

**POSSIBILITIES  
OF  
ITALIAN OSTALGIE**

## PREFACE

In an age where the politics of Italian Left are watered down to a centrist moderate programme of cautious reformism, fiction seems to have become all nostalgic for the glorious 1960s and 1970s. Italian cinema and literature in fact are blooming with memoirs of the years of the student protest and of the insurgence of the working class. The aim of my research is to find out the reason behind this “ostalgie” and its possible meaning and use in the present as a tool to re-start the revolution.

As exemplificative cases I have selected two novels, *54* (2002), by Wu Ming, and *L'Organigramma* (2006), by Andrea Comotti, and Guido Chiesa's film *Lavorare con lentezza* (2004). These authors have been able to go beyond mere historical reconstructions and contribute to support that “performative movement” that led the anti-globalization protests held in Seattle (1999) and Genova (2001) (Virno, 2005). Indicative in this sense are their decisions not to apply copyright on novels and to use the web to continue the analyses and discussions started in the fictional text. These artists treat intellectual production as a collective resource set free from the control of economic power. According to philosopher Paolo Virno a new possibility for political action consists in a similar re-appropriation of public intellect, subtracting it from the sphere of post Fordist waged labour (Virno 1996B).

Such an active role seems to find confirmation in their biographical outlines: one of them took actively part in the student movement of the late 1960s, the others are currently involved in various forms of activism. Some remarkable considerations about the present state of things in Italy also emerge from the interviews<sup>1</sup> with Andrea Comotti, Guido Chiesa and poet Nanni Balestrini. The latter who co-authored the text I used as main historical reference. I thank them for devoting part of their time to my enquiries.

My supervisor, professor Darrow Schecter, was also very helpful in suggesting works that could add depth to my research.

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<sup>1</sup> The original text of the interviews can be found enclosed in the appendix, while parts of it feature in translation in the chapters.

## The Decline of Defeatism

A critical historiography, reluctant to worship the authority of 'simple facts', must try to recognize, in every step and every aspect of the counterrevolution, the silhouette, the contents, and the qualities of a potential revolution. (Virno 1996, p.242)

Art and science have a revolutionary potential. [...] (They) cause increasingly decoded and deterritorialized flows to circulate in the socius, flows that are perceptible to everyone, which force the social axiomatic to grow ever more complicated, to become more saturated, to the point where the scientist and the artist may be determined to rejoin an objective revolutionary situation in reaction against authoritarian designs of a State that is incompetent and above all castrating by nature. (Deleuze and Guattari, p.379)

Stories about the past always speak "in the present tense" to the ears of their audience (Chiesa in Fantoni Minnella, p.248). They are not just a recollection of a private experience closed in one's memory, but are always mixed, contaminated by new interpretations. Walter Benjamin values this openness as the vehicle for a revolutionary potential. He makes a distinction between two different ways of getting hold of the past. On the one hand there is the official interpretation of history as a continuous linear flow, which the ruling classes use to prove how their being in power is the result of a natural historical progress. On the other hand there is historical materialism, the approach that can be adopted by the subjugated class.

The oppressed class appropriates the past to itself in so far as it is 'open', in so far as the 'yearning for redemption' is already at work in it – that is to say, it appropriates the past in so far as the past already contains – in the form of what failed, of what was extirpated – the dimension of the future. (Žižek 1989, p.138)

Revealing and bringing to the surface the "lost possibilities", the opportunities missed in the past, the materialist historian can "undermine the present where it feels most secure": the irrevocability of official history (Bauman, p.51).

Such an optimistic approach to history is one of the keys to the analysis carried out by this paper. The objects of its investigation are some fictional narratives about Italian recent past, in particular the years between 1950 and 1980, three decades of working class struggle and student protest that have become an inexhaustible source of subjects for Italian fiction lately. This phenomenon first caught my attention because, as a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Italian, I am concerned on a personal level with this part of history, all the more since it is not taught at school and therefore my generation has no memory of it whatsoever.

The works I have chosen stand out among others because they share some peculiar characteristics. First of all they all maintain a strong connection between the years

they are describing and the present. Whether they are trying to bear witness to past events or to explore past mysteries, what prompt them in the first place are the needs arisen by present circumstances. Another common feature is the central position occupied by pop culture either in the adoption of genre narrative style and formulas or in the choice of real pop icons as main characters of the plot. Finally what distinguishes them is a deep understanding and assimilation of the lesson on cultural liberation that those years were able to deliver.

A creative and literary work refers to original documents and records in order to represent the past. But then it turns them into something else. [...] A story brings back an image of an age that is not just a photograph: it's an allegory. [...] Intellectuals have political inclinations, but they keep them on another level: that of ideas. (Balestrini 2007)

Instead of releasing a sterile defeatist document about how the chance for a proletarian revolution was missed and how the time for the uprising is now over, these works produce an allegory of the revolutionary action. They highlight how the latter is free from timing constrains because it is "grounded in an exception, in a short circuit of 'too late' and 'too early'" (Žižek 2004, p.298) and therefore still possible.

## **A Missed Opportunity: from the Resistance to the *Autonomia* movement: a class betrayed by its avant-garde**

1.

My father, my brother and everyone else have fought for a good cause, but people my age have nothing but stories about Partisans and weapons that are left to rust in cellars, nothing to do but dream of the revolution that never comes. What are we supposed to do? (Wu Ming, 2002 p.154)

Wu Ming open their novel *54* declaring that “‘post-war’ means nothing” (Wu Ming, 2002 p.1). They reject the idea that the end of World War II brought a peaceful post-war period to Italian people. A civil war was taking place at the time but its very existence was denied, the whole matter was dismissed in the name of a legitimisation that would guarantee to the political leaders of both sides the participation in the new government and therefore power (Chiesa in Minnella, p.249). The Partisans freed Italy from Fascism and they were going to extend and complete this process of liberation through a proletarian revolution if it weren't for the Communist Party. In 1944 communist leader Palmiro Togliatti announced that the Pci would abandon the revolutionary option for a gradual acquisition of power (Wright 2002, p.8). Adopting a moderate stance, the Pci would attain an entirely legitimate position within the official forces that would bring democracy back to Italy after years of fascist regime. The disoriented working class was thus presented with a new myth to hold on to and with a historic duty to fulfil. The proletariat had to lead the process of Reconstruction to make up for a bourgeoisie that was too weak to fight for its country. This sacrifice was the necessary preparation for the advent of an advanced democracy in which the working class would gain control of the production process (Balestrini, Moroni 1997, p.16). To increase the productivity in the factories and help the economic growth necessary to “the construction of a ‘strong democracy’” (Wright 2002, p.9) the working class had to accept a return to discipline and to subordinate its interests to the good of the country. Interestingly enough this process of normalisation included the transformation of the *Comitati di Liberazione Nazionale* (Committees for National Liberation) into innocuous management councils. These committees had fought fascism from within the factories and were proving very effective and influent forms of organization of the workers. Their emasculation prevented them from handing over the factories to the working class. Besides, they too were involved in the mythical joint effort required by that project of Reconstruction

that was obscuring the problem of the class conflict in Italy (Wright 2002, p.14). This was the beginning of a deterioration of the relations between Italian working class and its official organizations that would eventually see them taking opposite positions in the political debate.

Things got even worse during the 1950s. Workers had to endure a violent attack from their employers. A strategy based on paternalistic relations and on the promotion of individualism opposed to the collective identity of “working class” succeeded in weakening the proletariat and restored order in the factories. Employers turned to mass redundancies as a pretext to get rid of the most politicised employees and as a way to blackmail workers and make them conform to the policy of the factory (Lumley 1990, p.21)<sup>2</sup>.

The financial help of the Usa influenced the capitalist orientation of Italian economic growth, harmonizing perfectly with the moderate politics of the new government controlled by De Gasperi’s Democrazia Cristiana after the elections of 1947 (Wright, p.10). The proletariat then had to confront with weaker representatives, marginalized by the right and unable to cope with their duties. They had ceased to support its struggles within the factories, subordinating them to political advancements within the parliament, and no longer cared to reflect adequately the changed composition of the working class. The latter now included a wide amount of non-skilled young immigrants from the south whose wage was so low that they couldn’t even afford basic housing expenses. The indifference of the institutions to these new problems led to the desertion of the official party organizations by a growing and consistent component of the working class.

A first attempt to close the gap between class and organization came from the experience of *Quaderni Rossi*, one of the reviews on which the so called New Left expressed its critiques of the traditional structures of the Workers Movement. These intellectuals refused the Marxism of the parties, which was fossilized in the “widely held equation between truth, party and class” and was no longer valid now that economic conditions had changed, redefining the composition of the proletariat. Raniero Panzieri, among the founders of *Quaderni Rossi*, denounced the fixity of a structure that had led intellectuals to be organic only to the party, but not to the

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<sup>2</sup> The line adopted at the time by the Fiat management is illuminating on this subject. In 1953 engineer Valletta hit the employees very hard purging the local Fiom (the metalworkers union) of its most leftwing representatives and prohibiting most of the strikes. At the same time he started spreading individualistic values, distinguishing between “productive” and “destructive” workers and openly offering prizes and preferential treatments to those who proved more cooperative (Balestrini, Moroni 1997, p.19)

people, as Gramsci had instead hoped (Wright 2002, p17). Advocating a Marxism that could return to be a permanent critique free from party control, Panzieri started the practice of the “*conricerca*” (co-research). The idea is to investigate the conditions and behaviours of this new working class and to do it not from above, but together with the very exponents of this class, in order to understand their perspective and include their point of view. Questionnaires and interviews collected information on the workers’ subjectivity, which could have become the starting point for the organization of the struggle. Therefore the *conricerca* was an enriching practice for both the intellectuals and the proletariat, through which the “theory” was continuously updated and revitalised from below (Balestrini, Moroni 1997, p.37). This investigation was at first a form of unofficial cooperation with the unions, to help them regain the leadership of the working class struggle. But these optimistic expectations were to be disappointed, as workers had to confront with the stiff bureaucratisation of the official organizations. These let their class down once again in 1962. On this occasion one of the unions (Uil) signed a contract with the employers without taking into consideration the demands of the new mass workers. The latter answered with a prolonged strike and with the occupation of Turin’s city centre, which was put to an end only through a violent repression by the police. The new forms of protest adopted by the new proletariat were not understood nor accepted by their own organizations and were dismissed as extremism external to the working class objective by Panzieri himself (Balestrini, Moroni, p.135).

On the contrary other exponents of *Quaderni Rossi* seemed to have understood the new mass workers. They were able to explain their need for a continuous struggle which surpassed the periodical and strategic demonstrations of the disciplined skilled workers who were guided by party and unions. The point was to refuse the condition of pure work force and to gain autonomy from both the capital and the external organizations, as they too were proving subservient to the capital. Therefore, while Panzieri kept his intervention within the limits of the sociological research, in 1964 Mario Tronti founded another review. *Classe Operaia* was open to new levels of class struggle (Lumley p.37-38), in which the strategy was set by the class itself, with its spontaneous claims of autonomy, and the party took the more limited role of coordinator (Balestrini, Moroni, p.141).

The main merit of *Classe Operaia* was to finally acknowledge the end of the myth of the Reconstruction and of a reformist form of socialism. An important change had in

fact occurred on the level of the imagery and this was also due to the changed international situation. The Cold War neat division between East and West was beginning to blur in the words of politicians, depriving people of the traditional points of reference. Krushev's theory of a peaceful coexistence with the West and the consequent revisionism towards an even more moderate position on the part of the Italian communist party were considered as a betrayal of the proletariat and a "bourgeois opportunistic degeneration" in the words of many critics internal to the party itself (Balestrini, Moroni, p.147). Such an evaluation was very similar to that expressed by the intellectuals of the New Left, those of *Classe Operaia*, arguing that the Communist party represented the interests of a small part of the proletariat, leaving out the majority of mass unskilled workers. Yet for these internal dissidents the solution to the problem still resided in the ability of the party to guide the working class. While the "*operaisti*" advocated the autonomous organization of the struggle by the mass workers, these Marxist-Leninist proposed themselves as an avant-garde capable of re-connecting the masses to the Communist party while guiding the latter on the right path to meet the needs of its class.

2.

