, judged the movement of 1977 to be "unmentionable" due to its opposition to the PCI—has made a major contribution to this neglect, and the resulting timidity of today's subversive youth milieu.

whose effects he already understood. At the same time, he was very much aware that the revolutionary movement in its broadest sense, on a world scale, was dissolving into new ideologies born from the recuperation of the "sixties lifestyle". If, for example, the experience of the American hippies constituted a new and authentic aspect of the revolutionary movement, at the beginning of the seventies capital had already incorporated the "transgressive" ideology of the Californian "alternative" culture, and disseminated it in all the markets of ideology.

Cesarano affirmed the profoundly "individual" content of the revolution, the implacable critique—assumed by the revolution from the sixties—of all forms of alienated everyday life; he rejected the alienation of theory in terrorist dogmatism, in that kind of Bacchanalia[44] of the negative which had assumed, in his circle, the form of an ideology of "illegality" and an exaltation of vandalism and theft; he also attacked the now generalized spread of fragments of the critique of everyday life on the part of cultural centers that were directly subordinated to capital, which implicated broad sectors of the dissident youth movement.

During the nineties capital is spreading its messages in an extremely direct way, and has no problem propagating the most reactionary and decrepit ideologies. Therefore, we no longer need the kind of mighty exploits that Cesarano had to carry out in order to avoid offering an ideological model of immediatist radicality, nor to wink at the youth as Marcuse did, while he clearly referred to LSD and more generally to the destruction of the limits of the ego.

In the *Critica dell'utopia capitale*, Cesarano clearly explains how, in schizophrenic delirium, the wall collapses within which our inherited language imprisons communication, and therefore so too does the perceptive barrier that marks the frontier between the ego and the world, thus opening up the explosive possibility of a dialectical relation between one individual and another. At the same time, he had to warn of the danger of the "private prison sentence", which, expecting "the explosion of living meaning experienced as individual vicissitude, sought to set fire all at once to the totality of its own meaning".[45] In the *Manuale di sopravivenza*, on the other hand, he

44. The Bacchanalia were ritual celebrations held in ancient Greece. In these celebrations a phallic symbol was carried in a procession, the object of adoration that could represent Priapus, Dionysius, or other deities. [Note of the Spanish Translator]

45. Among other things, if we want to demystify the recent past in Italy, there is not much to find in the declining theoretical production of the last radical communists. As of this date there has been no attempt to draw up a balance sheet of the veritable war of the years 1977-1979 (from the expulsion of Lama from the University of Rome to the struggle of the hospital workers). The dominant mystifications in the culture of the left tend to obscure or eliminate all the profound features and characteristics of this period, proposing a tremendously falsified reading under the rubric of "the years of lead", which only emphasizes the false spectacular war between the State and the militarized political groups. A typical aspect of this official interpretation is the version of the "defeat" of the movement, exemplified by, among others, the various exponents of Autonomia Operaia and the military groups, presented as if it were the result of a civil war or a revolutionary movement that was on the verge of seizing power. If we have to speak of defeat, this defeat certainly was not the result of a pitched battle, but was a social defeat, due to the profound weakness and fragility of the movement. The autonomists have also completely neglected the task of drawing up a serious historical balance sheet of Autonomia Operaia, which played such an important role in the reality of the movement.
There is a "radical critique" of the military tendency of the Red Brigades that was undertaken by Cesarano and Collu in Apocalypse and Revolution, and comprehensively completed by some of our comrades, and even by some exponents of Autonomia Operaia. There has been, however, absolutely no radical critique of the contents expressed and disseminated by the armed organizations such as the Red Brigades, Azione Revoluzionaria and Prima Linea; in order to find such an analysis of this kind the only place one can look is in various texts of the autonomists.
The events of the three years 1977-1979 were decisive for the fifteen years that followed, from 1980 to

has changed so much compared to the sixties and seventies, that the revolutionary experience of that epoch is already "history".

2. The "radical current" and the suicide of Giorgio Cesarano

The reader of *Critica dell'utopia capitale* cannot but be impressed by the suicide of Giorgio Cesarano, at the age of forty-seven, precisely when he was struggling to produce his most important work. At the time of his suicide his theoretical work had reached its high point. His death interrupted research that was still underway, at a time when bitter controversies were in progress, and when fruitful collaboration and new encounters were still possible. 1977 was just around the corner and Cesarano had already considered the possibility of a personal "practical" compromise that would have opened up the doors to action, which for him was more urgent than theoretical communication. At the time he had already participated in *Puzz* (a journal published by the informal group known as Situazione Creativa de Quarto Oggiaro) and he wanted to continue to pursue this collaboration.

In the spring of 1975 the young people of Quarto Oggiaro had already committed themselves to the street battles (together with a nascent Autonomia Operaia[6]): although it was only for a few days, barricades reappeared in Milan. Throughout 1975 and 1976, spontaneous groups of "radicals" emerged on various occasions, which already constituted a point of reference for various publications that appeared during this period in various cities in Italy. The veterans of the long cycle of struggle of the sixties were finally joined by a good number of young people. The "radical current" began to make its presence felt, and also attracted many dissidents from Autonomia Operaia, the university, the assemblies and the streets; and on the eve of 1977 it once again began to be a central critical presence that was based on a widespread network of contacts.

In this generally quite favorable environment, Cesarano became aware of its shortcomings: numerical increase did not entail a corresponding theoretical-critical advance. *Critica dell'utopia capitale*, had it been completed and disseminated in time, would have played the role of a valuable antidote against many of the ideological poisons, above all those of a transalpine provenance (the "French ideology"), which infected the so-called "creative wing" of the movement of 1977 from its very inception. Furthermore, Cesarano's coherence and lucidity would have made a decisive contribution to correcting the mistakes in which the "radical current" had become mired.

Beyond his personal history, this desperate act was based in the limitations of a current that a short time later would undergo its own crisis.

One of the characteristic themes elaborated by the author of the *Manuale di sopravivenza* is the need to pass the "test" that, in periods lacking social tension, is imposed on every revolutionary: to resist, as long as the "intermission" of the revolution lasts, the homicidal assault of the ghosts of guilt, the solitude that leads to confusion, the hallucinations and deviations that lead to madness, and the return to the habitual roles of economic and family life that were thought to have been left behind. Giorgio Cesarano, profoundly affected by the suicide of his beloved friend and comrade Eddie Ginosa, vividly demonstrates the risks encountered by the revolutionary when he cannot define his identity in a process of social struggle and loses himself in the hallucinatory and ubiquitous reality of the process of capitalist valorization, with respect to which he perceives himself as an irreducible other. In this situation reality can be perceived as something alien and one can

6. Workers Autonomy [Translator's Note].

experience one's own rage, and one's own revolt, as something complete, exclusive and unique, that is, pathologically. This is why isolation can be a mortal danger, against which the revolutionary must have the lucidity and the distance necessary in order to find his own reasons, and to understand that his reasons are the same ones that everyone else has:

Quote:

> "[…] the biological function of the revolt born from each individual experience is that each person recognizes his practice as generic and alien to any particular theory. Men lack neither the power nor the lucidity of practical criticism. There is no 'person' who does not himself know the contours of the nightmare that, despite everything, we call life. What is apparent, as appearance, cannot even retain the least trace of a glance that can penetrate the false wall of the suffering individual, who clings, between the ego and the ego that designates you, the terrible signs of the destruction of life, the cracks through which one can finally make out what is always obvious, visible: the identity of the mutilation that is paradoxically accepted by everyone in the name of the identity of each person as different and specific. The trivial truth of the fact that all of us are absolutely stripped of real identity—an identity with the need to exist, with the desire to love—in exchange for an absolutely carceral identity, numinous in its form but numerical in its substance. The need to exist is the elemental, and banal need; the suffering of not existing is likewise elemental and banal. The problem is 'the others', the labyrinthine "reign" that is not the life of anything or anybody, which claims to be the life of the whole, and everything for everyone…."[7]

… in order to remove from them unhappiness and desperation, granting them the incommensurable power of a revolutionary initiation to passion and to life.

Due to the fact that it addressed the totality and focused its interest on the critique of everyday life and the experimentation that leads to ecstasy, the radical current had to pay a very high price to the counterrevolution, inexorably suffering the self-destruction of the most passionate individuals, those who most genuinely enjoyed life and who were most incapable of adapting to the night without hope of everyday life under capital. Unlike other tendencies of that time—which are now our "enemies"—the radical communist tendency was not massacred by the repression, nor did it count among its ranks deranged loners and lowlifes: taken as a whole, it has not renounced its principles. With the exception of the very few who "betrayed" the movement in order to formally cooperate with the political ideologies and organizations of capital, most of us who have abandoned the revolutionary perspective did so out of inertia and conformism, or from an accumulated resentment (towards the proletariat that did not want to become revolutionary, or towards our more brilliant and admired comrades in whom we bestowed our confidence and who too often were not faithful to their unyielding, sometimes ruthless, critique of what exists, nor did they have enough effectiveness to arm their rage). But those who considered the revolutionary passion as a "biological" force, an energy that is profoundly rooted in their being, have continued to weave the shroud of Penelope of theory and experiment with solutions that allow us to survive and escape, in whatever manner, the invasion of an opaque and deceptive present. Some plunged into "romantic" adventures in exotic countries, without, however, taking refuge in the touristic ideology of "adventure". Others have satisfied their nostalgia by resorting to crime. Many have died; some are in jail. Most have, in any case, "come to a bad end", as must happen to people without money or *savoir vivre*, and who, in any event, never had the least interest in being successful in this world.

7. Giorgio Cesarano, Critica dell'utopia capitale (Opere complete, Vol. III), Colibri, Paderno Dugnano, 1993, pp. 125-126.

emphasis. As for the reasons that had once justified intermediate phases, socialism and the transition, they were obsolete, and now communism was proclaimed as the supersession of all previous revolutions, as the liberation of what was repressed by past history, a liberation of the interior of the species' psyche. The issue now was to get rid of all the old shit, to lucidly and profoundly confront that revolution within the revolution that had been such a decisive feature of the period of 1968-1969, and which was still the very particular dimension in which the revolutionaries lived and acted.

The total and definitive refusal to pursue the struggle under the aegis of "revolutionary politics", which was alleged to have inevitably become integrated into the existence of capital, did not presuppose any collapse on the individual level.

We must not allow ourselves to be deceived by this rejection of the ideology of everyday life, or of the "ideology of the critique of everyday life". This rejection by no means implied a retreat to "private life" or the isolation of the revolutionary "theoretician". The stress on the individual would still be very pronounced.

But there is more. The "practice of isolation" constituted an extreme radicalization of the revolutionary dimension, which thus removed itself from all engagement and continued to experiment with the adventure of individual passion, the subversion of family and bourgeois relations, and the extension of consciousness in all directions and by all means.

The *Critica dell'utopia capitale* is an outstanding example of this latter aspect. In Cesarano's work the tension that marks the very individuality of the revolutionary is absolutely obvious: his dramatic tone expresses the fact that the book is not "only" about "theory". The attack on fictitious identity is carried to its logical conclusion. The critique subjects to judgment the "revolutionary" ego itself, its self-valorizing mask and the diverse roles that it is obliged to represent in the unreal sphere of survival. By emphasizing the "biological" nature of the revolution it clarifies, beyond the shadow of a doubt, the materiality of the real war.

It is the "war of love": of flesh, blood, suffering and ecstasy.

From this specific subjective dimension, what may elude the understanding of the revolutionary who reads the *Critica dell'utopia capitale* after so many years and so many defeats, is the demand posed by Cesarano, an almost *a priori* demand, to reject any new ideology.

In fact, while he struggled relentlessly against any reconciliation, in any form, with the society of capital, he had to preserve an intransigent critique of that revolutionary neo-normativism, of those new models of "lifestyle" that during those years were so present in the milieus closest to him.

In short, Cesarano's struggle had to be waged simultaneously on various levels: on the one hand, the concrete critique, the war itself, the affirmation of the most profound side of communism, the resolution of all the contradictions of the development of prehistory, the "affirmation of the human species", of the *Gemeinwesen* of man. Affirmation of "the human", but which by no means ignored the living contradiction that gave it substance: the revolutionary individual "suspended" over the unknown, but moving in a very precise direction, towards ecstasy, adventure and passion, whipped on by his hunger for the new and the authentic. Thus, armed only with critical capacity and creativity, stripped of any prefabricated historical experience, he found ever more obstacles on his road.