He was not going to slip off this time, he had set his foot on it. On what? On life and on all the things that make it different from any other art, on what transforms it into the Ulyssian mix of *virtude e canoscenza* that prevents brutalisation. Do you remember? (Comotti, p.68)

The same disillusionment with the myth of the Reconstruction was deeply felt among another part of Italian society. During the early 1950s the universities had been widely indifferent to the situation, with only a small number of politicised students that entered the associations controlled by official parties. Then gradually more students began to perceive that the traditional social values were old and inadequate for the new situation. The circulation of information about what was going on in the rest of the world and the increasing practice of reading texts not included in the official educational programmes became means of self-education. These two factors mutually stimulated one another and increased the consciousness of how inadequate the schooling system was for the needs of the new generation. They expressed their dissent looking either for "separate forms of protest" or for a "different and antagonist intellectual research". This led them to discover "the American beats and the French surrealists" on one side and the Frankfurt school, Marx and unorthodox left wing tendencies on the other (Balestrini, Moroni p. 198). The natural consequence was a

substitution of the traditional students associations, strongholds of the institutional parties and therefore part of the same old-fashioned ineffective democratic system that ruled the country, with new organizations and reviews inspired by minor left wing groups.

These channels enabled students to reject the paternalistic legislation on education emanated by the government and to express directly their needs:

It had been a while since rumours had started to spread about *carbonari* meetings taking place every now and then [...] somebody would raise his head first and then his voice, very shy, but still very self aware [...]. Finally he would touch the sore point ruthlessly: programmes were old and even anachronistic, a proper curriculum of 'Nests of spiders' (Comotti,p.68)

In 1963 students occupied the faculty of Architecture in Milan asking for "coherent programmes of study" and for greater consideration of "education as a process rather than product" (Lumley, p. 64). In 1967 the *Tesi di Pisa* (Pisan Thesis) linked the figure of the student to that of the worker, stating that the former was part of the proletariat since the education system was developing as a mere instrument in the hands of capitalism for the formation of labour power (Balestrini, Moroni, p.203). An interesting case was that of the University of Trento, where the proletarian component was stronger among the students. In fact, here for the first time one of the faculties (Sociology) became accessible to students coming from technical institutes and not only to those coming from a *liceo*<sup>3</sup>. Besides winning their "internal" battles (including a reform of the programmes and the creation of a general assembly as a form of direct intervention for the students on the institutional life of the university) these students widened the scope of their struggle, covering external issues of home and international politics. But their greatest achievement was to acquire consciousness of their strength as a social group, while their original forms of protest<sup>4</sup> became a model for the whole Italian student movement. The authoritarian methods that the student movement was pointing out in the academic world "were only an expression of the more general power relations within society" (Wright, p.92) and therefore the only solution was the overthrowing of the State. The university was to become the place for a "creative, alternative and antagonist political work" with this

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<sup>3</sup> Traditionally the more prestigious form of secondary school, for the bourgeoisie and the upper classes and, until that moment, a compulsory step to gain access to university education.

<sup>4</sup> They organised "controlezioni" (counter-classes) and "controcorsi" (counter-courses): alternative classes and courses on subjects of academic interest held at the same time of the official ones, competing with them for attendance. In 1967 they elaborated the practice of *Università negativa* (negative university), which could denounce the instrumental use that the capitalist state made of the university and start a counter attack from within (Ibidem).

revolutionary aim (Balestrini, Moroni,p.211). In Turin the student movement was expressing similar positions.

The university is an instrument of ideological and political manipulation that inspires [...] a spirit of subordination to any form of power. It erases from the mental and psychic structure of each individual [...] the collective dimension of personal needs and the capacity to establish non-competitive relationships with other people [...] (Viale in Balestrini, Moroni, p.217)

The conclusion was that a joint effort of students and workers in the class struggle was the only way to defeat capitalist domination. This student movement was also characterised by a strong impatience towards the control of official parties on their activities. There was a strong predominance of spontaneity and autonomous organization in the forms of struggle adopted. This is confirmed by the fact that the movement did not confine itself within state universities influenced by left wing extra-parliamentary movements, but exploded also in a conservative institution like the Catholic University of Milan. Here the students availed themselves of the support of the existing currents of catholic dissent (in particular Don Milani and his *Lettera a una Professoressa*<sup>5</sup>) and in 1967 they occupied the university to protest against the selective mechanism imposed through higher university fees and the authoritarianism of the academic institution, which was made even more stifling by its clerical dogmatic disposition (Lumley, p.80).

Until the end of the 1960s the students maintained their own peculiar forms and objectives in the struggle.

The student movement of '67 and '68 was a real social group, a definite category that for the first time was moving as one single person, this was the reason of its force (Comotti 2007).

Its critique of the educational system gave important contributions to a fundamental aspect of the struggle against capital: the role of the intellectuals. Denouncing how the institutions provided a partial form of knowledge in order to shape a submissive work force, they spread an “acute awareness of how knowledge and skills were socially constructed and transmitted” (Lumley, p.119). In this analysis they also made

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<sup>5</sup> In 1966 Don Milani denounced the discriminatory and falsifying mechanism at work in the schooling system. He attacked in particular the content of the programmes and the language adopted by schoolbooks and teachers, labelling them as elitist. According to Milani this was a way of deliberately privileging the children of the upper classes, who would be more familiar with the topics discussed during the lessons and would learn to speak proper Italian from their educated parents, and excluding the ones coming from a lower background, who would inevitably lag behind their schoolmates (Balestrini, Moroni p. 179)

reference to Mao's cultural revolution<sup>6</sup>, which stressed the importance of an adequate change in the superstructure in order to prevent a capitalist restoration and subjected to a "dialectical critique" both bourgeois and revolutionary ideologies (Balestrini, Moroni, p.164). The students also directed their critical gaze to the media. They read the accounts of their battles on the national press and confronting them with their personal experiences they were able to discern the distortions enacted by the papers. The media were in fact mounting a campaign against the movement, deliberately alarming the population by describing apocalyptic scenarios of disorder and illegality. This made the students "unusually media conscious" and able to formulate an attack on the "myth of objectivity and disinterestedness" of information, which instead was always inevitably subject to the cultural domination of the ruling classes (Lumley, p.121). As a consequence they devised new forms of communication. The more immediate was the *controinformazione* (counter-information): graffiti, leaflets and weekly newspapers like *Lotta Continua* were the tools for the circulation of the students' version of the story. The *controcultura* (counter-culture) instead was a much longer process of reappropriation of a "popular" culture that was autonomous from that of the ruling classes<sup>7</sup>. Beat-hippie groups devised de-cultural practices to attack "bourgeois Culture"<sup>8</sup>. In Milan they tried to unite and in 1966 started publishing their underground newspaper: *Mondo Beat*. Strongly opposed by the bourgeois press, these groups were also gradually marginalized by the leaders of the student and worker movement as they progressed towards stricter forms of ideological politicisation (Balestrini, Moroni, p.121).

If the "unique significance" of the Italian student movement derives from the fact that it was "the first example of a mass struggle without party control" (Asor Rosa in Wright, p.91), it is also important to acknowledge that the movement underwent a gradual but strong politicisation as its relationship with the workers movement developed. Balestrini and Moroni distinguish between a bourgeois and a proletarian component within the movement. The latter was represented by a growing number of

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<sup>6</sup> From 1963 Edizioni Oriente had been translating and publishing the works of Chinese communists. During the 1960s there was a significant increase in the demand for new texts and a considerable number of small publishing houses started to translate and print books outside the traditional catalogue of "classics" (Balestrini, Moroni, p.197)

<sup>7</sup> Playwright and comedian Dario Fo was particularly active on this field. He proposed the return of the figure of the jester-intellectual that could "help people to rediscover popular history, language and culture and to free it from 'bourgeois baubles'" (Lumley, p.126)

<sup>8</sup> The review "S", drawing inspiration from French Situationism, proposed the practice of the *de-cultura* as a form of defence and counter attack. This meant a refusal of what is traditionally considered "Culture" and a reordering the values exchanging the hierarchic positions between low and high cultural products as a way to denounce the arbitrariness of such a selection (Balestrini, Moroni, p.122).

“proletarian students”. These new subjects did all the odd and precarious jobs in order to pay their university fees and they lived in the same rundown areas of the city inhabited by the mass proletariat, sharing flats with them and experiencing the same conditions of life. It was this very proletarian element that both brought the student movement and its original existentialist battle closer to the workers’ and kept the struggle on a radical line that could not be easily recuperated by moderate reformism (Balestrini, Moroni, p.257).

3.

The counterculture youth movement broke out worldwide in 1968. In Italy the effects of this global explosion of social protests intensified the urgency of the demands of both the students and the workers.

In the 1968-9 hiatus [...] the simultaneity of the crisis in relations in the education system and in workplaces [...] meant an encounter between students and workers as two groups sharing homologous situations (Lumley, p.116)

In *Contro l’Università* Guido Viale condemned the universities as instruments of integration in the capitalistic society and education as a form of capitalist domination over people’s existence (Balestrini, Moroni, p.233). This was the same form of exploitation that the workers were denouncing, refusing the traditional strategy of struggle that was proposed by the unions and which was based on a direct relationship between salary and productivity. Independent forms of organization, the Cub, Comitati Unitari di Base (unitary base committees), replaced the unions.

The workers themselves became the subjects of both the economic and political battles. Refusing to follow prefabricated ideologies coming from above, they used their material condition in the factories as a starting point to elaborate a political strategy. They no longer pursued simple improvements in their working conditions, but they were actually practicing a “refusal to work” as a refusal of a mechanism of exploitation (Bologna in Balestrini, Moroni, p. 299). Their forms of protest had both a practical and a symbolic value<sup>9</sup>. Meanwhile, outside the factory, workers, students and unemployed were increasingly adopting forms of “mass illegality” that spread the struggle throughout society resulting in a maximum of subversive energy (Virno in

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<sup>9</sup> The *autoriduzione*, a reduction of the output obtained by slowing down their rhythms of work, for instance was a very self conscious way of “making the bosses dance to the rhythm of their music” (Parlato in Lumley, p. 189)

Balestrini, Moroni, p. 326). This social force was firmly repressed by state violence and became the target of the so-called “strategy of tension”.

The Government, the secret services, the police and the media were all involved in a series of intimidating actions against these movements. A series of terrorist attacks were attributed to the “opposed extremisms” (right and left wing, nazi and Maoist) allegedly conspiring against the democratic state (Balestrini, Moroni, p.335). This escalation culminated in the bombing of Piazza Fontana on 12<sup>th</sup> December 1969 and in the following arrest and “Accidental Death of an Anarchist”<sup>10</sup>: Giuseppe Pinelli. As a consequence the bourgeoisie and the institutions asked for stricter control of public order while the rest of the society united in a battle against the manipulation of information operated by the establishment. This commitment resulted in the production of forms of counter-information and associations to protect the proletariat against the violence of the reactionary state and of counter-investigations such as *La Strage di Stato*<sup>11</sup>.

Against the threat represented by state terrorism the representatives of the student movement felt the need for a revolutionary party, an organization that could lead their struggle more effectively against the violence of institutions and police forces. The result was the formation of a series of small groups, of “tiny ultra-fundamentalist churches” (Comotti 2007) that reproduced the vertical structures of the political parties. This implied the delegation of powers and the presence of an official line of the group, considered fundamental steps in order to open the movements towards realities outside the university: factories and society in general (Balestrini, Moroni, p.367). *Lotta continua*, *Potere operaio*, *Avanguardia operaia*, *Movimento studentesco*, *Unione dei comunisti* but also the review *il Manifesto* (founded by members of Pci later expelled by the party) were all presenting themselves as cadres of politicians instead of “one group of workers to another” (Ciafaloni, Dondalo in Wright, p.127). As a consequence issues of education and more creative needs were all subordinated to the “orthodoxy catechism” (Comotti 2007).

Some took a more radical choice. Refusing to give up their autonomy and the direct control over their struggle the workers of the Cub brought their forms of organization outside the factories creating the Cpm (Metropolitan political collective). From 1970

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<sup>10</sup> Dario Fo’s play, one of the examples of counter-information that opposed the official version of the event.

<sup>11</sup>This is the title under which in 1970 “a group of activists of the extra parliamentary left” released the results of their independent investigation on Piazza Fontana. Some democratic journalists founded the Bcd (Bulletin for democratic counter-information); a group of lawyers and artists established Soccorso Rosso, an organization that provided legal defence and support to comrades under arrest (Balestrini, Moroni,p.345)

they also started publishing their own review: *Sinistra Proletaria* as a means of information and communication among the various social groups involved in the struggle (Balestrini, Moroni, p.388). This very paper was used to announce the birth of the Brigade Rosse. The latter represented an attempt to organise a defence from the aggressive bourgeois repression recurring to the same violent means adopted by the state, also drawing inspiration from the South American guerrilla movements. The need for a well-organised defence was mixed with a revival of the partisan tradition and of the myth of the Resistance in the review *Nuova Resistenza* (1971). This gave voice to all the “spontaneous or illegal groups that acknowledge the necessity of a violent opposition to the bourgeoisie’s armed counter revolution” (Balestrini, Moroni, p.402). The Gap (Partisan action groups) was one of the most important among these proletarian military organizations. They also devised original forms of intervention in the political debate through illegal broadcasting, availing themselves of state television and radio frequencies. This also enabled them to communicate with a large part of the population. The latter at first supported these groups, people sympathized with the exemplary actions of the Brigade Rosse and ex partisans were drawn towards them hoping in that final overthrowing of the state they had been waiting for since the end of the WWII. They moved away only when the Brigade Rosse started to present themselves as a counter-state, bureaucratizing their structure and widening their distance from the masses.

Workers meanwhile were moving on in their struggle against wage labour. In 1973 the occupation of the Fiat factory of Mirafiori proved how workers were now able to organise autonomously without the help of the politicians of the extra parliamentary left, now a distant external avant-garde. Ideologies were less influential on their actions. The mechanization of labour and the transformation of the factory into an asocial environment brought the workers on anti productive positions and pushed them to find new forms of personal realization in the creation of alternative “spaces of freedom” within the factory, transforming its interiors into a place for discussions and study (Balestrini, Moroni, p.430). The answer of the capital was a general restructuring of production and the introduction of technological innovation as a means of exploitation and control over the workers.

The Pci condemned the “rejection of work” refusing to understand the reasons behind it. On the contrary with the policy of the “historical compromise” it proposed

itself as a guarantor of a more relaxed confrontation between capital and workers (Balestrini, Moroni, p.472).

#### 4.

The *Sessantotto* started as something restricted to the universities and then little by little it grew and developed its political line, going through various stages. I think it reached its climax in 1977. (Balestrini 2007)

The refusal of the capitalist model of society implied by the workers' "rejection of work" led towards a redefinition of the role of labour as secondary and occasional. Life found a new organizing principle in the creative use of the so-called "free time". The time spent not working became the space where people could really take control of their lives. The amount of free time was greater for the new non-guaranteed proletariat: students, unemployed, temporary employees. This social group started to claim the right to organize their lives free from the constraints imposed by low paid temporary jobs and by any prefabricated ideology. From 1975 in Milan and gradually in many other major cities these people created the *Circoli del proletariato giovanile* (groups of proletarian youth) and squatted in empty flats and factories transforming them in places for discussions, meetings and every kind of activity related to youth problems. In this demand for freedom they came to a standpoint very close to that of the creative movement started in the 1960s that was still operating with its own underground cultural activities and publishing reviews like *Erba Voglio* and *Re Nudo* (Lumely, p.295-297). Together they constituted the "autonomy" movement whose famous slogan "*Vogliamo tutto*" (We want everything) meant "we want our lives back, present and future" and whose catchphrase "*personale politico*" claimed the importance of making private life a subject of political relevance and politics a private matter. Their position was in many ways opposite to both that of the official left wing parties and to that of the extra parliamentary left. They gave priority to the revolution in society: the state would then conform to the changed social conditions. They did not claim power on the basis of the fact that all individuals are equal, on the contrary they demanded a dislocation of power in order to enable everyone to exert control on his/her life, a space where they could freely express their difference and satisfy their personal needs. These were the purposes around which to organise forms of political action (Castellano in Balestrini, Moroni, p.456). Instead of waiting for this power to be granted from above, they simply started to apply their own laws to the territory occupied by the bourgeoisie. This meant that, besides organising demonstrations

and parties in the streets, they also started to fix their own prices on cinema tickets and pop concerts (*autoriduzione*) and to exert forms of expropriation at the supermarket.

Rule-breaking and the disruption of the routines of city life were practiced almost as an art-form [...] authority in all its guises was held up to ridicule or humorous banter. Yet disruption was more than a last resort of the powerless. It was a means of expression and a source of entertainment, unlike much of the politics offered by the political parties and unions (Lumley, p.302)

The very language of the protest was the object of an intense debate. Denying for the intellectual the role of spokesman gathering consensus to the party line, they claimed a “radical autonomy of culture from political and economic power” and the use of technology in order to create new polycentric forms of communication that would determine “autonomous systems of production-communication” (Balestrini, Moroni, p.604-605). The new free radios, like Radio Alice, were among the protagonists of this “appropriation of communication technologies to create a new public space autonomous from state monopoly and private enterprise economic power” (Berardi et al, p.136)<sup>12</sup>.

The institutions heavily condemned the “autonomy movement”. The “legge Reale” of 1975 granted greater powers to the police, who repressed with violence the expressions of dissent, while political parties and mass media conducted a campaign for the criminalization of these groups of youths. The climax was reached in 1977, when students occupied the universities to manifest against a school reform that would restore authoritarian structures abolished by the student revolt of 1968. The whole autonomous movement stood by the students. There were numerous clashes with the police and with fascists groups. In February in Rome a fight exploded between the students and the representatives of the Cgil union and of the Communist party, officially bringing conflict within the same class<sup>13</sup>. In March the murder of a student by the police in Bologna was followed by the occupation of the university and fights between the students on one side and the police and the

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<sup>12</sup> Radio Alice in particular started an “information guerrilla” that shifted the attention from the content of the communication to the medium. Instead of practicing counter-information, it “abolished the strict separation between editors and audience. [...] Information was the result of a joint productive effort” to which everyone could take part making a phone call to the radio (Berardi et al, p.138)

<sup>13</sup> The union leader Lama held a speech in the university grounds to invite students to stop occupying the campus. The meeting degenerated in a violent fight after a series of provocations exchanged between students and party members (Balestrini, Moroni, p.540).

*carabinieri* on the other. The consequences were an incredible amount of arrests and the police's siege of the city.

A last great manifestation of the autonomous movement was held on 12<sup>th</sup> March 1977 in Rome. Then the armed repression and the enforcement of a series of emergency measures concerning public order, including the creation of special prisons where political prisoners had to live close to the most dangerous criminals, determined a significant decrease in the participation of people to the protest. The following years were a period of restoration. The establishment, through an instrumental use of the media, imposed its version of the story, which identified the "movement" with a violent expression of youth deviance and wiped out its most original character: that of a movement of cultural liberation.

Such a view left out completely the perspective of thousands of youths who had lived those years as an age of joy, liberation and happiness, when things were done together, with enthusiasm. This aspect is completely ignored, repressed. (Balestrini 2007)

This obliteration represents not only a falsification of the past but also the direct negation of the conquest of intellectual freedom achieved through a process started by the students in 1968 and culminated in the creative liberation of the 1970s.

After that the counterculture movement returned to its underground den, which is not a narrow hole in the ground, but a maze of tunnels, a web of worldwide dimension "beyond the mirror" of opposing ideologies (*A/traverso* 1977) from which it continues to "record even the slightest change of the daily chart of struggles" (*Ki riceve ki trasmette*).

## Alternative ways to look at history

1.

To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was' (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger. [...] The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes. In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it. (Benjamin 1999 A, p.247)

In the last few years Italian literature and cinema have been prolific of narratives dealing with the struggles of 1960s and 1970s. Novels and films have become places for discussing radical theories and analysing the failure of past attempts to snatch the power from the hands of the bourgeoisie and turn Italy into a Marxist country. The genres adopted by these narratives are various, ranging from *bildungsroman* like M.T.Giordana's *La meglio gioventù*, to detective noir like the books of P.Colaprico and M.Carlotto, to documentary, like the TV programmes of C.Lucarelli. Nevertheless they all share a tendency to mix critique and nostalgia in their analysis. The years that go from 1960 to 1980 are described as the age of possibilities, when people had the world in their hands, and at the same time as a period of failures, of wrong decisions that compromised the future of national politics. This formula has proved very successful market wise. It has won many of the films international fame: M.T.Giordana's *La meglio gioventù* (2003) was awarded a prize by the Cannes Film Festival, Marco Bellocchio's *Buongiorno notte* (2003) has been acclaimed at several international festivals. While writers have been able to release their books with the brand of well-known publishing houses (Mondadori, Einaudi, Feltrinelli).

These general considerations aside, a deeper analysis of the significance of these works is necessary. What is the aim of these representations of the recent past? What is the reason that drove so many contemporary authors towards this topic?

Demetrio Paolin has analysed a particular section of this production, the one centred more specifically on the phenomenon of terrorism. He reckons that, notwithstanding their artistic value, there is something missing in these works. They have "removed and negated every trace of tragedy" assuming a reassuring all-forgiving tone (La Porta in Paolin, p.9). These narratives play down the facts they describe. The absence of the voice of the enemy, the intrusive omnipresence of a bourgeois family background and the indirect and distanced way of dealing with violence are detrimental to the effectiveness of the stories. They aren't capable of moving on from the commonly accepted version of the story: the years of terrorism remain the

product of a series of sad circumstances of which no one is responsible because we are all to blame (Paolin, p.77).

These stories are always told by an external voice. The point of view is never direct, increasing the absolutory character of the narrative. In these tales the dramatic events of those years turn into representations of a glorious youth. (Paolin 2006, p.104)

In his introduction to Paolin's essay Filippo La Porta concludes that the absence of the tragic dimension and consequently of a process of catharsis can be ascribed to a general flaw of Italian people. They are not capable of creating a shared narrative of their own most recent past and this is "an obstacle to the civic growth of our country" (2006, p.10).

Taking into consideration a wider selection of texts, including those dealing with other aspects of the Movement, we are confronted with a much more interesting survey. There are authors that have been able to write something that goes beyond the nostalgic recollection of memories or the celebration of a glorious past. They refuse to stick with the official version of history and liberate all the alternatives up to now obscured by the latter. Such a disposition is very Marxist according to Slavoj Žižek.

This perception of our reality as only one of the possible outcomes of an 'open' situation, the notion that other possible outcomes continue to haunt 'our' true reality, conferring on it an extreme fragility and contingency, is by no means alien to Marxism. Indeed, the felt urgency of the revolutionary act relies on it. (Žižek 2005)

This allows their stories to trespass the limits of a first layer of "ostalgie" and ask for a "repetition of the revolution". The focus of the narrative shifts from the past to the present, from the missed opportunities to their possible redemption today, drawing them to a position very similar to that conceived by Walter Benjamin in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (Žižek 2004, p.255).

"Taking the side of possibility, enthroning possibility as the supreme value, means to mock the dreams of certainty, foundation, destiny. It means irony" (Bauman, p.55). This is exactly where film director Guido Chiesa and novelists Andrea Comotti and Wu Ming stand. These authors belong to different generations and come from different experiences. They also deal with three different historical moments in their works, Chiesa's *Lavorare con lentezza* (2004) is set in 1977, Comotti's *L'Organigramma* (2006) swings back and forth between the 1960s and present time, while Wu Ming's *54* (2002), as the very title suggests, concentrates on 1954. This

heterogeneity though has not prevented them from following very similar patterns in their representations of the past.

## 2.

On 21<sup>st</sup> April '45 Ettore had liberated Bologna, along with his other comrades.

Sure, but who had they liberated it from?

The fascists, the ones who'd been given amnesty.

The partisans, thrown out of the newly formed police corps and persecuted by the law courts.

[...] Shitheads.