As a result, Cesarano had to strive to avoid succumbing to a norm of radicality, to that formalized intransigence

In 1975 and especially in 1976 there was an apparent intensification of the retreat, although there were also clear symptoms of recovery, especially among the young people who had no experience at all of the struggles of the previous cycle.

The seventies were cut in half by the suicide of Cesarano. We already said that it was the result of a collective failure. Cesarano's contribution was by no means indifferent to this new period. He very lucidly perceived the new cracks that were opening. He was alone and faced serious difficulties. He had abandoned the comfortable family life in his Tuscan country home, incapable of bearing the isolation.

Invariance had embraced some fundamental points of Cesarano's theories, particularly the idea of the anthropomorphism of capital.[43] It was prepared, on the one hand, to publish the texts that would positively found the affirmation of communism, and on the other hand would provide a comprehensive description of the "wandering of humanity", a historical synthesis that displayed similarities with Cesarano's writings. In the case of *Invariance*, however, it was a passing interest: the abandonment of strict Marxian orthodoxy would lead them to abandon the "revolution/counterrevolution" problem by shifting their interest towards an immediatism of realization which, despite all its uniqueness, may be summarized as a real regression towards the "naturalist" conceptions of certain hippies of the previous decade, a naturalism applied literally, we are justified in saying, by the founder and principal exponent of the formerly Bordiguist publication.

The fact is that to a large extent "radical theory" was revealed during those years to be an instrument for liberation from the Marxian tradition, or that of the ultraleft, or the revolutionary tradition more generally; so as to dabble instead in opportunism and careerism, or to rehabilitate religion, art, the repressive family, etc., which is what happened in the eighties.

15. Communism vs. the isolated, alienated individual

During the late sixties it was taken for granted that it was impossible to survive very long in capitalist society without becoming integrated into it. It seemed to be unacceptable to try to survive as an organization during a counterrevolutionary period. A ruthless critique was elaborated against the extraparliamentary splinter groups/mafia gangs into which all organizations that attempted to perpetuate themselves in the political sphere tended to be transformed (or else they became integrated into "alternative" economic circuits, in art, or in any of the aesthetic postures offered as "lifestyles"). We also pitilessly applied this critique to ourselves, to the small organization that we had created, and we also applied it to the autonomous factory and neighborhood groups that emerged during those years. All of these manifestations were rejected as "managerial" expressions condemned to be integrated into the misery which they were supposed to criticize and destroy.

In this sense Cesarano's tendency is paradigmatic: the dissolution of Ludd; his break with the last ideological illusions (the ideology of everyday life and the apology for crime); his isolation, even in a geographical sense (in the Tuscan countryside); his dedication to a theoretical activity of an almost limitless scope.

For us the decline negated the possibility of formal, organizational or activist achievements. Nonetheless, 1968 had effectively reopened the epoch of revolution and one of its results was to stimulate an attempt to forge the theory capable of confronting the extreme crisis of capitalism. The content of communism became the primary

43. Giorgio Cesarano, Critica..., op. cit., p. 121.

For the radical current, the impact of direct repression was relatively secondary, compared to the veritable massacre caused by self-destruction or by discrete forms of social liquidation (police and therapeutic routines; settling of accounts within the family; forced marginalization equivalent to exile in the underworld, to a murder of passion). This experience taught us a lesson that is of vital importance, above all in an epoch that is as ruthlessly cynical and nihilist as this one is, when the values of capital are brutally and directly exalted, and when revolutionaries are taking an obsessive ideological pounding which leads them to meditate, with bitterness and pessimism, upon their own obsolescence.

3. Bordiguists and anarchists

In Italy there was not just one historical element that reconstituted the classical current of the ultraleft.[8] This is

8. By the term, "ultraleft", we mean the international "extremist" opposition within the "left" (Bolsheviks-KPD), as opposed to the pacifist "center" (Kautsky-Bernstein-PSI) and the social patriotic "right" (Ebert-Scheidemann-Noske-Kerensky-Bissolati), which arose during the revolutionary movement that shook all of capitalist Europe between 1917 and 1923. This current spread all the way to Russia, as an opposition to the Bolsheviks, where it made the defense of the workers councils (hence the term, "council communists" or "councilists" that is applied to the ultraleftists) the rallying cry of their activity.
By way of an introductory note regarding the problematic of the historical ultraleft we reproduce below an excerpt from a 1974 text by Pierre Nashua (Pierre Guillaume), which represents a typical example of how this historical experience would be analyzed by the radical current after May 1968:
"One of the most noteworthy aspects is that the German revolution was conducted under the slogan: 'Get out of the trade unions!'. Although they had not broken with the trade unions and with social democracy before the war, the organizations of the ultraleft grouped hundreds of thousands and perhaps even millions of workers around revolutionary positions. Political organizations such as the KAPD (Communist Workers Party of Germany) were at one time mass structures more powerful than the Communist Party that was linked to the Communist International."
"On the one hand, the trade unions had given their total support to the war, as was also the case in the othercountries, to various degrees. Ludendorff had to render homage to them by declaring that the war effort would never have been possible without the collaboration of the trade unions and the Social Democratic Party. On the other hand, the left communists insisted on recommending the abandonment of the trade unions for the purpose of forming another kind of union. This slogan corresponded to a total rejection of the trade union form of organization, and was accompanied by practical creation by part of the proletariat of very different organizations: the 'unions' controlled by the rank and file. One of the acquisitions of this period is in fact the rejection of the separation between political and economic organizations (party/trade union) (....) Groups such as the KAPD, from their very inception, published profoundly correct analyses of Russia and the cycle of the world revolution. It must be said that they were the only ones who militarily and effectively supported, by way of insurrections, attacks on military convoys, etc., the Russian Revolution, despite their harsh critique of the orientation of the Bolsheviks and the Communist International. The growth of these groups provides an illustration of the entire problem of revolutionary organization. These groups rapidly disappeared when the revolution was defeated and the proletariat retreated towards desperate defensive positions (purely reformist ones: integration into capitalist society). The appearance of new problems led these groups to collapse in every aspect of their activity, with the usual reactions: terrorism as a result of desperation, activism.... It must not be forgotten that the German revolution was crushed by Social Democracy: the entire history of Germany after the war, including the rise of fascism, would be incomprehensible if we do not take this defeat into account. The growth of fascism does not make any sense if it is not considered in relation to the German revolution, since fascism was its executor. The revolutionaries and the most radical fractions of the working class (especially the unemployed) were all crushed, but the Weimar Republic (1919-1933), initially created and inspired by the social democracy and the trade unions, was incapable of imposing order on the economy and of satisfying the demands of the unemployed, thus leading to the unification of German national capital: only fascism could provide work for all, giving a new impetus to the longing for 'community' by offering it an alternative (in its way), and disciplining all social groups within the framework of the interests of the now-unified national capital. Fascism satisfied, in a mystical way, the demands (material and ideological) of the revolution of 1919, which social democracy had liquidated because it was incapable of fulfilling its aspirations in a lasting way, or even of successfully achieving the political unification of Germany. Faced with this situation, from the beginning of the twenties the revolutionaries were gradually reduced to the status of a sect, and only those who accepted the perspective of a very long counterrevolution were capable of offering theoretical resistance. (....) In the German revolution the radical minorities had addressed the problem of revolution, but the class as a whole remained imprisoned within a reformist attitude. The German left was basically the theoretical expression of what

because it was the Communist Party of Italy itself that assumed a "leftist" position,[9] and clashed with Lenin and later with the Communist International led by Zinoviev. Although the disputes with the omnipotent Bolsheviks quickly led to the expulsion of Bordiga, Repossi, Fortichiari, Damen, etc.—who represented 90% of the membership of the party—of all the party factions, the leftists who remained in the organization refused to break with the International, unlike the German and Dutch councilists, and instead adopted the role of a disciplined opposition fraction within the world party, and thus managed to postpone their expulsion until the advent of the Stalinist era.

The Italian Left under Bordiga, because it considered the creation of a new party outside the Communist International to be illusory and counterproductive, shared the central position of the ultraleft, that is, the refusal to allow itself to be absorbed by the centrist social democracy in order to instill life into the mass party imposed by Lenin and Zinoviev, and later by Stalin. However, the Italian Left differed considerably from the international council current not only in its organizational aspect, but also because it preserved a substantial fidelity to the work of Marx, always harshly criticizing the utopia of self-management (which possessed a certain importance for other "extremist" tendencies) and always focusing its critique on the law of value, and the process of capitalist exploitation, whose abolition constitutes the content of the communist revolution.

After World War Two, the Italian Left founded the Internationalist Communist Party and produced an important corpus of critical theory (which among other things revealed the capitalist social nature of the USSR). Strictly faithful to the revolutionary schemas of the past, this current completely ignored the movement of 1968, and since then has never had anything to do with the "radical current" (which it would nonetheless profoundly influence through the French journal, *Invariance*).

Another reason why the ultraleft and councilist tendency would not find an expression in postwar Italy, was the existence of a formidable anarchist and anarchosyndicalist movement (FAI-USI), which was very active and radical until the fascist seizure of power. After the Second World War, anarchism emerged with greater numerical stability, although in terms of theory it was much weaker than the veteran Bordiguist current.

the revolutionaries—often workers without any previous theoretical training—had experienced. This expression was the result of the entire experience, and the defeat, of the most important revolution in modern times, as well as of the limitations of the situation in Germany. This dual legacy was expressed by the groups that survived, for the most part grouped around one or two émigrés. The only elements of any importance were the Dutch communist left (GIK-H, Gruppe Internationaler Kommunisten-Holland [The International Communist Group of Holland]) and Paul Mattick, a frequent contributor to various American journals (International Council Correspondence, Living Marxism, New Essays). A distinction must be made between the texts that were published during the revolutionary period and those that were published afterwards. The first are very rich due to the concrete experience that produced them. It was often the case that those who arrived at these theoretical "discoveries" that had arisen from the struggle were not prepared for them. For example, the critique of the Russian Revolution was carried out from the basis of a vast concrete experience, based on the reports of the delegates to the Communist International, practical measures adopted to support Russia and the International, etc. Numerically insignificant, the surviving groups would not, so to speak, have any influence on any important struggles; despite their regular contacts with the workers, they were profoundly isolated. Together with the "Italian Left", however, thanks to a network of relations that did not involve many people but were complex and extensive, they were able to play an absolutely fundamental theoretical role. In the various groups and tendencies (although not directly linked to this tradition) that have since existed (for example, Socialisme ou Barbarie, in France) one may generally find the signs of the influence of one or two of the members of the German Left. There is continuity between the latter, the Italian Left and the "Left" as a whole" (Pierre Nashua, Perspectives sur les Conseils, la gestion ouvrière et la Gauche allemande, Éditions de l'Oubli, Paris, 1977, pp. 7-9).

9. V. I. Lenin, "Left Wing" Communism, an Infantile Disorder.

become "unnamable" by all cultural milieus, even by the "revolutionaries" of the seventies.

Quote:

> "Through money one 'lives' by dying entrenched in one's house. To live one spills blood on the floors of money. The savages are, according to the learned, poisoned by narcotics. In fact, drugs are gaining ground, while capital is gaining ground over drugs. But hallucinogenic drugs, by which we must understand the drugs that liberate us from the hallucination of 'life', by weakening the depth of the shadow that filters, that is, economizes perceptions, directly attack the economy that impoverishes everyone by confining them to the punch-card of the perceptions programmed for them by the hierarchy of knowledge, finally making them see what they had never seen before. Stripping them of the 'real', it restores to them the truth to which they belong. And this truth can only be terrible: humiliating and awful. But final, unforgettable. What is shattered cannot be repaired, the learned lament: it is what terrorizes, torments, brutalizes. But what terrorizes, what torments and what, in the best cases, brutalizes, is nothing, however, but the vision of the 'truth', suddenly stripped bare."[42]

14. A new phase begins

During the seventies there was a significant amplification of the theoretical perspectives and sources of the revolutionaries, which also corresponded to a notable existential enrichment and experimentation with new dimensions.