Pain, tears, fear, hatred. But also euphoria, the desire to see an end to the war and to fascism, the longing to create a new Italy. Life had a meaning in those days; it wasn't just a matter of running from hour to hour, dragging yourself from one day to the next. (Wu Ming, p.309-310)

Wu Ming's novel brings back to us stories from the 1950s, in particular from 1954. They have cut out a series of news from the newspapers of that year and mixed them with fictional characters and events. The result is a "choral novel based on coincidences" (Baird 2006, p.259). There is no reassuring guide in this narrative; it is a sort of "Babel in which a multitude of points of view and sensibilities presents history as a knot of stories, lives, bodies that cannot be disentangled and Literature as a muddle of voices, sensations, tales" (Wu Ming 2003, p.237). This is Wu Ming's way to "re-place in perspective" that year, but also the entire decade. In fact the 1950s are commonly described as a period of prosperity and growth, a fresh start after the "storm" represented by the Second World War (Baird 2006, p.256). In 54 on the contrary all their dark sides are exposed. There are the secret manoeuvres of the Cold War opponents, the purges of Tito's totalitarian regime, McCarthy's inquisition, the international traffic of drug controlled by the Mafia. In Italy the government guided by Scelba is repressing the workers on strike with a violence as crude as that of the partisans that "in the war didn't count the victims" (Wu Ming 2002, p.486). In 1954 the main story in the news is that of the murder of Wilma Montesi, a scandal in which politicians and exponents of the rich bourgeoisie were involved. This was the case that Wu Ming initially wanted to investigate in their book, but searching through the newspapers of the time they continuously bumped into "stories that claimed for attention and asked to be told" (2003, p.215). Eventually this changed the direction of their research: from the mixture of materials some "germs" came to the surface and developed a new plot.

Something similar happened also on the level of content, the so-called topics of the novel [...]. We realised what we wanted to say only after we went through the whole text from the beginning to the end as readers [...]. Actually, what one 'wants to say' is already contained in

you, and expresses itself as you start to select which stories you are going to tell. (Wu Ming 2003, p.218)

Wu Ming consider narration a political activity. To decide which stories to tell means to make a political choice. Creation can't avoid being political, because it affects a shared imagery creating new symbols that sustain a whole community, especially if the object of the narrative is the past. In this case as the narrator plunges into the depths of history he "digs up hatchets". He brings back to the surface stories that have been repressed and that now can destabilize our consciousness. As he perpetrates such an aggressive act he necessarily takes a position regarding the present (Amici 2006, p.12-13). Wu Ming consider history with a critical, detached eye.

The starting point then is to consider History, the one with the capital letter, as just another story. It tries to tell the truth availing itself of official sources of documentation and proceeding to meticulous scientific reconstructions. Nevertheless it remains a story, with its ambiguous, controversial bits that cannot be verified and are therefore inevitably filtered by the present in which the historian lives. (Amici 2006,p.13)

Michel Foucault expresses the same distrust of official history. He says that history should take into consideration local events instead of "grand narratives".

This historical practice shatters the appearance of unilinear human progress by revealing the unstable multiplicity of historical descent. [...] Addressing 'a layer of material which had hitherto had no pertinence for history and which had not been recognized as having any moral, aesthetic, political or historical value' (Gane, p.115)

Foucault's "genealogy" has the purpose to destabilize our certainties and re-write the history of the present retrieving "marginal or subjugated knowledges" (Gane,p.116). In Wu Ming's novels narration becomes a method of research. It explores "cones of shade" left blank by the historians because of a shortage of reliable records and it formulates hypothesis based on a "radical likelihood" (Amici, p.13). This is how a novelist can escape the limitations imposed on historians. He can do more than just collect files: he "can free his fantasy and build narratives in the spaces left empty by the lack of documentation" (Baird, p.255). The chance to "play games with history", to investigate it without the constraints of a rational-scientific method, means "to investigate the 'possibility' of a bifurcation in history, the moment when history 'might have gone' in a different direction" (Wu Ming in Snafu).

In 54 small events play a determinant role and are capable of influencing the wider field of international politics. These “subjugated” histories are not just another version of the story, they introduce complexity into official history in the form of “discontinuities” and challenges still open. “History is neither straightforward nor cyclical, it is 'catastrophical', 'fractal': conflicts produce bifurcation (branching off) and discontinuities all the time” (Wu Ming in Snafu). To the “apocalyptic” model of history as a series of “final revelations” coming from above, they oppose an “ipocalyptic” history, where revelation comes from the masses and where the urgency to act in the present is always superior to any utopia in the future (Amici,p5).

In this perspective, real newspapers’ headlines reported within the text are means of information as influential as the chatters and banter animating the “bar Aurora”. The latter is a local pub in Bologna frequented by the elderly members of the local Pci cell, who spend the day playing cards and having loud discussions about the latest news.

Here we talk in threes, in fours, sometimes the whole bar all at once, because there are topics like cycling and politics that inflame people’s emotions and make them raise their voices [...] Like that time in '48 when Stalin threw Tito out of the Cominform and we were all here talking till daybreak, with the shutter half down. (Wu Ming 2002, p.33-34)

Meanwhile the youths come and go, restless as they are they don’t even take off their jackets when having their drinks and “never talk about anything at all” (ibidem). This bar becomes a sort of press office for 1954 current affairs. Wu Ming tackle 1950s international and domestic politics through the voices and experiences of this small community. They take part in a manifestation against “the Government, the bomb and so on” and witness the clashes with the police (Wu Ming 2002, p.275). They follow the development of the Montesi affair on the newspapers and celebrate the rebellion of the Vietnamese against the French and the siege of Dien Bien Phu while absorbed by the weekly “communal ceremony” of the pools coupon day. Their point of view is always fragmented, multiple, they contradict each other, the voices of the dissidents make themselves heard besides the official party line of those prone to the Pci direction.

‘Then let’s drink this coffee to the health of Ho Chi Minh’  
‘To his health!’ says Bottone, raising his cup.  
‘If the communists win there too’, says Garibaldi after taking a sip, ‘we’ll have the whole of Asia. The Soviet Union, China and Indochina.’  
We nod emphatically.

'And what about us?' asks Walter  
'We'll come after them. One thing at a time, for Christ's sake!' (Wu Ming 2002,p.150-151)

This variety of perspective is also geographical. From Bologna the action moves to Napoli, Cannes, Palm Springs, Mosca, Trieste and the Yugoslavian coast. "In 54 there are about 16 different cameras filming the action. Including a carrier pigeon, a TV set and a bar". According to Wu Ming this is a way of "shredding" the choral novel. The absence of a mediating character throws the reader directly into the multitude's collective stream of consciousness (Wu Ming 2003, p.237).

The stress on the communal dimension is linked to another important idea introduced by the collective of writers. The role of the storyteller is that of giving voice to "an anonymous multitude, a community" (Amici, p.9). His main task is to take care of the greatest legacy of the multitude, the myth, and give it fresh vitality by re-interpreting it. "The creation of myths [...] is at the base of every human community". They are shaped by the people and must evolve with them, assuming new meanings.

The activity of the storyteller [...] has to do with this way of seeing myths and stories. That is as something living, something collective, something with which it's possible to interact. (Baird p.258)

Myths create a common language for the community, they inspire its actions, give it confidence in its possibilities, but if they stop evolving they loose contact with their human counterpart and become sclerotic.

Stories are the eco-fuel for marching communities. But they can also become instruments of oppression and paralysis [...] creating a fixed identity to preserve and defend from external contaminations. (Wu Ming in Fernandez-Savater 2003)

This is why it is so important to re-elaborate the myth. The 1950s are the years in which the Partisan Resistance undergoes a process of normalization and self-repression that sweetens this myth removing all its darkest aspects. In 54 the introduction of a respectable version of the proletarian revolution, modelled on the reformist way that Togliatti launched in 1944, is the reason of the conflict between "straight" Pci supporters and younger generations, between party politicians and ex partisans. What this narration tries to do is restoring complexity to the past and recovering with it the full mythopoetic potential of the proletarian revolution (Wu Ming 2003, p.180).

3.

Nicotrain and Cesare never bore witness in front of any court of justice. Nor at the time, nor later, when the gruesome theatre opened its backdoors to unveil the director of the ghastly act: the strategy of tension. [...] Was it due to distrust in the institutions? It wasn't fear, that's for sure. They were not scared, just horrified by the monster: the lumpy hydra with a thousand heads and toothed mouths. Had they testified, would it make any difference? Maybe, maybe not, who knows. Doubts had nurtured remorse for nearly thirty years in Nicotrain's subconscious. And now those photos had kicked the pulsating-militant doubt-remorse from the muddy limbo of his bowels up to his throat. Charged with tons of neo-rage. (Comotti 2006, p.30)

Andrea Comotti says he has “contracted a debt with his ‘68” (Comotti 2007). Like his fictional detective, he wholeheartedly took part in the student movement in Milan and witnessed the hectic and paranoid atmosphere the “strategy of tension” had determined in the city. He saw how the rumour of the anarchist terrorist attack was immediately and artificially spread among people as they rushed to Piazza Fontana, where he arrived only one hour after the bomb exploded. He never testified in front of any institutional authority and now feels he has the duty to pay off his debt in his fiction. In order to do so he has cleared the scene from all the “official” versions and created the possible scenario we would have if somebody had led the investigation in the right direction. Andrea Comotti is in search of the truth: “at the moment I can only conceive ‘realistic fiction’... that can be used as a jemy to uncover the unreal within the real” (Comotti 2007). This has become a common purpose for many contemporary writers dealing with the so-called Italian mysteries. They try to make amend for the faults of Italian legal system, where “the law is nothing but a cover for the petty vendettas and back-stabbing of a collection of state spooks” (Jones 2004). Massimo Carlotto, one of the most popular noir authors in Italy, has denounced the absence of investigative journalism in Italy: “Italy has lost any real sense of truth, because nobody believes in the official ‘truths”” (in Oliver 2005). He has also affirmed that noir and detective fiction can fill this void and try to solve the many mysteries of our past. “It is my way of recording what is happening in present day Italy. Noir writers talk about the social and political situation right now” (Ibidem). Other authors, like Carlo Lucarelli and Piero Colaprico, share this view. The success of their publications and TV programmes seems to prove that their quest for truth is appreciated both as fictional and as journalistic narrative. They have also suffered censorship sometimes, especially when the results of their researches affected politicians still in charge.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> In 2001, during the national elections campaign, one of the episodes of Lucarelli's TV format *Blu notte* was the target of state censorship. That episode dealt with the Mafia and its influence on Italian life in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

Counter-information and independent investigations are well-established practices among the exponents of the Italian left. The most prolific years in this sense were those following the “hot autumn” of 1969. It was a battle supported by the whole left independently from its various affiliations “as this was the only instrument that could effectively fight the reactionary plots of the authors of the terrorists attacks of Milan and Rome” (*Strage di Stato*, p.7). The official information reported by the media was rejected as product of the dominant ideology and opposed with the production of counter-information that could unmask bourgeois lies and “re-establish the proletarian truth” (Berardi et al., p.135).

With these precedents, *L'Organigramma* “digs, elaborates, brings back to the surface a truth that existed already but was never mentioned, with words untouched rather than untouchable” (Comotti 2007). The investigation of the piazza Fontana bombing of 1969 takes place in the present and is inextricably linked to the reminiscence of the entire season of struggles started in 1967. What is at stake is the personal recollection of Andrea Comotti and that of his fictional writer/detective Nicotrain, but, as the novel develops, an increasing number of “veterans” joins this operation of historical reconstruction. Nicotrain in fact has a very bad memory (Comotti 2006, p.67) and to remember past events he often turns to other people. These assistants are his old colleagues and mates, but also the families and friends of the victims of the bombing. The first Proustian madeleines are a few photos he retrieves in the attic of the small villa he has just bought. Nicotrain identifies the people in the picture as the suspicious individuals he himself had noticed that day roaming the square. He traces back the author of these documents: the photographer that took them in the immediate aftermath of the explosion was a member of a Milanese anarchic collective. From here he sets out in search of what remains of the anarchic group and of the truth on the terrorist plot. As the investigation moves on a whole world comes back to life. The 1960s are rediscovered as a collective memory, a myth deeply embedded in the popular imagery.

This novel [...] not only recreates what those years have been, but also what they have become in the words of people. Reality, through memory and research, mingles with fantasy and the result is a mixture that tastes of myth, imagery, ‘handed down’ stories and touches of truths. (Vibrisselibri 1)

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The presence of interviews with political personalities was considered a violation of the *par condicio* (Lucarelli, 2004).

The nights at the Palazzina Liberty “the interconfessional temple of the counterpower, snatched by force from the town council jurisdiction and turned into a stronghold for the masses” (Comotti 2006, p.49), free-love and squatting, but also the student movement in the universities, the distributions of leaflets outside the factories and the “obladi-oblada prolixity” of the politicised youths (Comotti 2006, p.16), Comotti makes a lucid analysis of a period in the past and “brush(es) [...] against the grain” (Benjamin1999A, p.248) the history of the victors to distil that of the vanquished.

I feel the need to bear witness of a history that has been lived collectively, not only on a personal level, I wasn't an individual going arm in arm with other individuals, we were all together inside a collective I... the pot of the history of the victors only interests me because sooner or later will come out of it the real 'sup of the vanquished' ... the group I belonged and I still belong to, but with no sense of defeat... no... maybe in the final outcome of the events... things could have gone better if only... but for sure it wasn't a defeat for me being there... it might sound ambiguous and incoherent but I swear I have a positive feeling when I remember... (the negative bit comes out only when I have to rationally consider, as everybody, as ever, the inevitable mistakes, that were big and significant). (Comotti 2007)

The climate of tension and repression that followed the terrorist attacks of 1969 completely erased the “positive” character from the memory of the period and archived it as a gloomy age of violence. Comotti started with the idea of writing a detective novel set in 1969 and the result of his efforts is the story of the student movement that nobody has written yet. One that is closer to his direct experience and to that of a whole community whose *bildungsroman* was the *Sessantotto*. The truth uncovered then not only provides a solution to the noir, but also gives back to a whole generation and its descendants a myth to guide them towards the future.

#### 4.

Every story is about today.  
And tomorrow. (Chiesa and Wu Ming 2003, p.108)

The story of the anarchic libertarian creation and diffusion of culture practiced by Radio Alice, one of the first free radios in Italy, is the subject of both a documentary<sup>15</sup> and a film by Guido Chiesa. The Italian director firmly keeps his distance from what he sees as a common practice of today's left: that of turning to the past in search of a “comforting identity that makes present misery bearable” (Chiesa 2007). His project is not a nostalgic recollection of a glorious past.

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<sup>15</sup> *Alice in paradiso* (2002).

We wanted [...] to narrate a complex experience [...]. Not in order to identify with it and maybe say 'see how great we were', but to help us meditate on past mistakes and also on 'the good things' that could be useful today in order to understand better the present and to create a better future. Our attention was mainly directed towards the present and the future. We were not interested in the reconstruction of a past or in the controversies concerning this practice. This past was thrown out into the future. (Chiesa in Giannelli 2004)

Radio Alice and the related collective Controradio, who were part of the writers and editors of the review *A/traverso*, dealt with issues that are still very relevant these days. The debate over political communication and the rejection of work found answers and expressions in that movement that could still prove useful today. The whole process of historical reconstruction in the film aims at "spreading the germs circulating in the Bolognese area (and not only there)" into the present, "in order to make them available for a critical analysis of today's reality" (Chiesa 2007).

The script of *Lavorare con lentezza* (2004) was written together with Wu Ming. This partly explains the particular point of view adopted in the narrative. Radio Alice is not the protagonist in the plot. The main story in fact, inspired by a minor news reported by the newspapers of the time, is that of two young unemployed digging a tunnel in preparation for a bank robbery. The starting point is then one of the so-called "cones of shade" that, according to Wu Ming, can reveal the story of the anonymous multitude and that "remain hidden in the folds of History" (Chiesa in Crespi 2003). Radio Alice and the movement of 1977 are represented as a reflection, as a background of this minor story. Such a device allows the director to stress the collective character of the 1970s Autonomia movement, whose protagonists were intellectuals but also mass workers, a heterogeneous group that never submitted itself to a single official form of representation. These youths were after an alternative kind of society to be achieved through the "appropriation of free time, liberation from the constraints of factory command" (Castellano et al., p.232). They refused to conform to a model of existence that was "work-consume-die" (Chiesa and Wu Ming 2003, p.24) and instead claimed a more central role for creative practices, defying capital but also the orthodoxy of the Pci and common sense's idolatry of rationality.

Comrades, you consider those who rebel, who take back their lives from labour, family and state, as obscene, outlaw and mad. [...] Against the anxiety imposed by this idea of reason we invoke the reason of the frenzy, of the obscene. You're left with nothing but the chance to defame us in your papers, like the ignorant do with what they cannot understand. We answer all together a disdainful ZUT! (Ibidem,p.33)

Culture was understood as something very different from the socialist category of superstructure: “information is power, its function is not to record reality, but to produce it” (Radio Alice 1977). This view was influenced by Foucault’s and Deleuze’s analysis of how culture produces “symbols and imagery [...] determining the basis of social practice and transformation” (Berardi et al., p.136). Through the appropriation of means of mass communication the movement had the power to spread subversive practices and to act as “a symbolic agent, a collective for mediatic production” (Berardi et al., p.144).

The programme is writing and communicating. Writing as a minor subversive text, as a way to carve these transforming practices on reality, as a way of bringing to the surface these underground molecular activities. (Radio Alice 1977)

In a similar way, “resuscitating” Radio Alice *Lavorare con lentezza* brings to the surface a knowledge that up to now had been emarginated by the establishment, “a cultural alterity concealed within the history of the present”. According to Foucault, such a revelation denounces the net of “power-knowledge relations”, determining a certain construction of the past and imposing limits on our present, while at the same time it offers “the possibility of going beyond them” (Foucault in Gane, p.117).

Chiesa says that every narration, history included, cannot be reduced to a simple linear sequence of facts, such a vision is a distortion operated by the victors (Minnella, p.249). Memory should mirror the complexity of an era, avoiding reconstructions shaped on progressive models. This is why his films present transformations still open to different solutions, they provide the audience with a series of hypothesis, but never offer an eschatological interpretation, a “message” (Minnella, p.239). The “subjugated knowledge” of 1977, liberated by *Lavorare con lentezza*, enters our present imagery and destabilises it. Suddenly the 1970s are no longer the years that saw counterculture degenerating into violence, nor a colourful untroubled hippie past, but a source of possibilities for the future. The refusal to confer to labour a primary role in the organization of human life and the abolition of a series of distinctions “that produce artificial hierarchies and therefore structures of power: public/private, male/female, art/politics, producers/consumers” (Chiesa 2007) are all recuperated by this film. The very ideas that were reduced to silence through harsh repression by the official parties are now reintroduced as important references to debate present problems because they can “overturn and overcome modern values through affirmation of the otherness concealed within our past” (Gane, p.123).

The complex memory of 1977 includes a record of its flaws. In fact Chiesa depicts that period with affection, but also with irony, keeping his distance as he denounces its “unrealistic ambitions and the neat separation between theory and praxis” (Chiesa 2007). Therefore whereas on the one hand he colours the story with romantic subplots, the love affairs of Sgualo and Pelo but also the complicated relationship between Pigi and Marta, which involve and move the viewers, on the other he disorients them with unexpected super 8 inserts. The latter are the sequences in which the main theories of the creative collective are exposed, but always filtered with an irony that prevents discourse from becoming rhetoric. Images turn to the black and white of silent cinema and characters act exaggerating gestures and expressions while subtitles do the talking. This style reminds that of the slapstick comedies of early 20<sup>th</sup> Century movies, a visual connection that removes any sign of authoritative tone while also recuperating the same use of nonsense that characterized the Bolognese radio station.

*Lavorare con lentezza* is no historical movie. It is a mad movie. It is a film about the power of paradox and playfulness of language, about collective tenderness. [...] It is about today, about what we could do. It talks of the infection that should be spread, today, in collective imagery: contagious slowness, contagious tenderness. [...] It is exactly what we need: pulling faces and grimaces to avert the abyss. (Berardi 2004)

## Popular counter-culture

1.

'The popular' then, is determined by the forces of domination to the extent that it is always formed in reaction to them; but the dominant cannot control totally the meanings that the people may construct, the social allegiances they may form. (Fiske, p.45)

In an era in which mass communication often appears as the manifestation of a domination which makes sure of social control by planning the sending of messages, it remains possible (as in an ideal semiotic 'guerrilla warfare') to change the circumstances in the light of which the addressees will choose their own ways of interpretation. In opposition to a *strategy* of coding, which strives to render messages redundant in order to secure interpretation according to pre-established plans, one can trace a *tactic* of decoding where the message as an expression form does not change but the addressee rediscovers his *freedom of decoding*. (Eco, p.150)

The complete appropriation of a past includes a parallel reappropriation of the myths that have sustained it. A history of the masses cannot leave out the narrations that have accompanied them, their culture: popular culture. The latter has been the object of intense debate among various personalities of the left culminating in the bleak defeatist vision of Guy Debord: there's no way out from the Spectacle, any form of cultural production is recuperated by it, folklore included (Wu Ming 2003, p.32). Wu Ming though argue how it is still possible to draw a completely different conclusion, making reference to Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (in Snafu). The obliteration from the work of art of the "aura" of authenticity and uniqueness opens the way for "the formulation of revolutionary demands in the politics of art" (Benjamin 1999B, p.212). The artistic product undergoes a process of alienation from its traditional sacred value.

The technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced. (Ibidem, p.215)

The masses then are no longer the passive audience of the spectacle. On the contrary they represent the "social bases" that determine the decay of the aura through a perception of the "universal equality of things" and the desire to "bring things closer" overcoming their uniqueness with reproduction (Ibidem, p.217). Vice versa mechanically reproduced art stimulates in the masses a different approach to culture, no longer "reactionary" distance but a "progressive" enjoyment (Ibidem, p.227). Masses are then capable of an appropriation of this culture; they feel more confident in assuming the position of critics and even of writers. These conditions

represent in a way a return to the “multitudinous intelligence” that produced its own narrations, its own myths.

The arts (plural) always were a communal thing before the bourgeoisie persuaded the world that Art (singular and capitalized) is the magnificent output of some super-gifted, super-egoic Ego. (Baird 2006, p.251)

Masses are capable once again of exerting some form of control on their lives: even if mass culture is in part materially produced by the capital, by the establishment, it is still subject to people’s interpretation. Moreover the increased accessibility of the very means of production (whose reach is widened to mass scale by the Internet) has lately made even more evident the possibility for a reappropriation of culture by the people and for a return to the original meaning of the “popular culture” which is “belonging to the people”, “made by the people” (Wu Ming in Snafu).

Everyday life is constituted by the practices of popular culture, and is characterised by the creativity of the weak in using the resources provided by a disempowering system while refusing finally to submit to that power. The culture of everyday life is best described through metaphors of struggle or antagonism [...]. These antagonisms [...] are motivated primarily by pleasure: the pleasure of producing one’s own meanings of social experience and the pleasure of avoiding the social discipline of the power bloc. (Fiske, p.47)

2.

The making of pop culture [...] was a collective process during which the borders of ever-changing open communities were constantly retraced, subcultures constantly re-shaped themselves around myths. We’d better understand what ‘pre-requisites of communism’ were at work in that process, instead of believing that millions of people were being brainwashed. (Wu Ming in Snafu)

Starting from the second half of the 1950s new cultural models are imported to Italy. American films and music, the first domestic appliances, all contribute to shake the monolithic bloc represented by the official culture whose morals were still dominated by either the Catholic Church or the Pci. A whole new generation was awakened to adopt a more critical stance towards such a cultural hegemony (Balestrini, Moroni, p.26). Wu Ming’s novel is set in 1954, a year that can be seen as a crucial turning point in the history of Italian society. Television is introduced to Italian audiences and becomes at the same time an agent of social transformation and cultural unification and the access to a dream world of “icons imposed from below, modelled on the desires of the multitudes” (Wu Ming in De Lorenzis).

In 54 real show biz personalities and politicians meet and interact with humble fictional characters. Cary Grant spends his gap year from Hollywood working for the

MI6. He meets communist dictator Tito (Wu Ming 2002, p.310) and has his life saved by Robespierre, a *filuzzi* dancer from Bologna, and by the boy's father, an ex partisan, ex Tito's soldier, now living in voluntary exile on a small island just off the Yugoslavian coast. Elsewhere Lucky Luciano reigns over the Gulf of Naples and on international drug dealing, the last of his lackeys plays a small part in Hitchcock's *To Catch a Thief* (Wu Ming 2002, p.401). Including elements of the pop culture of the time in the novel Wu Ming reactivate a complex cultural legacy that belongs to the masses. Hollywood stars, politicians and all the protagonists of the daily news belong to that "media culture" which is a branch of the much wider field of popular culture. Cary Grant, Grace Kelly, but also Lucky Luciano and Tito are characters of a collective narration, a myth, to which people respond and in which they take part: 20<sup>th</sup> Century pop culture. Wu Ming refer to Gramsci's notion of cultural hegemony and to Negri's autonomist Marxism to support their view (Wu Ming in Snafu). Popular culture is not only an aspect of our existence, but a model of mythopoetic practice provided by the masses that can inspire the storyteller today.