The desire for immediate practical realization was not satisfied in the social struggles, which is why there was an attempt to develop a radical dimension in everyday life.

The immediatist theories discovered a vast terrain of application: crime, madness, sexual experimentation; such were the practical truths for many of us.

Under communitarian forms or as individual adventures, now that "politics" was totally excluded from our interests, we tried to proceed to a creative and affirmative dimension that would correspond to the predominant theoretical demand: that of establishing communism.

The richness of these experiences largely escaped subsequent restructuring, since in order to include them it would have been necessary to take into account certain individual vagaries that were never set down in writing.

The sexual liberation, feminist and homosexual movements also had a considerable impact.

Generally, despite the risks and the casualties, the overall experience of those years appeared to be as rich and as complex as the movement that preceded it; so much so that it merits, in some instances, separate analysis. Taken as a whole, this experience expressed the need to overcome the limits of a practice that, in its most specific features—recognizable in its theoretical formulations—tended to a certain degree of loss of contact with reality.

Cesarano certainly considered his participation in the movement of the second half of the seventies in a positive sense. His enthusiasm for the struggles of April 1975, which inaugurated the history of Autonomia Operaia, was obvious.

Many individuals and groups displayed a tendency to separate themselves from reality, conferring a bleak dimension—among other things—on the work of Cesarano himself.

42. Giorgio Cesarano, Critica..., op. cit., p. 31.

"personality" must submit, rendered incapable of encountering others due to the social confusion of the circulation of men reduced to "quantities" of capital (at least unless passion, risk and the initiatory test manage to open up the way to the recognition of another, and therefore to what there is of the others). Secondly, he tells us how he came to break with the world of culture and art, in which he had lived since 1968 and to which he returned, as an enemy, in order to settle unfinished business by means of critique and struggle, the only possible expressions that are not immediately subjected by and incorporated into total capital.

On several occasions he refers to the experience-test of lysergic acid.

His violent and dramatic language, which is, furthermore, rigidly abstract and never abandons the terrain of the enemy, is indicative of the "segregated" condition of the revolutionary, isolated since the end of the 1967-1970 cycle, who is nonetheless determined to use his own desperate condition to produce his great theoretical synthesis, which announces the certainty of the next definitive, final resurgence of the revolutionary proletariat. Either it will be victorious, or capital will drag it down with it into the catastrophe. The irreducibility of the biological basis of the revolution guarantees the invincibility of the species.

Both the strength as well as the limitation of his work resides in the conviction that the crisis of capital, predicted by the MIT report, as well as the symptoms that reveal the psychological crisis of the person (madness and neurosis that are now out of control and cannot be contained by any repressive structure) and of society (unmotivated revolt, collective plundering and violence, crime) is irreversible and final, and will compel the species to live, finally, if it does not want to disappear and go extinct.

During the seventies, the claim that the catastrophe of capital really threatened the survival of humanity and the planet, and the desperate and passionate wager on the vitality of the species that had been manifested in the recently-concluded cycle of struggles, are distinctive and basic features that can summarize the positions, although diverse, of the entire radical current at the beginning of the new epoch.

The power of the disjunctive: life against death, instead of the proletariat against capital, is the sign of a relative theoretical vitality; but it also demonstrates how hard it was to discover its own reasons in the specifically social contradiction.

Because it overlooked the fact that all production is a very precise social movement, the sterility of the radical current was revealed, which, in an illusory and hallucinatory way, "upped the ante" of its own claims, and proceeded to its own decline and fall in the course of a few years.

13. Burn the ships

References such as the ones made to LSD impressed upon this theory the stigma that it could no longer be assimilated to culture. The world of the Italian intellectuals, culture, writers, poets, of artists, and academics was not capable of responding, except by way of marginalization and silence, to a man like Cesarano, who did not restrict himself to celebrating the generalization of the revolt of the others, but who entered into complicity not with the students but with the "provocateurs", not with the left but with the most "ambiguous" groups (accused, as always in Italy, of being "fascists"), and who did not engage in masturbatory disquisitions on "drugs" but who tempered himself by experimenting with lysergic acid.

The power and drama of Cesarano's theory are obviously direct expressions of his life and of his hope to literally

The anarchist movement that experienced the storm of 1968 was incredibly fossilized and advocated openly "pro-democratic" positions. Its activity had a purely symbolic character, and remained trapped in the internal logic of its own movement, very much conditioned by the Spanish experience of the thirties and by the "trauma" of fascism and Bolshevism (demonstrations against the repression of Spanish comrades, ritual commemorations, an exasperated anti-Bolshevism and anti-Marxism, the nightmare of Lenino-Stalinist authoritarian communism; unofficial support for the "anti-fascist front" together with the DC and the PCI). Furthermore, its theory was confused and superficial, and was mired in the debate on "anti-authoritarian organization" that dated from before the war. The anarchist movement, however, unlike the Bordiguists, was not only unable to ignore 1968, but was seriously affected by it: first it had to adjust to the vigorous uprising of its younger component,[10] and then to the revolt of its organized groups, which would sooner or later separate from the anarchist organizations in order to join the confluence of the incipient radical communist adventure, either identifying with that movement or else supporting a councilist-workerist position.

4. International Precedents

Strictly speaking, the Italian radical experience had no precedents in Italy itself. For this reason one must consider it as the result of the cycle of struggles of 1967-1970 (a cycle heralded by an ostensible rejuvenation of the class struggle, held at bay by the PCI and the CGIL after 1960).

The antecedents of the struggle and of the Italian radical current are entirely international.

First of all, France, which exploded in May-June 1968 at the same time as Italy, but which had very important precursors from the theoretical-organizational point of view: Socialism or Barbarism and, most importantly, the Situationist International. From the very first moment the situationists made their name as protagonists of certain famous episodes of contestation in the universities[11] that were to some extent echoed in Italy, where radical theory was first disseminated in the occupations of the high schools and universities at the end of 1967.

The American social movement of 1964-1967 also had a decisive impact on the Italian situation. Especially the black movement in its two versions. On the one hand, the violent movement, expressed as Black Power with Malcolm X, the SNCC of Stokely Carmichael and Rap Brown, but above all the "mute" revolt of the ghetto in Watts,[12] which culminated in a veritable insurrection in the working class city of Detroit, pinning down the military forces of the United States in a week of house to house fighting. On the other hand, the pacifist and integrationist version, represented by Martin Luther King.

The testimonials and news reports from the uprising in Detroit gave the exciting impression that a revolution was underway: one of the principle industrial and working class centers of the time—Detroit had not yet fallen into

10. The FAGI was formed in [XXXX] and dissolved in [XXXX] (sic). Eddie Ginosa was a member of this group, and, together with Cesarano, Gallieri and Fallisi, presented his text, "Tattica e strategia del capitalismo avanzato nelle sue linee di tendenza", provoking lively polemics (this text, which was later discussed and re-elaborated within Ludd, was published in the third issue of Ludd-Consigli Proletari). [The FAGI, formed in 1965, was a group of autonomous youth disenchanted with the two large Italian anarchist organizations—Note of the Spanish Translator]

11. [Note on the Strasbourg Scandal and "On the Misery of Student Life" by Mustapha Khayati] (sic).

12. See "The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy", in Internationale Situationniste, No. 10, March 1966 (English translation: "The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy", in Ken Knabb, ed., Situationist International Anthology, Bureau of Public Secrets, Berkeley, 1981, pp. 153-160).

the abyss of desperation and criminality created by the restructuring and deindustrialization of the eighties, but was still one of the vital centers of world capital, like Turin and Milan—had fallen into the hands of the desperados of the ghetto who had risen in an armed uprising, inflicted a crushing defeat on the local forces of repression and now confronted an enormous display of military power. Although the workers occupied the factories, they were ultimately incapable of leaving them in order to join the insurrection, and were bogged down in a dead end and thus revealed the shortcomings of the self-management conducted by the workers councils, shortcomings that would later be manifested as well in the French May. The extent of this rebellion was demonstrated, negatively, by the desperate violence that followed the repression of that great outburst of enthusiastic activity.

The hot summer of 1967 lit the match of the student movement in Europe. It also had a great emotional impact on the demonstrations of the civil rights movement, which Martin Luther King—who would pay with his life—began to orient towards social questions (support for strikes and demands of black workers, who generally performed the hardest and lowest paid work).

Finally, the movement of the hippies and the white students against the war in Vietnam—within which radical elements were to be found—led the critique of everyday life towards a practice without mediations. The hippies and the students experimented with communitarian ways of life, sexual liberation, rejection of work, critique of the family and social roles, the illegal use of drugs that "expanded consciousness", nomadism, and the rediscovery of certain religious traditions for the attainment of ecstasy. But the original power of the American youth movement must not be confused with later imports, on the part of more or less specialized workers, of the values of the underground that under the aegis of a "novel" ideology played an essentially demobilizing and disintegrative role, directed against a movement that had already attained a considerable level of consciousness and radicality.[13]

Prior to 1967 the Italian "underground" was composed of a few countercultural and communitarian groups (Onda Verde, Barbonia City, occupied houses in the countryside, the spread of "communes" in the cities), which had the merit of introducing for the first time the critique of everyday life (above all in relation to sexual liberation, the refusal of military service, soft drugs). This critique would later be taken up, in other terms, by the revolutionaries, who incorporated it together with that of the Situationist International. Such was the origin of the revolution in customs that, in the provincial and intolerant Italy of the 1960s, would end up irreversibly

13. The movement of rebellion that took shape in America from the end of the 1940s to the second half of the 1960s was deeply rooted in the social traditions of the oppressed of the continent: black culture, indigenous worldviews and the workers movement of the Wobblies, which would be displayed in its literature, its music and in the way of life that inspired the young people. Naturally, such "cultural" expressions increasingly converged with the social insubordination expressed above all by the movement against the war in Vietnam. The political and public relations recuperation of this movement, in the form of the "underground" (in addition to the bloody repression of some of the most radical elements) exhibited a few revealing moments: the rapid decline of the counterculture district of Ashbury Heights in San Francisco; the autistic Woodstock festival and the incidents at Altamont, where "flower power" was transformed into a violent pitched battle among drug-addled hippies; the sinister history of intrigues involving Andy Warhol, Valerie Solanas and the "SCUM Manifesto"; etc. These episodes took place at the same time that the MH/CHAOS and COINTELPRO operations of the CIA were underway, both of which were designed to neutralize the dissident movement. It is known, for example, that the CIA maintained very close relations with underground personalities like Timothy Leary and Gloria Steinem (apostles of psychotropic liberation and feminism, respectively) and that it played a major role in the proliferation of destabilizing drugs and reactionary culture disguised as emancipatory trends. With regard to this theme, we recommend, "Operation CHAOS: The CIA's War Against the Sixties Counter-Culture", by Mae Brussell, 1976 (on the internet); the book, The Beat Generation, by Bruce Cook; and of course the revelatory texts on the underground written by Servando Rocha. [Note by the Spanish Translator]

the radical direction that he gave to his life from 1969 on, and which he impressed with a sense of forward movement, which he implacably maintained until the end.

Before 1971, it was the collective and public experience of Ludd. Later, he began to write his most important work, the *Critica dell'utopia capitale* (which was already anticipated by "The Capitalist Utopia" in issue no. 3 of *Ludd*, Milan, 1969), where he definitively settled accounts with the world of mainstream culture and intellect, from which he distanced himself more and more, inexorably, in practice.

In the first pages of the book we find the following fundamental formulations: 1) the development of the species since its most remote origins and the history of its submission to labor and to the production of tools-prostheses, which increasingly began to control the subsistence of the living body, reduced to an alienated appendage; 2) the development of the individual psyche, separated from the body, as thought that thinks on its own, becomes the history of the Ego colonized by capital as "person", the internalization of "value" as process; 3) the production of language, as the set of independent signs, accumulates as dead labor and ends by acquiring a decisive role over human communication, and dominates the subject, which is now spoken by language.

These three dimensions constitute a single process—seen from different angles (and disciplines)—by means of which the species, on the basis of an instinctive primordial need, separates from the living body of the world (and from its own biological body), extracting itself from it to the point of being threatened, today, with extinction, as if it was an external enemy. And the body, after millennia of implacable survival, imprisoned as always in the unconscious, in the repressed, in the other, reacts to this threat of extinction with armed critique, with madness, with the "biological" revolution.

While all of existence is nothing but a desert dominated by capital, the "mute" passion of the bodies prepares to explode, affirming itself as the "naturalizing totality", routing the cybernetic or cloning projects—which could end the game forever—and revealing their utopian character.

This formulation is followed by the attack. A disordered and passionate plundering of the scientists and theoreticians of capital (and of various critical thinkers like Horkheimer and Adorno, although the lessons of Freud and Reich are also taken into account).

Theory is employed as an instrument of trespass in order to refute the cruel conclusions that the theoreticians of capital reserve for life, and to extract the information that proves the irrepressible vitality of the biological species in its opposition to the catastrophic disaster of the society of capital, which from now on will only be reproduced as the cancer of the world.

Proceeding on enemy territory, following the thread of scientific-philosophical abstraction, erupting into the various fields of separate thought in order to seize theoretical materials, Cesarano successfully settled accounts with the world of culture and intellectual fashion—raging uncontrollably then and in the following years, as well as in opposition to the movement of 1977—reserving particularly violent invectives for art, pychoanalysts, therapists, experts of language, and the futurologists who proposed "painless" solutions for a world headed for catastrophe.

At the same time, he successfully and dramatically communicated his own individual experience. On the one hand, he provided testimony regarding the sense of being under siege felt by the isolated individual, immersed in the hallucinatory everyday life in which he wanders, incarnating the various economic-social roles to which the

the retreat to books (a refusal that we perceived to be ideologically reflected in Comontism)—the release of the report of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), *The Limits of Growth*, was greeted with joy, since it provided an indisputable confirmation coming from the mind of the enemy.

The *Critica dell'utopia capitale* was not content with this ingenuous revolutionary religiosity. In its pages, the MIT report occupies a prominent place. The concept of "capitalist utopia" is absolutely clear: in the face of the reality of the final crisis, capital prepares some totally utopian solutions—whose sole reality is ideological mystification—among which is that of a zero-growth society, held together by substitutes for community and by an almost complete liberation of labor; these projects, according to Cesarano, would be frustrated by the catastrophic crisis and the insurgency of the revolutionary proletariat. The imminence of this final liberating explosion did much to reinforce the feeling of hope and prophetic anticipation that suffused the whole atmosphere of our current. This tension suffused the conclusions of the long aphorisms of *Critica dell'utopia capitale*, whose structure, in the first part of the book,[40] tends to assume the following character: 1) an attack, as violent as an armed assault, on the theses of the biologists, physicists, geneticists, anthropologists, psychoanalysts, linguists, etc., who are invariably condemned to display the ideological colors with which they attempt to conceal, without being able to exorcise it, the eruption of almost cosmic contradictions that evince the opposition of the biological life of the species and the planet to their views; 2) the unveiling of the utopian nature of their horizons and their instability in the face of the imminent uprising of the revolutionary proletariat.

In this schema there is no concession to the mysticism, nourished with drugs and esotericism, of the small groups that arose in the intermission of the revolution, which experimented with every kind of "ecstatic", communitarian, sexual and amorous combination; it demonstrated, to the contrary, the rigorous tone of someone who was relentlessly confronting the experts of capital on their own terrain, plundering knowledge and language; however, it is not just the references to LSD which are repeated on several occasions: it is also the zest, the acerbic tension that flows in these pages, leading the reader to return to the prophetic legacy of the sixties, transmitting to him the harshness and the drama of a theory forged, in fact, from the bitterness of a real and personal experience.

12. The "case" of Cesarano

Quote:

> "The starting point can only be radiant intuition, and in this concrete and vitally initiative sense, from the point of view of the totality."[41]

This shocking sentence leaps from the pages of the book and displays the measure of the dimensions of Cesarano's experience. If up until now, for good reasons, we have not spoken about him except as a particle of a historic movement and, within that movement, as an exponent of the most radical current and as the bearer of the richest and most innovative theoretical contributions … for just a moment we would like to focus with special emphasis on the uniqueness of Cesarano. "Radiant intuition (…) of the point of view of the totality"! How can one not immediately think of LSD? In fact, his critical adventure was radiant, developed coherently in

40. That is, the part that was finished and revised by the author. The rest of the book is composed of Cesarano's notes and letters.

41. Giorgio Cesarano, Critica..., op. cit., p. 389.

changing the life of an entire generation, leaving its mark on all of society.

5. The Italian Radical Current Emerges from the Student Movement of 1968

The radical current in Italy was a product of the movement of 1967-1968. This was especially true of the first core groups of radical communists that arose from the turbulence that was unleashed by the high school and university occupations. Some of these groups had already been influenced by the Situationist International (which had at that time formed an ephemeral "Italian Section"); others came directly from anarchism, which had received a rejuvenating impulse from May 1968. In any event, the anarchist movement was incapable of retaining in its ranks the most astute and determined elements, who, in the heat of the struggle, considered the anarchist movement's fervent anti-Marxism to be unacceptable.

In Genoa, for example, the movement found a place to meet at the Rosa Luxemburg Club, a group that had split from the PCI, many of whose members had also been involved, like Cesarano, with the group, Classe Operaia, which was distinguished by its emphatic anti-Leninism. The movement was also very open to new anti-bureaucratic ideas. Overall, its most characteristic feature was its spontaneity, exemplified in Genoa by the Worker-Student League.

Everyone—except, of course, those who refused to do so out of faithfulness to an ideological schema, like the three tiny Bordiguist parties[14] --considered 1968 to be the expression of a vast revolutionary wave that was sweeping along in its wake individuals, groups and masses, inciting them to take action and to abandon all previous forms of political and ideological attachments.

Regardless of their origins and backgrounds, the most radical elements of 1968 were those who were most prepared to question, first themselves, then the total organization of life. This was because, above all, they wanted to experience and to enjoy life, and to escape from a future without hope or adventure that was decreed in advance by the adults and by a social mechanism to which they did not want to adapt.

1968 offered the chance to strike the first blows against the high-school/university institution, by demonstrating its antidemocratic function (its "authoritarianism") and its injustice ("eligibility based on class"), that is, its class nature.

From this attack, the requirement for theoretical elaboration would emerge, born from the need to create instruments for self-expression and writing, in order to pursue the struggle with greater clarity and coherence.

The works of Marx ultimately became the most appropriate theoretical tool for an in-depth critique of capitalist society. However, the Marxist organizations had proven that they were nothing but bureaucratic machines, devoted to mediation, negotiations, and compromise, which is why they were abandoned in favor of certain kinds of assembly forms of organization, or, more precisely, unconsciously councilist forms of organization, even though they were oriented towards a practical application of anarchism.

Thus, in 1968 many anarchists still considered themselves to be anarchists without participating in any way in the life of the official superannuated movement, and formed improvised groups in the form of student leagues, libertarian committees, etc.

14. The International Communist Party (Il Programma comunista); the International Communist Party (La Rivoluzione comunista); and the Internationalist Communist Party (Battaglia comunista).

In this manner, the opposition between Marx and Bakunin was superseded in practice, as the situationists had demonstrated in theory.

Naturally, during 1968 the events in France gave a new impulse to the movement in Italy and favored the introduction of newer and more radical ideas.

Even Cohn-Bendit's March 22 Movement, which was the object of a spectacular media campaign that characterized it as the supreme expression of "extremism" (it must be recalled, however, that during this period the space occupied by the information-spectacle was minimal compared to its current ubiquity in today's television-dependent society), had a libertarian component. In any event, the mere fact that the TV news showed black flags waving in the marches in Paris refuted the political spectacle that was occupied across its entire breadth by the Stalinist screen (which had been modernized "by force" by the USSR), its Third-Worldist tendency and the resulting swarm of Marxist-Leninist sects, which were flourishing during those years.

The libertarian group that published the journal *Noir et Rouge* also had direct contacts with the young dissidents of the Italian anarchist movement, and Cohn-Bendit himself attended the anarchist congress at Carrara.[15]

At around the same time, the Situationist International began to attract attention, and the most influential aspect of its work was its "critique of everyday life". This dimension of the struggle clearly went beyond the limits of politics and reaffirmed the feeling that, more than anything else, characterized 1968: the feeling that everything had to be subjected to criticism.

6. Workers and Students

Giorgio Cesarano left us a novel about 1968, *I giorni del dissenso*, in which he describes, in a delicate and sensitive way, the atmosphere of the "student spring". Although he was not yet a revolutionary when he wrote this book—which is an autobiographical account of some episodes of 1968 that took place in Milan—his pages reflect the experiences that would gradually lead him towards the heart of the movement, which at that time he was still observing with the detachment and the sympathy of a left wing intellectual who felt terribly more adult than the students with whom he participated in protest marches.

The pages of this book also unequivocally convey a sense of the extent and the greatness of this movement that was making the world tremble. At that time the workers were soon to be inspired by the student and youth movements, and revolutionaries managed to insert themselves into the point where these two movements intersected—although, generally, they remained separated, once again, from the mass of the workers, who provisionally accepted the "external support" for their autonomy offered by the PCI. Worker-Student Base Committees sprang up everywhere, which were in fact open to all revolutionaries.[16]

15. In 1968, in the city of Carrara, an international anarchist congress was held, where the International of Anarchist Federations (the IAF) was founded. This was one of the high points of the history of the anarchist movement since the end of the Second World War. [Note of the Spanish Translator]

16. One must distinguish the Unitary Base Committees (CUBs), which were completely self-managed institutions during 1968-1969, from the institutions with a similar name that existed during the early 1970s, which were dominated by Avanguardia Operaia (a group based mostly in Milan, of Trotskyist origin but later converted to Maoism, and which later spawned Democrazia Proletaria, and finally combined with the Partito della Rifondazione Comunista).

Comontism, however, was right to reject the elitism of the few who act "at the highest level of theory". Such elitism could only lead to the creation of relations rooted solely on the intellectual plane.

Cesarano was the only person who acted on the highest level, producing a clear and explicit theory, completely anti-esoteric, vainly trying to provide a human solution to this pseudo-intellectual milieu, characterized by its absolute fragility and by its tremendous incoherence (except for Piero Coppo and Joe Fallisi, the only other people among his comrades who preserved a revolutionary coherence, without nourishing any pretenses to superiority derived from the possession of theory).

11. Prophetic communism

One other characteristic aspect of the radical current in the seventies was the dissemination of predictions.

After the period mentioned above, in 1971 the cycle that had started in 1964 with the revolts of the blacks and the civil rights movement in the United States came to an end. A new phase of waiting began, which nonetheless, in the view of the revolutionaries, would be brief: 1968 had reopened the era of revolutions. It was above all Detroit (1967) that showed that the United States was the new epicenter of the world revolution (contrary to Bordiga's predictions), although Danzig and Stettin (1970)[39] confirmed on the other hand the importance of the "German zone" (in accordance with Bordiga's views). It is true that theory is prediction or else it has no reason to exist; but predictions based on the exact calculations of the crisis cycles, such as Bordiga had formulated during the fifties, became for us an "article of faith" that was taken half-seriously when it came time to resolve all theoretical doubts: one prophecy mentioned the year 1975; another, more precise and specific, pointed to 1977 as the date of a crisis and a violent upheaval of capitalism: for us this was, however, the date of the revolution.

The whole aura of the esoteric sect that surrounded the International Communist Party—derisory as a formal organization but at the same time the fascinating incarnation of the historical party—was confirmed by the mythical Bordiga and Vercesi (Ottorino Perrone), members of the Central Committee although not formally party members, as a pure expedient and instrument of the historical party, or rather of the formidable theoretical activity of the Neapolitan prophet.

Other powerful prophetic interpretations were proclaimed by Norman O. Brown and Herbert Marcuse: from the first, we extracted an interpretation of Freud according to which the unconscious conflict between the life instinct and the death instinct would become more acute until it would finally unleash a vital-destructive explosion or a self-destructive-narcotic explosion; from Marcuse we derived the expectation of the arrival of a new era that would finally lead the revolutionary horizon towards the victory of Eros, of the new sensibility and the new values inaugurated by the American hippie movement. All the esoteric and astrological prophecies decreed the advent of the final crisis and the Age of Aquarius. At the beginning of the seventies everything could be interpreted—not without a certain theoretical dignity and a certain coherence with regard to evidence—in this sense.