In the 1990s in Italy [...] a great number of people were exploring mythologies, in order to find a way for a libertarian non-alienating deconstruction, a manipulation and reutilization of myths. The sources of inspiration were ancient legends narrating popular heroes' exploits [...], genre cinema and the whole western popular culture in general. (Wu Ming 2003, p.33)

The introduction of pop icons has also a satirical purpose in the novel. Cary Grant is described as the prototype of a new kind of man: the "homo Atlanticus", with working class origins, successful and "progressive" (Wu Ming 2002, p.50). Grant embodies the ideal man for a classless society. Such a magniloquent and flattering description is of course a parody of a general attitude displayed by many left wing radicals "doing all kind of somersaults to prove that the music they listen to is, in fact, unmistakably radical, that the clothes they wear are not 'bourgeois' etc." (Wu Ming in Purbright). Such a use of a pop icon is the ultimate exemplification of their idea of popular culture: Wu Ming can describe Cary Grant as they like since they actively participate in the elaboration of this grand collective narrative. In support of the idea of an interactive relation between pop culture and its consumers and maintaining their satirical approach to the problem, Wu Ming introduce a McGuffin TV set as a main character in their novel. This object of desire travels across the Italic peninsula in the hands of various dealers and functions as a "mirror" of the worst social scenarios (Caronia 2002).

Since he's been with the Italians, McGuffin hasn't known peace. [...] Cruel fate! Used to cheering up the public with reassuring images, mute witness to acts of squalor and violence. Nothing to fight back with. A void facing the void. (Wu Ming 2002, p.366)

This TV set is broken. Instead of broadcasting programmes it becomes a spectator itself turning upside down the traditional relationship between media and audience: its glass reflects passively external actions. The McGuffin is even abused either because people see their expectations frustrated by a broken domestic device or simply because they are not ready yet to appreciate it as a status symbol.

And what was happening now? Contempt, tools jabbing into intimate parts, punches, even spit. [...] No American television channel would have dreamt of showing, uncensored, what came next. Enough to say that in the end four hands grabbed McGuffin, lifting him up from a cemetery of broken plates and crockery that had flown round him like shells on a battlefield. [...] Derisory payoff! They gave McGuffin back without even knowing that he didn't work. (Wu Ming 2002, p.367-368)

The form of the novel is borrowed from one of the genres of popular culture fiction. *54* is a thriller, its models are the Mediterranean noirs of Izzo, Le Breton and even Fenoglio (Wu Ming in De Lorenzis). This choice is functional to the idea of writing the history of the multitude collecting and revising "fragments" since different people have experienced the past in different ways. Wu Ming "try to manipulate (various) literary genres in order to create popular fiction", the hybrid form and the mixture of points of view give birth to a narrative that shares the same nature of those "folk ballads that seem to have no author, they are credited as either 'popular' or 'traditional'" (Wu Ming in Snafu).

The choice of the noir genre is an appropriate one also for the exploration of the dark corners of the past. Many are the writers who have individuated in noir narrative the right shade of colour to deal with "strong topics". Genre narrative privileges the plot, the story. Therefore besides charging history with a "modern sensibility" (Amici, p.5-7) it also confers energy to the exploration of reality, to the revelation of the repressed and to the production of imagery. As thriller narrative events and archetypal characters fill the "cones of shade" of history, this hybrid text assumes the anthropomorphic shape of a hard boiled fiction hero: the trickster (Amici, p.17).

We can use this collective spectre, this imaginary popular hero whose strings are pulled by the multitude, to introduce into popular culture a myth of struggle. A myth that is playful, clever, captivating, effective, 'pop', that can promote a view of life and of class struggle joyous and free, far removed from the horrors/errors of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. (Luther Blissett, p.XXXVII)

The disturbing activity of information guerrilla that Wu Ming once pursued as members of the Luther Blissett Project has now become an inside job in the world of cultural industry.

There is a particular episode in *54* in which Cary Grant, chatting to his friend actor David Niven, dismisses Ian Fleming's latest book as trash literature.

I read a ludicrous and revolting book written by somebody called Fleming. The protagonist is an MI6 agent called James Bond. Brief summary. Incoherent, indeed. They'll never make a film out of that! (Wu Ming 2002, p.320)

Niven answers: "It's reality that is incoherent, my friend" (Ibidem). Wu Ming uses his words to underline how, since history often follows the same patterns of a blockbuster spy story, a distinction between these levels of narration makes no sense at all. They both can contribute to the project of mythopoesis for the creation of an adjoined collective myth supporting the masses in their struggles.

### 3.

Hunger for newness: Hemingway and García Márquez. Thirst for newness: Burri and Warhol. Drive for newness: Stockhausen and Berio, Led Zeppelin and Jimi, Miles and Pink Floyd. Newness of the mind: Kubrik and Buñuel, Tarkovskij and Ferreri, Fellini, Bergman, revolution in the air and in our hearts, for hands and eyes of smart guys. (Comotti 2006,p.153)

In the 1960s the new social group represented by the youth assumes a more definite shape. They are more self-aware and express their diversity with increased confidence. They reject traditional social and economic patterns and attempt to "autonomously organise their daily routine" (Balestrini, Moroni, p.52). They deliberately manifest their diversity on many levels: from the adoption of a new dress and fashion code to the pursuit of cultural interests other than those proposed by the traditional canon. The very instruments to perform this revolution are atypical. Music for instance becomes a vehicle of political and cultural messages. American born rock n' roll assumes a strong political connotation in Italy and is never fully recuperated by the show business industry (Ibidem, p.54).

This joyous cultural renaissance is brilliantly re-enacted in *L'Organigramma*. To the memory of 1968 Comotti dedicates a well-defined section in the novel. Flash backs in

italics interrupt the plot repeatedly and the whole text assumes the irregular shape of a jazz song, where the chorus is always played in different keys. Jazz is a powerful symbol as it is the music chosen by the American beats to express their revolt. But jazz is above all the soundtrack of Nicotrain's (and Andrea's) *Sessantotto*. The very name of Comotti's detective results from the *collage* of his two "passions": nicotine, like any perfect hard-boiled detective Nicotrain smokes a lot, and John Coltrane, his favourite composer (Comotti 2006, p.20). Nicotrain's discovery of jazz and his enthusiasm for this new kind of music are emblematic of a wider phenomenon of cultural awakening and renewal.

The *Sessantotto* was above all suffering [...] the pangs of a spasmodic hunger for culture. Hey, let's make it clear, we are talking about that kind of culture proposed by the '*scuola Barbiana*', opposed to that Rhine ivory tower of knowledge. Culture as that *quid* you can't do without if your life is going to be interesting and rich with feelings and good intentions, for your friends and for yourself. Culture as treasure, a legacy from the dawn of time, harmonized with experience of and desire for the brand-new or the forthcoming birth [...] Goldoni's powdered wig goes together with Bukowski's parka, Verga's traditional prose with Gadda's transgression, Armstrong with Coltrane. (Comotti 2006, p.152)

The realisation of how superstructure plays an active part in preserving the status quo generates hunger for knowledge and newness. Intellectual liberation is the first necessary step towards freedom from ideology and autonomy from capitalistic society. The student movement's protests aim exactly at providing the youths with the tools for this liberation. In this perspective the extended excursions on cinema, music and literature that characterise *L'Organigramma* are not a deviation from the plot, on the contrary, they become the very core of a narrative which tries to represent the *Sessantotto*. From now on the definition of culture embraces a wider range of knowledge, without sectarian distinctions, in which "cinema and music were the king and queen" (Comotti 2006, p.153). In Italy the clear-cut separation between high and low culture has been traditionally encouraged by academics who negate "the contiguity between high and popular literature that is easily accepted in France and in England". Noir literature in this respect has unveiled the artificiality of such separation. Italian writer Valerio Evangelisti explains how noir is related on the one hand to classic tragedy, with which it shares the themes of suffering, death and crime, and on the other to the "universal oneiric ground" from which popular culture draws its archetypes and symbols (Evangelisti 2004A, p.75). If a distinction is ever to be made among literary works, continues Evangelisti, it is on the level of content. While the so-called high literature has concentrated on intimist topics, according to a

general trend that, after the excesses of the 1970s, has preferred “mediocrity and soft colours” to the harshness and roughness of reality, genre literature has decided to “soil its hands” with politics and social issues (Ibidem, p6-7). The choice of genre narrative as a form for the narration of the complexities of history, as it is the case of both Wu Ming and Comotti, has therefore an even deeper significance. It reinforces the value of *L’Organigramma* as a “political novel” (Comotti 2007). At the opening of the novel the author presents the poetic manifesto he shares with Nicotrain.

If ever he thought there was something worth believing in it was the oxymoron represented by realistic fiction. He would then release, set free his passionate need to narrate, but he would only tell stories of which he had first hand experience, of which he directly recognized the smell, the colour and pains. In particular he had found a congenial narrative ground in noir literature. His stories drew inspiration from real crimes he would investigate personally in the tiniest details and even solve in the end. (Comotti 2006,p.9)

This detective corresponds to the archetypal character of the noir unconventional hero. At some points he seems to draw inspiration from Mediterranean noir writers M.V.Montalban and A.Camilleri and their hedonistic detectives, like in the long lavish description of Nicotrain as he prepares the perfect peach ice-tea (Ibidem, p.19). But his real antecedent is *Quel pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* of Italian novelist C.E.Gadda (1893-1973). Throughout the book Comotti entertains a dialogue with his favourite author, admitting openly how much he owes to his literature. He makes an expressionistic use of language that recalls that of Gadda. The text is thick with terms and phrases taken from various Italian dialects, neologisms and onomatopoeic words. The result though not a mere copy. The linguistic basis is in fact a very contemporary one. He concentrates in his text an imagery that is a combination of references to present-day literature and cinema but also television programmes and characters, like when he quotes Corrado Guzzanti’s stock character Quello<sup>16</sup> (Ibidem, p.152). The Italian reader can immediately recognize that culture and that language as his own, as part of his everyday life and speech. Still Comotti’s prose does not homologate to reality quietly, it represents an angry “reaction to its (anti-)canons” (Comotti 2007).

This creative and popular approach to language finds another antecedent in Mayakovsky and his linguistic project. The Russian poet wanted to synthesise a form of expression that was not alienated from the people, which could be their direct

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<sup>16</sup> This character was first launched by the comedian in *The Pippo Chennedy Show* (Rai2 1997-1999).

product and not something resulting from the mediation of bourgeois cultural institutions. (1990, p.46).

The *Pasticciaccio* is not just a source of literary inspiration for this novel. *L'Organigramma* consists of three parts. *El largo adios*, the only one that has been published at the moment, has a sequel in which Gadda's novel will appear in its material form as a key to the solution of the mystery investigated by Nicotrain.

The *Pasticciaccio* is the backbone of *L'Organigramma* [...] it is a sort of key that will eventually enable Nicotrain to decipher the enigma and find out names and faces. The members of this criminal organization refer to the very pages of a copy of the *Pasticciaccio* to create a secret code to communicate with one another. (Comotti 2007)

Literature, even in its most popular versions, is part of a collective legacy, a malleable cultural matter in which people can find support for their actions in the present. Comotti says the *Sessantotto* started the "two-sided cultural detonation" that reoriented his perspective on cultural liberation: backwards, to recuperate all that untouched knowledge that school does not provide, and forwards, as this liberated culture destabilises our present limitations opening up new possibilities of advancement (Comotti 2007).