In this "theoretical" climate—which expressed the desperation and the sincere refusal to accept, in our hearts,

39. In Danzig (Gdansk) and Stettin, Poland, violent strikes broke out among the miners in 1970 and continued throughout the entire decade. The powerful strike movement that arose in both cities not only spread throughout all of Poland, but also had profound repercussions throughout all of the areas controlled by the USSR. This movement was actually the beginning of the end of the state capitalism that ruled the Warsaw Pact countries [Note of the Spanish Translator].

Communist principles, united with a critical theory animated by its contrast with the theory of the previous two decades and with the principle results of the recent past—that is: a revolution of and for life, a questioning of the limits of the ego and of personal identity (which in the work of Cesarano are denounced vehemently and comprehensively), the experience of a revolution in the revolution—are the only antidotes against the Mafioso degeneration, which cannot be escaped by way of self-valorizing isolation, and much less by the original and personal road of an alleged creativity.

It is obvious that in 1970 there was no danger posed by the possibility that a militant-activist group associated with *Invariance* or a core group of "theoreticians" would be formed. In fact, the danger was just the reverse: disintegration and the neglect of the most important questions that should have been addressed:

1. The reformulation of the contribution of the historical ultraleft (Bordiga and the most consistent sector of the German revolution, which were decisive for the world revolution);
2. Draw up a balance sheet of the new contents contributed by the sixties;
3. The need to create a network of relations capable of enduring and prepared to reinitiate the revolutionary possibilities that were presented during the seventies.

According to Camatte and Collu the "production of revolutionaries" would magically resolve all problems, when what actually took place immediately thereafter was the dispersion of the revolutionaries, and it became evident that they were incapable of taking advantage of the opportunity that would be once again, and only in Italy, be presented.

In the following years the question of nihilism arose, still posed in terms that were upside down with respect to reality: in reality the expressions of nihilism were the abandonment of the revolutionary tradition, the end of the search for communist relations among subversives, the denial of the need to become an effective community, and the underestimation of the need to avoid being dragged down by the counterrevolution.

Comontism was a caricature of relations between revolutionaries, with its illusion that all problems could be magically resolved by the right ideology, and its pretension of being the embodiment of the theory of the sixties, now complete, which only had to be applied in practice without any delay.

Although it was aberrant and unsustainable on the theoretical plane, this simplification was based on a profoundly correct demand: theory cannot be a separate and specialized activity, it is an integral part of the everyday coherence of revolutionaries and the need to change reality in its entirety, to have an impact on society and on history.

Comontism had a doubly counterproductive result:

1. Because it created a gang that proclaimed itself to be the enemy of society and the proletariat, preventing any possibility of forming a pole of regroupment and of having an effect on society;
2. Because it was easily recuperable by the most typical ideology of the seventies: that which consisted in justifying—as Toni Negri did—the groups produced by social disintegration, instead of subjecting them to a radical critique. This made Comontism incapable of providing any perspective to a sector, one that was much more coherent in 1977, of young people who broke with the hierarchical and instrumental armed practice of Autonomia Organizatta and who instead wanted to act for themselves, courageously but with impoverished and confused ideas.

Active and autonomous participation in the movement, under the most diverse group names although generally anonymous, without either organization or party, was the most distinctive feature of the radical experience in Italy, which situated it in the center of the most crucial events and moments.

The Italian movement, compared to the French movement that was much more radical, had the merit of lasting much longer: in fact, it endured, and continued to grow, throughout all of 1969, receiving the decisive support of the southern proletarian masses, who waged impressive battles against the apparatus of repression. This had a tremendous repercussion throughout the entire country, and culminated in the great struggles in the factories of the north, during the "hot autumn".

In 1969 Ludd was formed (Giorgio Cesarano was a member from its inception), a group that participated actively in the movement, above all in Genoa, where it attained an extraordinary stability. At the end of 1969, the elements of the movement that were still linked to the left and which expressed various degrees of Marxist-Leninist and workerist ideologies, organized into formal political groups. As a result, Ludd had to act as an opposition, differentiating itself from the rest of the groups and fighting a rearguard battle. Although this was not a crucial conflict at the time, it still profoundly marked the experience of the radical current during the following years.

At the end of 1969, the State, in order to reassert its authority, had to resort to bombings. From that moment on, everything that happened in Italy took place in an environment of assassinations and armed actions. This obliged the revolutionaries to open up another front, very much on the defensive, in order to demystify the violence of the State and an armed fraction that began to separate itself from the proletarian movement.

During the next few years, all of this would have a determinant impact on the activity of the revolutionaries, who had to commit their energies to the struggle against repression and to sustained efforts of exposure and demarcation. This ultimately had a retarding effect on the development of their revolutionary potential.

But this would not become evident until some time had passed. For one or two years it was very difficult to recognize the undeniable fact that a retreat was underway, and that a period of reflux was commencing.

7. The Content of Radical Communism

The one aspect that is most indicative of the specific content of the radical communist current is its conviction of having entered an era in which the development of the productive forces now made possible the direct affirmation of communism, thus situating its position beyond the problems of the transition and socialism: the development of science, technology, mechanization and automation render a radical liberation of labor possible. The accumulated wealth of capital would allow for the immediate realization of communism.

This basic idea corresponds to the general feeling of the movement that "revolutionizes the revolutionaries", which shatters the limits of their lives and which opens up for them a practice that is no longer adjusted to the traditional schemas of tactics/strategy, economic struggle/political struggle, party/trade union. For example, on the basis of the abstract demand of the right to hold assemblies in the schools, serious problems affecting the entire educational system were brought to light, through strikes, occupations, interruptions of classes, sabotage, the practice of free love and the revolt against the family.

This reversal of perspective was also reflected in the idea that now the goal was to stop the destructive capitalist

machinery for as long as possible. It was no longer a matter of reconstructing, transforming or reforming anything, but essentially that of destroying, irreversibly, all the aspects of the current state of affairs: the structure of production and classes, as well as customs and attitudes. The new world would arise by itself, spontaneously, as a demand for existence in the midst of the struggle, in a condition of permanent conflict that would impose a radically different use of space and resources.

All of this also presupposed an effort to modernize the content of the ultraleft, even if this would essentially take place on the practical level, since it did not then have a precise knowledge of historical councilism (not by chance, one of the concerns of Ludd was precisely the clarification of the "councilist ideology").

The critique of democracy—a legacy of Bordiguism—was practically expressed in the conviction that, with regard to the "political capacity" conquered by the workers and the students, what was important was the relation of forces, the content that was sought for the struggle, its capacity for destroying the existing relations and, at the same time, to affirm communism in the immediate present. If they did not abide by this orientation, the assemblies and struggles would fall into the hands of the reformist conciliators or the Marxist-Leninist ideological militants, who would sterilize them and lead them towards co-management or destruction.

The unitary concept of organization invoked the AAUD-E[17] and the historical struggle of the anarchosyndicalists and anarchists. It is not by chance, as we have already pointed out, that in 1968 the Marxism-anarchism juxtaposition appeared to have become obsolete.

Also, there was a reemergence of the critique of Leninism and the bureaucratic degeneration of the revolutionary movement, a critique that tackled both the starting points as well as the consequences of the October revolution. The denunciation of the capitalist character of the USSR, China and Vietnam distinguished the "radicals" from all the other sectarian currents that were being formed, even the Trotskyists (the latter would not have the kind of importance in Italy that they had in France, for example: the specifically "Italian ideology", in fact, was always distinctly Stalinist).

The "radicals" identified themselves in a more or less immediate way with a set of contents and practices which in their time had characterized the Dutch-German ultraleft and to some extent the Italian left. These contents included direct action, the autonomy of the struggle, the denunciation of parties and trade unions as representatives of capital, the defense of the Workers Councils and intransigence towards any mediation effected by reformists and progressives.

8. Ludd and Councilism

In 1969, Cesarano was personally involved in the battles in the front line of the movement: first in the Pirelli CUB,[18] then the occupation of the Hotel Comercio in downtown Milan, and then the self-management of the publishing enterprise, Il Saggiatore. That was when he joined Ludd.

17. The AAUD-E was a councilist organization formed in the 1920s in Germany by militants who had split from the KAPD, including Otto Rühle. They emphatically opposed the separation between workers organizations at the workplace, on the one hand, and revolutionary political organizations, on the other. [Note of the Spanish Translator]

18. CUB: Unitary Base Committee, an institution formed in the Pirelli de Bicocca auto plant in Milan, in 1968. [Spanish Translator's note].

individualism that it was incapable of undertaking any relevant interventions). In fact, individualism favored the dissolution of the revolutionary perspective: either because life in isolation produced a feeling of reduced self-esteem—which could only be escaped by comparing oneself with one's peers—which prevented one from perceiving the movement and which generated discouragement and depression, the loss of one's defenses against the invasion from "outside" and surrender to dominant tendencies; or because it disguised personalism and elitism, and served to enable one to get rid of those uncomfortable relations that could stand in the way of an opportunist reinsertion into bourgeois ideology. During the seventies and eighties the work of the liquidation of the organizational remnants (which were by then fragile and informal) and the unjustified fear of succumbing to politics, "workerism" or leftism, contributed the impulse to jump to the "other side of the barricade" for those exponents of the "elite" who had transformed theory into a fetish and who were mistrustful of the alleged danger of followerism (a danger that was actually imaginary and non-existent: in Italy no group or personality exercised any attraction or obtained passive followers such as the Situationist International had on the other side of the Alps. In France, in any event, *Invariance* never did so).

We have been analyzing two views regarding organization that were typical of the seventies, which we can reject without any remorse, and above all without falling prey to any of the mystifications offered by the youngest elements.

The first view, that of Comontism, is the model of the criminal gang-historical party-human community. Although respectable from a human point of view (like its current epigone, the French group, Os Cangaceiros), and although it was often interesting for the practical-organizational-lifestyle solutions that it proposed (the revolutionaries must live "as if" communism was already a fact and could thus face the terrible struggle for survival together, which was twice as hard for them), its vision was born from resentment: the proletariat is not revolutionary, so "we" (the tiny groups) are the proletariat; we are the now-realized human community. This led them to a dogmatic and ideological evaluation of their own sectarian activity and offered the most disastrous answers: the terroristic self-criticism imposed on every gesture and every word; the fetishism of coherence; the lurking possibility of political decline, caused above all by the spell cast by action, which led them to become a mere gang of loud-mouthed thugs. All of this was based on the totemic-fetishistic blackmail of "practice", in the ideological scorn for theory and lucid action.

The other, "invariantist", view, which would later spread over a large part of the radical current, is the model of the circle of relations among "theoreticians". In this case, the enormous totem-fetish of theory conceals the unilateral nature of relations limited to a tiny elite of "critics".

Such an attitude, now that the illusions regarding a rapid and abundant "production of revolutionaries" have dissipated, amounts in reality to pure and simple individualism.

Instead, there is nothing left to do but to adjust to the fact that the revolutionaries are now isolated. To increase their current powerlessness by taking a position against organization does not make any sense. The alternative of continuing to pursue this option, in an environment of the anxious atomization of revolutionaries, insisting on the anti-Mafia phobia and on the exclusivity of relations between a handful of the elect (if one can find any such elect) at the highest level (higher than what?) of theory, is not very attractive.

Although it is now clear that the resurgence of activism and militancy rapidly leads back to politics, it is also clear that the fetish of theory separated from collective efficacy and, if possible, organized practice, offers no way out.

recognizable hierarchy, which subjected its recruits to initiation tests and examinations of their radicality. The most disastrous aspect of Ludd, which we shall discuss in connection with Cesarano's critique, became a systematically and relentlessly applied ideology. Among its ideological conclusions we find: the apology for crime (the only respected and recognized way to survive); the praise, not publicly proclaimed, but a constant feature within the group, for hard drugs as an instrument of destructuring and liberation from family and repressive relations; the sectarian attitude of superiority displayed towards every element external to the organization; the group's hostility to the hard working, sheep-like proletariat, which was viewed as just as culpable as everyone else who was not part of the organization. All of this turned Comontism into a gang at war with all of humanity, and an uncritical follower of the criminal model. This is what we mean by "ideology": the theorization of this practical attitude in fact prevented any critical procedure from assuming a material basis: they were dogmas embedded in the extremely coercive experience of the members of the group. This form of immediatism was certainly one of the reasons that prevented Cesarano from drawing practical conclusions, and which led him to lose himself in sterile abstractions.

However, behind this and other dead ends of Cesarano we find certain positions that are diametrically opposed to those of Comontism: the positions of *Invariance*.

Invariance had "resolved" the problem of organization by studying the measures employed by Marx to prevent the party from succumbing to bourgeois reformism during the period of counterrevolutionary retreat. This analysis was extremely partial, since it completely ignored all of Marx's activity that was devoted to building the communist party, and distorted the revolutionary tradition by avoiding a critical examination of the purely political activity of Marx taken as a whole. This attitude was expressed in a text from 1969, published three years later by *Invariance* under the title, "On Organization"[38] , signed by Camatte-Collu, which can be summarized as follows:

1. Under the real domination of capital every organization tends to be transformed into a Mafia or a sect;
2. *Invariance* avoided this danger by dissolving the embryonic group that had begun to form around the journal;
3. All organized groups are excluded *a priori*, because of the risk that they will be transformed into Mafias;
4. Relations between revolutionaries are only useful at the highest level of theory, which each individual can attain in a personal and independent way, or otherwise fall prey to followerism.

According to Camatte and Collu, the danger of individualism was of no account because the "production of revolutionaries" was already underway—in 1972: the extension of the revolutionary process was such that a network of interpersonal contacts at the "highest" level of theory was already guaranteed and was even evident. Thus, Camatte and Collu expressed in the clearest way an error that was typical of the entire current and of Cesarano himself. In reality, a pre-revolutionary stage on an international level was not opening up in 1972 (despite the fact that the movement would continue to resist, although only in Italy), nor was an inexorable production of revolutionaries imminent (even Camatte and Collu would desert). Therefore, the disregard of individualism was nothing but an illusion. There was nothing glorious about dissolving the small group that was forming around the journal. This did nothing but accelerate what was already taking place: the dispersion of the sparse revolutionary forces that remained from 1968, forces which would not experience a resurgence (in France there were no more large-scale social uprisings, and in Italy the revolutionary current faced 1977 so weakened by

38. "On Organization", J. Camatte and G. Collu. English translation online at: http://libcom.org/library/on-organisation-jacques-camatte

Aside from internal differences (in fact, the group was far from homogeneous), Cesarano's participation was undoubtedly in accordance with the original and novel character of this group. In fact, Ludd was conceived—beginning with the choice of its name—as the product of a new development, a shift of perspective on the basis of which the workers movement, which had been considered to be defunct at least since May 1968, was no longer seen as the springboard of action.

Instead, Ludd sought to found its activity upon the historical precedent that was the inevitable basis for its critique. And it knew quite well what the problem was: councilist theory was almost entirely unknown in Italy.

In the revolutionary upheavals that followed the end of the First World War, "extremism", characterized by the rejection of electoralism and of the united front with the socialists, was expressed in Italy by the Bordiguist current, which was nonetheless totally hostile towards councilism and drew a sharp distinction between the political party and economic-social and administrative organizations. During this era, the councilist position was represented by the Turin group, Ordine Nuovo (Gramsci, Terracini, Togliatti, Tasca), which emerged as a significant force, together with the anarchists, during the factory occupations in September 1920. Bordiga's position, on the other hand, as he recounted much later, was: "We must not occupy the factories and the offices, but the State and all its institutions". Ultimately, despite the definitely "extremist" positions of its initial period, Ordine Nuovo later became an instrument for reunification with the "centrist" socialist majority, which was imposed by Lenin and Zinoviev's Comintern leadership, a process that delivered the cadres to the "Bolshevization" of the party and its Stalinist degeneration.

As a result, there was no councilist tradition in Italy comparable to the Dutch-German current (except for a tiny minority of émigrés after the two world wars, such as the groups formed by Michele Pappalardi, Piero Corradi and their journals, *Réveil Communiste* and *l'Ouvrier Communiste*). The rediscovery of the German revolution and of council communism took place after 1968, and was largely due to the activity of La Vieille Taupe in France.[19]

19. "In 1965, Pierre Guillaume, a member of Socialisme ou Barbarie and then of Pouvoir Ouvrier, founded the bookstore, La Vieille Taupe, on Rue Fossés-Saint-Jacques in Paris. This bookstore served as a point for discussion and activity related to the Situationist International—which for a certain period of time maintained relations with La Vieille Taupe—as well as the Italian Left, which was then known almost exclusively through the filter of the International Communist Party (Programme Communiste). Pierre Guillaume took part, for example, in the publication of the English edition of the S.I. text on the Watts Riots. [...] From its inception, the bookstore refused to adopt any doctrinal label. It was not the headquarters of Pouvoir Ouvrier (since Guillaume was not a member), nor was it that group's bookstore. During a period when it was hard to obtain essential revolutionary texts, which were scarce on the 'market', La Vieille Taupe sought to make them available. The mere fact that it featured texts by Marx, Bakunin, the S.I., Programme Communiste, and the ultraleft, had a clear political and theoretical impact in 1965. In its own way, La Vieille Taupe contributed to the indispensable theoretical synthesis of that era. It overcame sectarianism without collecting "'everything to the left of the Communist Party'. (...) "In 1967, the bookstore acquired the voluminous surplus stock of Costes, the only publisher of Marx's works in pre-war France, when the French Communist Party was more interested in publishing Thorez and Stalin. In early 1968, when Éditions Sociales had almost ceased operation, the only place you could get a copy of Capital was La Vieille Taupe. The bookstore sold the remainder copies of Socialisme ou Barbarisme, but also Cahiers Spartacus, which had published various representative texts of the workers movement after the war, from its extreme left to its extreme right. Thousands of copies of Rosa Luxemburg, Prudhommeaux ... which had been in storage for years in a warehouse of the fifth district, were once again offered to the public. La Vieille Taupe did not deny the need for coherence. Instead, it believed that coherence could not be achieved on the basis of just one of the radical currents (all of which were focused on a single view) of that time, nor by trying to make contact with the workers (like the ICO), nor by studying the forms assumed by modern capitalism (as Souyri advocated, who kept his distance from the polemics that arose from the split in Pouvoir Ouvrier), but by way of the theoretical

In the first issue of *Ludd*, the minutes of the meeting held in Brussels by Information Correspondence Ouvrière in July 1969, at which almost all existing councilist currents were represented, were published. It featured the texts of the "immediatists", who focused their practice on forms of the immediate realization of the critique of everyday life (illegalism, immediate rejection of work, hedonism) and who had engaged in a harsh critique of the other groups at Brussels. At first, some members of Ludd clearly sympathized with this attitude. The Milan group, including Cesarano, certainly placed the critique of everyday life at the center of its interests, expressed in the search for an extreme coherence in personal relations and in the attempt to reveal "real needs".

Ludd also published Jean Barrot's "Critique of Ultraleft Ideology", which took up the thread of the critique of ultraleftism made by the Bordiguist current. Barrot, criticizing the councilist ideology, rejected the self-management tendency by defending instead the essential aspects of Marx's work: the critique of value and of the capitalist valorization process, whose rupture and abolition constitute the very content of the communist revolution.

Ludd therefore cannot be considered to be part of the councilist tradition: by firmly deciding to distance itself from the project for self-management in its entirety, it also turned its back on the legacy of historical councilism. In fact, Ludd did not recognize itself to be the heir of any historical current, arguing that the proletariat had no program to realize. This negative connotation of its critique (the end of politics, of militantism, of the workers and trade union movement, of activism) would have a determinate impact on the subsequent developments of the activity and influence of the radical communist current (in the 1967-1971 period).

The period of reflux, of course, was at first perceived as a return to Stalinist or neo-Stalinist political organizations. In late 1969 there was a veritable boom among these organizations (among others, Lotta Continua, Potere Operaio and the despicable Movemento Studentesco of Capanna and Toscano,[20] which engaged in ruthless repression against "provocateurs"), imposing upon revolutionaries the need to clearly distinguish and establish a line of demarcation.

This requirement had a tendency to assume a negative expression, above all in the form of the rejection of militantism, the repudiation of politics and proselytism, and a veritable "nihilist" questioning of any public intervention carried out beyond the narrow circle of comrades. It was also expressed by means of "exemplary actions", or taking advantage of the occasions offered by encounters with the police to discharge accumulated rage. The times were changing, however, and in the next cycle—1971 to 1976—the influence of the revolutionaries would be very much reduced.

appropriation of the left communist current (and therefore also of the historical terrain on which that current had arisen) and of the Situationist International, and by way of reflection on communism and particularly on the contribution made by Marx.
"This small heterogeneous group that broke from Pouvoir Ouvrier carried out little or no 'publicity' during the months that followed May 1968. It basically organized collective readings of Capital and began to assimilate the theoretical contributions of the various components of the communist left, as well as of the Situationist International. La Vieille Taupe was not a group: it was instead a steppingstone for various tendencies, in which anti-Leninism was predominant and where the appearance of Invariance opened up a new field for discussion" ("Le Roman des nos origins", in La Banquise, Paris, No. 2, 1984).

20 The Movemento Studentesco (M.S.) was a student organization of the extraparliamentary left, which in the seventies spread from the state university of Milan to the rest of Italy. It was at first linked to the group, Lotta Continua. The notoriety attained in this group at the time by its leaders, Mario Capanna and Salvatore Toscano, allowed the latter to enjoy a long and successful career as politicians and writers. [Note of the Spanish Translator]

Comontism instead whimsically identified its own members (largely veterans of the similar Organizzazione Consigliare di Torino[35]) with the historical party of the proletariat, or, even better, with the "human community". On this basis, it created an organization with branches in several Italian cities (see *Maelström*, No. 2), which erased any distinction between theoretical and practical activity, between public life and private life, between individual and organization. Comontism thus attempted to breathe life into a concrete communism, characterized by:

1. The collectivization of all resources for survival;
2. A "total" way of living together;
3. The constant practice of the "critique of everyday life" in order not to yield to the pressure imposed by society in the form of family, social milieu, legal relations, etc.

The immediatist illusion of the group caused it to overlook one fundamental fact: that between capitalism—that is, between personal relations dominated by valorization—and communism, there is a revolution that, according to Marx, serves among other things to "get rid of all the old shit". For Comontism the *Gemeinwesen* had to be put into practice here and now: it was all about the passage to communism of twenty or thirty persons, communizing all relations all at once: this idea would lead inevitably and immediately to the production of an ideology: immediatism was rapidly followed by the elaboration of a whole set of "theoretical" corollaries.

In retrospect, we have to sympathize with Comontism: it was a group of courageous individuals who always stayed at their posts at the revolutionary front, bravely confronting harsh repression and fighting against various Maoist-workerist splinter groups that had specialized military structures crafted to ensure that the assemblies and demonstrations were conducted in a way that was acceptable to their father-master PCI (with the sole exception —besides, naturally, the Bordiguist groups that had already experienced the armed repression of the "extraparliamentary" Stalinists—of Potere Operaio, a group devoted to guerrilla tactics which, although it did not publicly defend the revolutionaries, was always opposed to their persecution). The provocative and ominous attitude of Comontism (which gloried in a display of macabre humor on December 12, 1972, on the occasion of the destruction of the Banca de Agricultura at the Piazza Fontana in Milan[36]) was compelled to confront, among other things, the systematic calumnies of the left which had for several years been proclaiming that "situationists=fascists". It is indisputable, however, that Comontism was a revolutionary group, which the *Cronaca di un ballo mascherato*[37] justly cited as part of the radical communist current. Not in vain did it claim to have remained on the terrain of revolutionary practice, when so many other former Luddites had accepted the separation between the "militant" public life and private life, which soon led them to passive nihilism and, in many cases, to renounce the revolutionary option in favor of worldly success or simply a tranquil life.

On the other hand, one cannot avoid criticizing the retreat of Comontism with respect to the level attained by Ludd. Comontist immediatism is nothing but a substitutionism of the proletariat carried to its logical extreme. From this point of view, Comontism was an authentic model of ideology, based on an undeclared but easily

35.Councilist Organization of Turin. [Note of the Spanish Translator].

36. On the significance of this date, see Note 21 [Note of the Spanish Translator (*Note number modified for this edition* - ed)].