#### 4.

Changing the content of the speech is not enough. First of all we must change its order, produce short circuits in its meaning... it is crystal clear: if reality can change language, then language can change reality... this is what Radio Alice does, this is Mao-Dadaism...(Chiesa and Wu Ming 2003, p.10)

*Lavorare con lentezza* recreates the activity of Radio Alice adopting to some extent the same linguistic devices experimented by the members of the Bolognese radio station at the time. The historical reconstruction of the appropriation of an instrument of mass communication becomes a project of liberation from the control of the spectacle on culture. In the documentary *Alice in paradiso* Guido Chiesa concentrated in particular on the description of the innovations introduced by this radio station in the field of political communication, on the use of irony and nonsense to disrupt the order of discourse and power. He thought the documentary was a much more suitable form than narrative to tackle these particular aspects (Chiesa in Crespi). Nevertheless as he started filming *Lavorare con lentezza* he realised that introducing the topic of the rejection of labour proposed by the Autonomia movement

was anyway inevitably shifting the focus back to the problem of communication (Santoro 2004).

... the body, sexuality and desire have been the targets of censorship for centuries, they have been denied, submerged... because life must solely mean labour, production, sacrifice... [...] Well, now we say: everybody will work, but very little, this is the end of your rule and this is what we want...(Chiesa and Wu Ming 2003, p.49)

The critique of wage labour is aimed at liberating work activities from their economic implications (as pure toil to make profit) and restoring their creative and self-realisation potential (Wu Ming1 2004). But this was part of an extended project to achieve full autonomy from the capital for all the aspects of human life, cultural production included. The latter besides had to achieve independence from political power too. Radio Alice and the Mao-Dada movement mixed the Dadaist aspiration at unifying art and daily life with the adherence to the material problems of the people that Mao required from the intellectuals (Balestrini, Moroni p.604-605). The solution was then to be found in pervasive and polycentric communication technologies.

Let's broadcast ourselves! Let's give voice to desire! Not against somebody, just for ourselves!  
[...]  
Who listens? Who speaks? This is what really matters!  
[...]  
We don't want to be professional politicians! There's no party and no line, let's have the movement speak!!! (Chiesa and Wu Ming,p.40)

Linguistic practice within the media allowed the subject to go beyond mere counter-information. He could denounce the groundlessness of the order and discourse that support the power of the establishment as he proceeded to dismantle and reassemble them in new nonsensical ways (*A/traverso* 1977). The critique of identitarian inclinations contained in Deleuze's analysis of Alice in Wonderland inspired the collective. As they "explore the Country beyond the mirror and make creative interventions in everyday life", in fact, they too eschewed any form of definite fix identity (Berardi et al., p.140). Refusing to distinguish between the roles of broadcasters and audience, Radio Alice opened its microphones to live phone calls. Anyone could take part in the programme without suffering censorship: the creative flux was never to be interrupted (Chiesa and Wu Ming 2003, p.49). Chiesa is very wary of this kind of identity temptation and some of the artistic choices in his work can prove it.

The cast of Lcl includes a popular Italian Mtv vj: Massimo Coppola, who can be easily recognised by any young spectator. The introduction of an icon of popular mediatic culture in the film is emblematic of how much of the creative potential liberated by the 1970s movements was later absorbed by the spectacle again as part of the “production cycle of the immaterial and of the imagery” (Balestrini, Moroni, p.604).

Massimo Coppola [...] represents effectively the path followed by many of the greatest intellects of the generations after the 1970s: from intellectuals at the service of the movement they became artists working for the spectacle. [...] Including Massimo in the film has been a way, indirect and certainly oblique, to make people meditate on this phenomenon. And on the whole pop culture of the last 30 years. (Chiesa 2007)

Another significant choice was that of having contemporary alternative rock band Afterhours playing the part of a band of the past: the Area. Since the latter is now disbanded and Chiesa did not want actors to just ape the original rock group, he opted for real musicians that could give their interpretation of Area’s music (Chiesa 2007). Afterhours lead singer Manuel Agnelli explains how they see the 1970s band as “the first masters of freedom”. They’ve always rejected any definitive identification for their music and their image, even with the movement itself because “absolute and unchangeable coherence is not the answer”. They refused to limit the scope of their lyrics to matters of acknowledged political relevance and to assume the identity of committed rock band, accumulating critiques from the orthodox members of various left wing groups. The only way to play them faithfully was then to respect this honesty and give a personal interpretation of the band’s repertoire.

Revolution is not the exclusive property of a tiny group of integralist carbonari, it belongs to the people. To all the people. This is an anthem for those who want to communicate but not from the height of a self-reverential ivory tower. This music is popular according to the real meaning of this word. It reaches everyone, it speaks to everyone. Conscience awakening is a profitable practice only if there are consciences to be awakened, and this is to be achieved above all through research. (Agnelli 2004)

In the same way, to be popular cinema has to address everyone and to abandon any pretence of “beautiful semblance”, since to abandon the traditional notion of art as distant and untouchable is the only way to communicate with people, to arise in them the progressive reaction “characterized by the direct, intimate fusion of visual and emotional enjoyment with the orientation of the expert” (Benjamin 1999B, p.227). This kind of communication is the only effective form of preservation for historical

memory. Agnelli underlines how the various organizations, even the extra-parliamentary ones, have kept verticalising the structures and separating the avant-garde from the masses. The historical knowledge accumulated by one generation has not been transmitted to the following ones, who have then repeated the same mistakes. “Without communication changes have occurred only on a material level. Progress. But on the inside we are acting according to the same script” (Agnelli 2004).

## Copyleft, sans papier, cultural guerrilla

1.

Post-Fordism economy is a weirdo one: working hours dilated, no guarantees whatsoever, exploitation of all human resources, emotions and sensitivity included. [...] Terms like 'general intellect', 'immaterial' production and mind labour point out that we all produce something today, because production is based on imagery, on language and its renewal, on flows of information we all contribute to shape. In English the word 'prosumer' indicates how [...] the borders between production and consumption blur to a vanishing point. (Wu Ming1 2004)

A 'citizenship income' [...] would adequately acknowledge how everybody takes part (without receiving any salary) in the production of imagery and communication. (Ibidem)

Franco Berardi defines media activism practices as the attempt to return to an autonomous communication, free from the control of the spectacle and therefore capable of assuming an active role within the community. Culture and imagery would then be no longer moulded by the power, but by the people (Berardi et al., p.129). This was the very objective that in the 1970s reviews like *A/traverso* pursued conducting researches on language and its relationship with power that went beyond ideological implications, inspired by the analysis of Mayakowsky, Deleuze and Guattari, but also by Totò<sup>17</sup>. Irony and nonsense then became the means to express a "‘revolutionary Totoism’, the shared passion for this smart stock-character and the rediscovery of his popular roots" (Balestrini, Moroni, p.591). As the focus of the struggle shifted from the political to the mediatic ground a "practice of fake" and sabotage started to catch on (Ibidem, p.598). The front pages of the main national newspapers were reproduced with fake headlines as part of an information guerrilla that would undergo harsh repression from the establishment but would then re-emerge and start again in the 1990s.

The survival and resurgence of this practice signals how 1977 autonomists were like heretics whose ideas are accepted only once they have disappeared (Evangelisti, p.34). The traditional contradiction afflicting every socialist project once in power, when the principles of individual freedom clash with oppressive state forms, was overcome introducing a new idea of liberation. It no longer focused on the seizure of political power, but on the creation of communities independent on a social level, capable of organizing themselves outside the economic principle of exchanging labour for money. This is why, when the 1977 movement was close to disintegrating as a consequence of police repression and internal divisions, the collective animating

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<sup>17</sup> Alias Antonio De Curtis (1898-1967), the popular Neapolitan comedian was the unrivalled protagonist of Italian theatre and cinema throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

*A/traverso* was able to be optimistic and title in their June issue: “The revolution is over, we won”.

The model of political revolution is no longer applicable: In this sense ‘the revolution is over’. But [...] what does it mean that ‘we won’? [...] Our fight with the Italian government was over. ‘Historical compromise’ (the only proposal advanced by the state) had failed and therefore the state was to be considered disbanded. [...] Anyway our dream was coming true as traditional forms of labour were going to vanish. We could then rewrite the Constitution starting from this basis: labour is disappearing; lets found our existence on something else. (Balestrini, Moroni, p.580)

The only form of defence devised by the capital against this kind of revolution, apart from violent repression, is the “project of disutopia”. Celebrating the end of big political ideologies is a way of prohibiting the very act of thinking and therefore of being a critical observer of present day society (Žižek 2004, p.168). In Italy this project of disutopia has given birth to a widespread “grey zone”. Mediocrity, in politics and culture, is the answer to the “shock provoked by the Red Brigades” and by the rebellions of the 1970s. The “minimalism” prevailing in Italian literature is therefore due not so much to a lack of ideas but of the courage to rebel to the imposition of “soft colours” for “great literature” (Evangelisti 2004A, p.13). Contrasting with this general background the works here analysed all deal with “socially disturbing themes” and this very choice in a way revives the utopia of cultural autonomy pursued in the 1970s. In fact they take up the heresies proposed by 1977 *Autonomia* now that those “premature problems” have become central in present everyday life (Ibidem, p.34). They are performing that “revolutionary intervention” capable of retroactively redeem the “symptoms” expressed by the rebellions of the 1960s and 1970s (Žižek 2004, p.255). Collective participation in cultural production and writing as a form of actual intervention capable of recording and therefore actualizing revolutionary practices are all topics these works put into practice.

2.

What the brain of a man produces results from his relationships with other men and from what other men have done and thought. Some privileged and experienced minds [...] can translate, express and better describe a whole legacy of knowledge and experiences that would not even exist if it did not rely on the life of the community. (Bordiga in Luther Blissett, p.XX)

The five writers of the Wu Ming collective were previously all members of the Luther Blissett project. The latter was a “multi-use collective alias adopted by hundreds of artists and activists all over Europe during the 1990s” (Wu Ming1 in Baird, p.250). As

Luther Blissett they practiced forms of information guerrilla against a “worn out culture”. Their purpose was a “new relationship with mass media”. Going beyond mere counter-information, instead of denouncing media’s lies, they started to play with them in order to “exorcise their power”. Challenge replaced paranoia. This was already understood as part of a wider project of cultural guerrilla (Luther Blissett, p.XXIII-XXIV). Following this path they had also already taken up the role of storytellers: Luther Blissett are in fact the authors of the historical novel Q (1999).

The anonymity implied in the adoption of a collective name, Luther Blissett before and now Wu Ming, represents their rejection of the idea of a fix identity. They believe in fact that any identity is a protection against the menace of diversity and in this sense it causes the so-called phenomenon of the “wooden tongue” that stiffens myths reducing them to old-fashioned and therefore useless empty words (Wu Ming 4 in Fernandez-Savater). Identity is an artificial form of self-defence from the “randomness of the cosmos”, from the “fear of not being something” and is the cause of a series of limitations on man’s life.

The mind knows that it’s a question of a game, a construction, that in reality Personality and Identity [...] are mechanism of constraint, that there is nothing ordinary in these concepts. [...] The person who plays with identity is prepared to an extent to exchange the territory of existential security, the certainties of one’s own personal Story (I am thus-and-so), for an opening towards the potential, towards the unexpected. (Wu Ming5 in Baird, p.252)

This potential is represented by the fact that every individual is part of a community: the species, the “social man”, the real depository of all that human knowledge that has been handed down from past generations (Bordiga in Luther Blissett, p.XIX).

Luther Blissett is *Gemeinwesen*. [...] This term indicates the collective dimension of the real human community, which can be identified with [...] the multiplicity and variety of relationships the proletariat could and should establish [...] beyond class conflict. (Luther Blissett, p.XX)

This is why these novelists, both as Luther Blissett and Wu Ming, consider themselves as catalysts, they don’t create anything, they just revise and play with that legacy of human knowledge, which they share with the rest of the species. For the same reason they refuse the idea of forcing copyright restrictions on intellectual products: they belong to the “multitudinous intelligence” (Wu Ming1 in Baird, p.251). They have succeeded in imposing this condition on each book they release, even if their publishing house is one of the biggest and most powerful in the country. Their works can be reproduced and downloaded by anybody (as long as no profits are

made through this operation). This is their way of fostering the free circulation of knowledge and bringing the struggle into the very core of cultural industry (Amici, p.3).