37. Cronaca di un ballo mascherato, Giorgio Cesarano, Piero Coppo and Joe Fallisi, Ed. Varani, Milan, 1983. Spanish translation, Crónica de un baile de mascaras, included in the collection, Un terrorismo en busca de dos autores. Documentos de la revolución en Italia, Likiniano Elkartea, Bilbao, 1999 [Note by the Spanish Translator].

The visible manifestations of the proletariat thus always and exclusively appear as individual manifestations of the crisis of the ego-persona, or else as undifferentiated and blind outbursts. The problem of identifying them historically with a sector of the class in struggle or with a set of principles, much less with a collective and coherent practice, is not posed. The concept of communism disappears, even in the notion of the "naturalizing organic totality",[33] by becoming more extensive but also more abstract and more generic. This is why his work runs the risk of being read as a mere desperate critique, which derives its undeniable force only from pain and madness.

In any event, it is not possible to understand Cesarano's work if it is not considered as the product of the entire historical current of which it forms a part and of that current's theoretical stagnation, which in turn reflected precisely the practical dead end in which the radical communists found themselves once the cycle of struggles of 1967-1970 came to an end. Situated in a dead zone, the radical current attempted to replace the generalized action and offensive of the proletariat, which was on the decline, with certain "new" expressions that could not be recuperated by the capitalist apparatus. Hence the spread of certain "juvenile" values that were rapidly co-opted by the culture industry, to the point of transforming sexual liberation, communitarianism, the critique of the family, psychedelic drugs and rock music into just so many new commodities.

Cesarano's achievement consists in having produced a powerful and unitary synthesis of the theory of an entire epoch, and of having created a complex critical machinery; his weakness consists in having reproduced the contradictions that undermined the movement that he was depicting. He was personally deeply involved in the general crisis. By burning all the bridges that he crossed, he ended up also abandoning the collective point of view that turned out to be so necessary at that time. By referring the solution of present-day problems to a successful future movement—even though the *Critica dell'utopia capitale* was the fruit of these problems and reflected them—Cesarano failed to propose explicitly and openly how to get through a period of decline.

The abstraction of some of Cesarano's conclusions consequently dates back to the crisis of the radical[34] communists that resulted from their confrontation with the new stage of reflux. However, in the profundity and the richness of his theoretical production we can discover the necessary elements to explain and demystify the collapse of the entire current, in the face of the possibility and the evidence of a new cycle of struggles.

10.2 Two opposed points of view on organization.

In 1971 Comontism took shape and the group that had formed based on the positions of Invariance dissolved. It must be mentioned that both tendencies had diametrically opposed attitudes towards the "question of organization". One of these attitudes was in fact that of Cesarano and a large part of the current. The idea of

33. Spinoza conceived of nature as "naturalizing", that is, as the free cause of itself and conceived by itself; granted the attributes that express an eternal and infinite essence, that is, the essence of God. This notion, united with the Hegelian concept of the organic totality led certain theoretical formulations to conceive of the realization of the Gemeinwesen, of communism, as the inexorable result of the self-sufficient development of the totality. Thus, the emphasis shifted from the historical analysis of the class struggle towards the recognition of the totality that acts and is expressed in every particular phenomenon of the present. [Note of the Spanish Translator]

34. On this aspect, see Note 13 [Note of the Spanish Translator (*Note number modified for this edition* -ed)]

Then the radical current began to self-destruct, in such a way that when there was a resurgence of a cycle of struggle between 1977 and 1979, the radical current was already on its knees.

9. The Retreat. Azione Libertaria and *Invartance*

We have always considered December 12, 1969[21] as the date that concluded the cycle of 1968, and inaugurated the first period of the decline. However, like all historical dates, this one has a relative value. This is especially true when one takes into account the international context, in which the last important struggle, the great Polish revolt, took place at the end of 1970. That year also witnessed the American invasion of Cambodia, while in the United States the movement against the war reached its maximum level of intensity. Then the famous events in Ohio[22] capped off this period with a resounding conclusion, while the U.S. troops and especially the fleet in Vietnam engaged in a constant series of mutinies and incidents of insubordination. Even in Italy, 1970 was a year of major social agitation, despite the repression and the end of the "hot autumn". The universities and the high schools were still occupied, while the core groups of the workers avoided being absorbed by the "extraparliamentary" groups, creating their own autonomous networks for mutual contacts. In Milan, an anarchist group directly influenced by "radical" elements, Azione Libertaria, mobilized three thousand people for two demonstrations. At one of these demonstrations, held on the first anniversary of the massacre of Piazza Fontana, organized by Azione Libertaria against the recommendations of the rest of the anarchist movement—which did not want to participate due to the fact that the police had prohibited the demonstrations—violent clashes took place in downtown Milan, during which Saverio Saltarello, a young militant of Rivoluzione Comunista, was murdered by the police.

At this time Azione Libertaria broke with the libertarian movement and, establishing relations with Ludd, initiated a significant project to attain a more profound understanding of the concept and practice of workers autonomy, in a way that was similar to that of Information Correspondence Ouvrière.

The central hypothesis of the current was that it had to develop the content of workers autonomy, and in order to do so, it had to make contact with the factory groups that had refused to be absorbed by the extraparliamentary groups. It focused above all on the theme of the conflict in the workplace and published various journals, one of which, in 1971, carried the prophetic name of Autonomia Operaia (the others were Azione Libertaria in 1970 and Proletari Autonomi in 1971). It must be said that, compared with the later and more famous tendency of the same name of the period 1975-1979, the former experience was qualitatively superior insofar as it was not contaminated by the Stalinist and militarist ideology that the Autonomia Operaia of 1977 was incapable of entirely ridding itself. Later, a break took place between two factions: those who simply wanted to link up with the factory groups, on the one hand; and on the other hand, those radical communists

21. On December 12, 1969, a powerful bomb destroyed the Banca Nazionale dell'Agricoltura at the Piazza Fontana in Milan, killing 17 people and wounding 88. On that same day various other bombs were detonated in other cities in Italy. As is now known, these attacks were the work of secret agencies of the Italian State linked to NATO. Piazza Fontana was the beginning of the "strategy of tension", which included more than a thousand attacks in Italy during the seventies, and which were used by the State in order to more effectively manage public terror and the persecution of the revolutionaries. [Note of the Spanish Translator]

22. On May 4, 1970, a protest ended in tragedy at the State University at Kent, when the Ohio National Guard murdered four students after a demonstration against the war. This was followed by a wave of student protests that paralyzed the American universities. Between May 4 and May 8 there were hundreds of demonstrations, strikes and violent confrontations every day. [Note of the Spanish Translator]

who already perceived the coming decline and who were trying to elaborate a theoretical activity at the same time that they were trying to "approach" groups like Lotta Continua, Potere Operaio and the Colletivo Politico Metropolitano, that were occasionally allied with radicals and anarchists up until 1971.

The Bordiguist theoretical influence was obvious. Just as in other situations the principle theoretical point of reference had been Ludd and La Vieille Taupe, now it was *Invariance*, even more than the Situationist International, which was only known up to a certain point (the main reference points were above all the *Revolution of Everyday Life* by Raoul Vaneigem and the sole issue of the Italian section of the Situationist International, since *The Society of the Spectacle* was largely unknown or else misunderstood).[23]

Invariance arose from a dissident group that split from the French section of the International Communist Party (*Il Programma Comunista*), due to the dissidents' demand that theory be privileged over the role of the party, accusing the latter of having succumbed to the activism typical of a Trotskyist sect (a charge that was actually hardly merited).

Basically, *Invariance* challenged the usefulness of a party organized around a mass of trade union activities, etc., opposing the "historical party" to the formal organization of militants. That is, the Marxist program and theory taken as a whole, which only in revolutionary periods assumes the structure of a militant formation while in counterrevolutionary eras it dissolves in order to avoid succumbing to opportunist degeneration. This was Marx's attitude when he provoked the dissolution of the First International; and it was also the attitude of Bordiga, who did not reconstruct a real party after the war, but only used the International Communist Party as an instrument to carry on his theoretical work, without ever acquiring a membership card.

Invariance was especially devoted to disseminating the voluminous work of Bordiga, translating it into French. Likewise, it also had a positive approach to the ultraleft current (which had also been stigmatized by Bordiguist ultra-Leninism) and produced an abundance of original texts, especially *The Unpublished 6th Chapter and the Economic Works of Karl Marx*, written by Jacques Camatte when he was still a party militant, and revised by Bordiga himself.

The adoption of this perspective was undoubtedly contradictory in a current—and above all in a group like Ludd—that had conceived of 1968 as a new beginning, as the opening up of a completely new revolutionary epoch. However, this contradiction did not correspond to the new reality, nor could it coexist with it, so it just evaporated on its own before the disaster occasioned by the decline of the cycle of struggle of 1967-1970 unfolded. All that remained was to discover the crucial importance of theory, which until then had only been vaguely presented. There was an enthusiastic return to Marx and Bordiga, rediscovering the weapons of critique in all their power.

Actually, at the beginning of the seventies our current seemed to fit into the model of the Bordiguist party: that tiny sect that, during the fifties—when it was persecuted by Stalinism—had upheld dissident positions (such as the famous section of Asti, which acted as strikebreakers during the strikes organized by the Stalinists). As the struggle went into decline, the horizon was occupied by boisterous Maoist groups that constantly expelled the radical communists from the assemblies.

23. See Guy Debord, The Society of the Spectacle, Zone Books, New York, 1995; Comments on the Society of the Spectacle, Verso Books, New York, 1990; Raoul Vaneigem, The Revolution of Everyday Life, Aldgate Press, London, 1983.

Comontism. It was part of an effort to include all those forms of spontaneous rebellion within the "real movement", as replacements for the proletariat that was during that period forced to retreat to particular conflicts within the factory, or towards domestic problems.

To get a better understanding of this perspective we have to return to *Invariance*, which during that period was the principle source of inspiration for the entire spectrum of Italian radical communism, although often with varying effects. In fact, this journal was published at the same time that Bordiga's texts were being re-published, as well as Marx's works in their original versions, texts that exercised a powerful influence on our current, and on Cesarano in particular.

Beginning with its second series, *Invariance* began to impress a forced march on Marxist theory, which led it—while paradoxically preserving its name, *Invariance*[29] --to various 180-degree reversals with respect to certain basic Marxist positions. Thus, in 1977—a crucial date when revolutionary theory produced numerous *mosche cocchiere*[30] --it would abandon the revolution-counterrevolution problematic.

In the *Critica dell'utopia capitale*, we find contents that are typical of *Invariance*.

First of all, the concept of "universal class": the proletarian condition tends to become generalized, the new middle classes (today often denominated as the "tertiary sector") tend to live in a condition of exploitation and alienation that is similar to that of the industrial proletariat. During the course of a revolutionary crisis, the proletariat thus has the possibility of deploying the vast majority of humanity on the battlefield, unified as the "universal class".[31] This concept is an aspect of Cesarano's idea of the biological revolution, in which all class distinctions become obsolete, since now the "utopia of capital" is opposed to the totality of the human species.

Another such notion consists in viewing the disturbances in the American metropolises as the concrete affirmation of communism. Such an idea was amplified by the idea of a "transfigured" revolution, which Cesarano defined solely by its destructive and capital-negating work, and which found its continuity in arbitrary violence, even in its most sporadic and individual manifestations.

Quote:

> "While the curtain falls on the spectacle of ideological war, which has gone beyond its limits, the real war, as Marcuse says, is everywhere and all the time, but everywhere and all the time for each person, without any constraining frontiers, and inseparable from the process of production. This war is the practical critique that is expressed, and nothing more. The perspective of the accommodation of politics and sociology attributes to critique their disguises and spare clothes every time they confront—but they always confront it—the need to exorcize it. The criminal, the gang, the drug addicts, the excluded, the sectarians of alienated religions and ideologies, the misfits, the 'youth', the sub-proletarians, the 'neurotics', the mentally ill (!): the original enemy, the antichrist, those who by their mere existence deny as a whole too many things so that it is impossible not to see that, simply, they are everyone. The critique is latent in each person."[32]

29. See Note 24 [Spanish Translator's Note (*Note number modified for this edition* -ed)]

30. Mosche cocchiere: untranslatable expression used to describe those people who concede great importance to themselves and take pride in deeds (perhaps extraordinary exploits), in which they had minimal, irrelevant or no participation. [Note of the Spanish Translator].

31. [Cite Transizione] (sic).

32. Giorgio Cesarano, Critica..., op. cit., pp. 48-49.

action, in the revolts of the black ghettoes in the United States; and even in the fascistic, basically patronage-based revolts of the cities of southern Italy (Reggio Calabria, Caserta).

Quote:

> "The 'wild outbreak' [the term corresponds to a hierarchy of knowledge; to the position of the person who, in fact, knows] of the outcast against alienation, of passion against suffering, where the modern proletariat goes on the offensive, in the ghettoes which are now off-limits to the isolated bourgeoisie in New York and Detroit—just as in Reggio Calabria, Caserta and the Barrio Latino, where hatred breaks out for 'futile reasons'—displays the features of the struggle for life against the 'spread' of necrosis; a struggle that, because it can, must be expressed. They are the features, in fact ferocious, of the return to the primal forest, of primitive violence [...] the wild conquest by night of the spaces which in the day are usurped by the masters and their slaves, the bourgeoisie do not venture beyond those same streets where the offices of their representatives rise which, in that space-time reconquered from the enemy, no longer represent them. Even during the day, the savage reappears in desperate and sudden attacks, pointing their machine guns at the cages of the bank tellers, hidden from the electronic eye of the police TV" (*Critica dell'utopia capitale*).[27]

With regard to this point it is very important to understand the "turn" taken by the radical current at the beginning of the seventies, which led to its subsequent sterility. This is fundamental especially if one wants to understand the *Critica dell'utopia capitale*, whose purpose was to contribute a theoretical solution at this crucial historical juncture.

In Cesarano's most important theoretical work one can also discover the inspirations for this immediatism: the revolts of the black ghettoes, the expressions of arbitrary violence, criminal gangs, the subjective crisis unleashed by various degrees of neurosis and madness that no repressive structure and no therapy can continue to contain, all of this was interpreted in its immediacy as so many manifestations of the communist movement, of the revolutionary praxis that abolishes the current state of affairs.

Cesarano incorporated these acts of revolt into a general theoretical discourse whose purpose was to prove the "biological" character of the revolution, its origin in the living body of the human species, which simultaneously attacks the inorganic universe, the personal-ego and the language produced by the ruling "rationality".

Quote:

> "Every time a 'crazy' man launches a violent protest against the prison in which he is held and declares that what exists does not exist or is false, the imagination is at work. This 'every time' is becoming 'always'. In the increasing rates of crime, neurosis and insanity, in the increasingly more frequent collective explosions of 'unmotivated' rage, in insubordination, in alienation, in the insidious absenteeism, we see an intermediate stage on the road that the imagination is taking towards the definitive overthrow of reality as the organization of the unreal, and towards the conquest of an organic totality that will put an end to the inorganic capitalist utopia, to prehistory, and allow the commencement of history as an equilibrium of existence and being, the finally attained correspondence between the will to live and life".[28]

This apologetic for moments of social and psychological disintegration, and for ad hoc outbursts of deleterious vitality, comes from his early period: it characterized the period of the dissolution of Ludd and the early stages of

27. Giorgio Cesarano, Critica..., op. cit., pp. 30-31.

28. Giorgio Cesarano, Critica..., op. cit., p. 52.

The "historic party" of Marx had nothing to do with the bureaucratic and terrorist structure of the Bolsheviks. It therefore acquired among us the esoteric enchantment that contrasted with our real poverty. It was a party that could be reduced to a couple of bookshelves in a library, a post office box, or to the correspondence and encounters between two or three friends. But at the same time it was an entity that, because it was disincarnate, transcended the limits of time and space, uniting generations and continents in the immutability[24] of the communist program. The latter, of course, had been established once and for all by means of a process of historical illumination—similar to that of the great prophets of the revealed religions—which, between 1844 (the *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts*) and 1848 (revolution) had forged a perspective that was applicable to all the subsequent periods of struggle. It is a fact that our contact with Invariance stimulated our interest in the very rich vein of Bordiga's works and in the study of the works of Marx; so that isolation ceased to be considered as a problem and began to be valued, and every form of activism was viewed as an impediment to theoretical activity. Our interests were thus dominated by pamphlets, journals and mimeograph machines.

The logical schema was as follows: the international proletarian movement had reappeared on the historical scene between 1965 and 1970. While the revolutionary epicenter had shifted towards the United States, the wave of disturbances that had shaken Europe finally reached the East. This period had begun to come to a close in 1971, when a stage of retreat began in which the problem no longer consisted in active intervention, but in avoiding being reabsorbed by a reality that was completely dominated by capital. During this retreat what was required was intense theoretical activity, the assimilation of the works of Bordiga and Marx, the German Revolution, the ultraleft current and the Frankfurt School ... materials that had to be used for the purpose of moving towards the affirmation of communism. Communism, for its part, had to be revealed on the basis of the recent movements and the theories that best described those movements (besides the interest aroused by the Situationist International, the American social movement led to the rediscovery of Norman O. Brown and Herbert Marcuse[25]).

This led us to definitively reject the politics with which we had been attempting to settle accounts: none of the extremist or militarist variants that were then current had the least interest for us. In fact, we even accused the movement of Autonomia Operaia of having adapted to the requirements of a narrow and stifling situation. Only the resumption of the movement could lead to the rejuvenation of the problems in a dynamic sense and in their real dimension. In the meantime, what was necessary was to use the critique to fortify the subjectivity threatened by capital, as well as the spheres of personal life that total capital had hijacked in order to seize possession of individuals. With regard to the prospect of the next resurgence of revolution, it was necessary to be prepared, wielding the theoretical weapons not just of negativity, but also of the affirmation and the theoretical basis of communism.

The concrete possibility that this offered us was that of the enormous enrichment of our weapons with the contributions of the Marxian and Bordiguist traditions. However, what happened instead was that on the one

24. This time, for the purpose of clarifying a recurrent term, we have translated the term "invariance" used in the original text by the term "immutability". This idea, which was the fundamental pillar of the theoretical work of the Italian communist left, refers to the immutability or invariance of the communist program, as the latter was elaborated and theoretically expressed during the revolutionary era that corresponded with the life of Karl Marx. [Note of the Spanish Translator]

25. Norman O. Brown, Life Against Death: the Psychoanalytical Meaning of History, Wesleyan University Press, 1985; Love's Body, University of California Press, 1990. As for Marcuse, we read An Essay on Liberation and Counterrevolution and Revolt.

hand the immediatist tendency became stuck in its utopia, creating Comontism; while, on the other hand, Cesarano intensified his theoretical efforts, which he assumed on his own account, experiencing in his theoretical-practical journey the contradictions of the entire current.

10.1 The Dissolution of Ludd and the Revival of Immediatism

If the retreat presupposed a theoretical intensification and a more or less fruitful immersion in study, according to the Bordiguist-*Invariance* model, it also led to the destruction of the groups that, like Ludd, identified with the new contents of the movement and thus appropriated their force.

The heterogeneous nature of Ludd caused its dissolution to be spontaneous and almost painless. The problem of how to resist a counterrevolutionary wave had not yet been posed. There was no attempt to create a permanent organization. In fact, the dissolution of the group could be seen as a positive fact since it prevented its ideological recuperation and re-absorption by capital.

However, the disappearance of Ludd was not enough to liquidate the remains of immediatism, which in fact continued have an influence on subsequent theoretical production.

It often happened that genuine revolutionaries (unlike the sectarian followers of an ideology that helped them to find meaning and purpose) oscillated between an awareness of the oppressive superiority of capital and the apparent weakness of their own antagonist existence, barely recognizing themselves in the real movement that socially embodied their perspective, and thus they had a tendency not to take that movement seriously.

The "spontaneous" dissolution of a group is always the product of a weakness that tends to be rapidly forgotten by the revolutionaries, due to their uncertainty regarding the real scope of the projects in which they participated, and an unconscious sense of modesty. In the seventies this tendency was accentuated by the anxiety of shifting to a higher, or in any event, more coherent sphere of activity, an anxiety based on the illusion that individuals would thereby be not only less impeded, but also more potentiated in their search for radicality (of course, in that time this option was validated by a social environment that was much more interesting and fruitful for a social explorer and adventurer than the present one).

Perhaps this anxiety was entirely justified, and in fact it was proof of a profound demand for radicality, the fact that a group, in a period of retreat, dissolved in order to avoid succumbing to a ritual repetition of its own gestures, which would have presupposed the perpetuation of the group as an end in itself, independent of the activity of its members, who would thus have become militants. There are many examples of the misery of these groups that stubbornly persist in proselytizing with the hope of recruiting militants who would keep the flame of the organization burning.

This does not mean, however, that the split or dispersion of a group, even one that is numerically insignificant—which was not the case with Ludd—would not be extremely important for subsequent events, and therefore should not be seriously confronted.

The history of Ludd is exemplary because it demonstrates the revolutionary essence of the group, which had nothing to gain by perpetuating itself as an "independent" enterprise, at a moment when neither the immediate movement nor the theoretical tension merited keeping it alive. But at the same time this history demonstrates the superficiality that characterized the way the group "gave up".

From the point of view of the revolutionary movement, breaks, splits, and dissolutions should fulfill a function of enrichment, of clarification for others. This is why, when an experience comes to an end it is fundamental to settle accounts with it, and this must be done in a conscious and explicit way. Otherwise there will be confused remains that will continue to produce undesired effects.

In the case of Ludd, the unresolved remnants would have highly damaging consequences.

Afterwards, disillusionment and resentment, which were felt even years later, gave way to the pretension of being able to replace the working class. This tendency was "armed" immediatism, which assumed diverse forms in the movement of the seventies and in the multiform Autonomia Operaia, and which assumed its most regressive and catastrophic manifestation in the dramatic experience of Azione Rivoluzionaria.

There was no settling of accounts with the ideology of everyday life, or with the immediatist dogmatism that justified concealed hierarchies and which animated the self-laceration of the weakest militants. Cesarano was clearly aware of this degeneration and produced a very harsh and precise critique. Surprisingly, however, this critique remained in the "private" milieu of those closest to him, his friends. In his writings, Cesarano took it for granted, as if it had been done before. In reality, what he did was to liquidate the problem without having clarified it in its ultimate consequences. Comontism, the presumed heir of that "ideology of everyday life", carried its immediatism to the paradoxical point of calling a circle of comrades "the human community" (note that Comontism=*Gemeinwesen*[26]). Although Cesarano often expressed how strange he found the theory, practice and perspective of Comontism, he never engaged in a real fundamental theoretical confrontation that would clarify the question. The "critique of everyday life" had arisen in order to confront an odious inquisitorial order, embodied in a very energetic and concrete organization in which all the human and personal sympathy of the world could be expressed, but it is entirely undeniable that this critique had a regressive theoretical character compared with Ludd.

Frankly, the immediatist legacy of Ludd went beyond the ingenuous and crude expressions of Comontism and its brutal and pompous "ideology of crime". In general, the ideology of everyday life was still fixed on the entire radical horizon. The rejection of politics, militantism, organizational continuity, and the value of a lasting shared activity, had two derivatives: on the one hand, an exclusive dedication to theory (which in itself does no harm) and on the other the resort to certain modes of action that no longer appeal to the class—or to organized core groups of the class—but to the milieu of psychological and social disintegration (this rejection of organization may now be subjected to critical analysis because it has lost much of its meaning in the absence of hegemonic leftist splinter groups. It might thus seem like an incomprehensible phobia to a present-day revolutionary. Especially because it has an inhibitory effect, because it generates impotence, because it renounces acquired experience by rendering impossible any efficacy and any instruments of communication that can only be forged over time).

Comontism therefore wanted to see the vanguard revolutionary expressions in madness, in delirium, in crime, in the explosions of blind and meaningless violence, or, in the best cases, as the last link with the ideal of collective

26. Gemeinwesen is the German term that defines the "collective" and integral "existence" of man as a member of his species. This generic social existence is the negation of man produced by and for bourgeois society: the man who is internally shattered and alienated from his own activity, from the other members of his species and from the material world that they create. This idea and its profound implications are elaborated in Marx's 1844 Manuscripts and in various other texts of the communist tradition. [Note of the Spanish Translator]