Copyright is an old-fashioned tool, an ideological wreck that castrates creativity and limits the growth of cultural capital. This growth is now made possible by online social cooperation, the Internet hosts a brainstorming to which everyone can contribute. In order to be productive ideas must be free to circulate. (Wu Ming 2003,p.282)

Plagiarism, file sharing and piracy liberate information and images thus restoring a popular character to mass culture. On the contrary copyright is a bourgeois notion that regards the individual as an entity separated from his social concrete dimension, an “owner, always identical to himself” (Wu Ming 2003, p.280). Criticising this concept Wu Ming are not just supporting the attack to the privileged subjects of cultural industry carried out by file sharing and piracy, they are pointing out a mechanism linking this specific productive sector to the rest of the capitalist economy.

The conflict between anti-copyright and copyright expresses in its most immediate form the contradiction lying at the bottom of capitalism: the one between productive forces and production/property relationships. At a certain point the development of the former inevitably causes a breakdown in the latter. The corporations that sell samplers, photocopy machines, scanners and CD burners, also control the entertainment industry damaged by these very machines. (Wu Ming 2003, p.286)

Copyleft is then a “juridical innovation coming from below” (Ibidem, p.287), the *pars construens* of a movement that in its forms and battles takes up the legacy of 1970s Autonomia. Deserting the capital Wu Ming resumes the struggle carried on by the creative counterculture of that time. Shifting the focus of attention from the content (contrasting ideologies and doctrines) to the mechanisms of cultural production is the only way to go beyond “the stale existing (post-)ideological coordinates [...] in which we live” (Žižek 2004, p11). It transforms “the oppressed victim into an active agent” enabling him to take possession of the tool for liberation: the ability to start thinking again (Ibidem, p255).

### 3.

The refugee should be considered for what it is, namely, nothing less than a limit-concept that at once brings a radical crisis to the principles of the Nation-State and clears the way for a renewal of categories that can no longer be delayed. (Agamben 1996A, p163)

Comotti's publisher, Vibrisselibri, is a publishing house and literary agency for books rejected by other distributors or still waiting to find their way out of the literary underground. The status of these works is that of "sans papier", deprived of their citizenship they nevertheless want to be seen and keep struggling to be admitted to the overground world of Literature.

*Sans papier* is a French phrase (with which now Italians are well acquainted) indicating people 'without papers', without all those documents certifying the right to live, work and move freely in a country and have access to its public services: basically they are not considered full citizens. Vibrisselibri often publishes books that have previously tried to become citizens of the 'Republic of Letters' but that have been rejected and sent back to the borders and beyond. Without playing the martyrs they can now proudly say: 'Here we are. We are *sans papier* but we're still here. And we require to be treated as citizens' (Vibrisselibri 2)

If the first and main purpose is to make these works accessible and visible, at the same time Vibrisselibri strives to keep them free from copyright even after they have achieved paper publication. This way they maintain their position within the collective knowledge of the community, always accessible to anyone because it belongs to no one exclusively.

These texts have no official recognition, no "rights". Therefore their condition can be related with a simile to that of the refugees that are not granted the citizenship of the country they live in. Giorgio Agamben draws an interesting parallel between the exceptional status of the refugee and the chance to find new possibilities for political life. "Breaking the identity between the human and the citizen" the figure of the refugee highlights how up to now the concept of Nation State has based its power of sovereignty on nativity: its citizens were those human beings born in a particular territory (Agamben 1996A, p.162). In the last decades the increasing presence of masses of refugees in Nation-States' territories have made this juridical power inapplicable, opening up the possibility of a renewal that confers new political value to "the old concept of people" opposed to that of Nation State. Agamben interprets this possibility as the passage to "a life of power", where people think for themselves, instead of being enacted, and become the actual actors of political life (Agamben 1996B p.154).

The experience of thought that is here in question is always the experience of a common power. Community and power identify one with the other completely, without residue, because the inherence of a communitarian principle to any power is a function of the necessarily potential character of any community. (Ibidem, p.155)

In a similar manner texts *sans papier* and free of copyright bring to a crisis the idea that literature consist of works that have been acknowledged the right to be published, or that are the original output of a single mind that owns them and decides for them. These works instead are free to circulate and to be read independently from any official recognition. No committee has the power to ban them from the Internet. Culture achieves autonomy from the economic and political powers. The creators of Vibrisselibri pay great attention to the dynamics that can really accomplish this liberation. Animated discussions of these issues take place on their blog.

Even this tiny independent dimension adopts in part the same mechanisms of selection and censorship, the same limiting structures that govern the life of every publishing house. In fact there is a chairman-president guiding the committee of readers in the selection of the texts and anyway founder Giulio Mozzi himself is so charismatic that he exerts his influence on everyone. The very founder members of Vibrisselibri have noticed what's happening. They have started a very interesting debate on their blog-forum '*vibrisebollettino*' in which they discuss about the dialectic relationship between author and editor: who has the last word? (Comotti 2007)

In his novel Comotti describes the attempt of three editors, one of which is a young Nicotrain, to exert direct control over a small encyclopaedia published by their house. Giving relevance to some lemmas and obscuring the others they try to transform it into a left wing collection of references. The awkward operation is of course condemned by the author's sarcastic tone.

The lemmas of the encyclopaedia gained flavour and rose thanks to the aut-aut yeast of the orthodoxy: with us or against us, within or beyond the barricade (the model was Paris' Commune more than Milan's 'Cinque giornate'). The lineage was swarming with Engels, Marx, El Che, Mao and Linpiao, Camilo Torres and Emiliano Zapata [...] This proliferation of apologies obscured the importance and historical relevance of the other lemmas, to the point that some of them disappeared completely from the encyclopaedia. These were 'the enemies', the opponents [...] tattooed with the mark of class enemy, extremist, conservative, bigot and reactionary. (Comotti 2006, p.42)

Comotti confirms how this episode is a caricature of how the appropriation of the means of cultural production and communication should take place. (Comotti 2007). Instead he remembers how he and the other editors of a major Italian publishing house once nearly succeeded in introducing the modalities of popular culture in the publishing processes.

We almost reached the point of actually taking part in the cultural debate. Discussions took place about forms and contents of those very books we edited and that our friends, our children and we would eventually buy and consume. This was a goal of counter-power: to my knowledge nobody ever went that far, or reached the point of questioning the editor's last word on a publication. Utopia, childish candour, anarchic madness (Fo's anarchic fool?)... it never

happened again, but who knows the future? (Ibidem)

Bypassing the rules and jurisdiction of literature's Nation-State, these works "*sans papier*" are the emblems of an ideal "anarchic" culture, where the people, as human beings and not as citizens, are the direct addressees of political debate.

A left wing policy today is one that looks ahead, to the future. But to do so it works on the present. Step by step, on the right fields: school, research, youth. Because a well educated people can guide their government to find the right solutions for their needs or even find them themselves. Governments should involve people and ask their advice. (Ibidem)

The protagonists of this uprising will draw strength from the awareness of belonging to a social group, a "multitude" whose human potential directly "emerges in the space between, in the social space of communication [...] in collaborative social interactions" (Negri, Hardt 2006, p.222).

#### 4.

Alice built herself a radio, but to be able to speak up she has to keep fighting zombies and Jabberwocks everyday... (Police sirens in the background and metallic voice). Insurrectionary assembly, inducement, plot against the State, against the family... [...] Radio Alice broadcasts anything: what you want and what you don't, everything you think and everything you think you're thinking, especially if you come here or just phone us and say it. (Radio Alice 1976)

Radio Alice anticipated in some of its characteristics the forms of communication introduced by the Internet many years later (Chiesa in Gandus). Mao-Dadaism was the only organizing principle and the broadcasting process assumed a "horizontal line" similar to that of present day chat lines (Chiesa in Tola). Live phone-calls were just the most manifest feature of its peculiar listings. There was no official editorial line and everyone could introduce any topic.

Radio Alice gives everybody a chance to speak a little: Jabberwocks and zombies, retired generals and blacklegs, insincere mothers and honest children, '*faziziti*' and dishonest chemists, Christian Democrats and Demosthenians, phalocrats and 'phalloworkers', fathers-butchers and eternal fathers, leaders and offsidiers, firemen and bankers, forerunners and banner men. (Radio Alice 1976)

The technical support for this communication was the same employed by the establishment, recovered "among riches" waste, stealing the enemy his own weapons" (Chiesa and Wu Ming 2003, p.10). Radio Alice gave voice to "the movement" through a united effort of technology, in the form of an old army transmitter, and "collective intellect" (Ibidem, p.40).

In order to give voice to his film Guido Chiesa has set up a website ([www.lavorareconlentezza.wumingfoundation.com](http://www.lavorareconlentezza.wumingfoundation.com)). This is not the usual collection of clips and trails: it is a continuous flow of information. There's a forum where anyone, fans, but also ex members of 1977 movement, can leave a message, write a political comment, a criticism. There are archive photos, transcriptions of original documents, images of the front pages of the newspapers of the time; there are links to other websites where one can find pieces of information on Radio Alice and 1977, but also on contemporary cultural guerrilla and media activism.

Web resources are all at our disposal. These fragments can be organised in a systematic reconstruction of past events that are still alive in our memory but too disturbing (because still politically relevant) for us to recall. (Evangelisti 2004B)

Like he does with cinematic discourse, Chiesa employs this means of communication with the purpose of spreading a virus. The web is swarming with the germs of Radio Alice, as a result of a collective work of recuperation to which a whole series of local "broadcasters" contribute. Chiesa is very clear about his idea of communication. He underlines how the direct form of participation and expression allowed by the Internet can lead to very superficial contributions. Instead with this website he tries to pull the brake and to carve out spaces for meditation and criticism. He stresses the importance of "slowing down, meditating and questioning the overwhelming noise of the continuous semiotic flow generated by the triumphant capital" (Chiesa 2005A) and quotes Filippo Scozzari, one of the voices of Radio Alice, as he says "the simple will to communicate is not enough, you must have something to say" (Chiesa and Wu Ming 2003, p.40).

His use of cinema and the Internet are inspired by the joyous relationship with technology of the 1970s Autonomia movements but also of the French "Intermittent" workers<sup>18</sup>. According to Chiesa they have been able to keep "the utopia" alive. They do not condemn the media as completely and irremediably prone to the precepts of the establishment. They are able to distinguish between their unbiased nature of "vectors of communication" and the use that their management make of them. Therefore they see the media as collective possessions to be shared for an

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<sup>18</sup> The Intermittent are the precarious and part-time workers of French cultural industry that became target of cuts on welfare benefits in 2003/2004. Against this protocol they carried on a strenuous struggle centred on visibility: they occupied radio stations and television channels and organized demonstrations during Cannes' film festival in 2004. They have emerged as a new "radical subjectivity" and have created a network of connections that unites all those intermittent participating in the new "flexible and knowledge oriented" labour dimension. (Capocci et al.)

alternative communication and they use them to carry on their protest against bad working conditions.

The Intermittent's activism and its good results (the massive audience response, spin-offs of their protests appearing on newspapers, radio and TV, a new chance for their battle against the contract reform, etc) introduce instead a different attitude: one that sees possibilities and takes them instead of just being dismissive [...] France Intel is just a company managing vectors of communication: these vectors aren't inherently good or bad [...] France Intel has not become the radio of the Intermittent, but for a little while it has been the radio it could be. (Chiesa 2005B)

Chiesa agrees with Žižek: a non-extremist position that acknowledges the positive potential offered by this technology is not a mystification of reality, on the contrary it is the only way to practice the utopia today (Ibidem). What should be rejected is the monopoly of the establishment over it. Bifo suggests that the dominion of the big corporations must be fought from below: the proliferation of "nuclei of equal communication" can lead to the appropriation of the public spaces of communication penetrating the technological apparatus that sustains them. He makes reference to television in particular and to the project of Teletstreet as an example of horizontal and local model of transmission that allows people to be at the same time spectators and broadcasters (Berardi et al., p.15). Chiesa then uses media technology with the same liberating aim of Berardi and the other speakers of Radio Alice. Many representatives of the 1970s movement still dwell the fields of media activism today. The germs of Radio Alice are still contaminating communication technologies. Mao-Dadaism liberated subjected language and knowledge just like Teletstreet finds newness in the local, "the missing and denied" (Serra 2002). Through Radio Alice information became a multiplier of subversive activities (Radio Alice 1977), just like today the practice of media activism goes together with the Social Forum movement, spreading and amplifying its need for autonomy and for the liberation of communication from (economic) power, war and global corporations' control (Berardi et al., p.14).

## APPENDIX

## Intervista a Nanni Balestrini

1 – *L’Orda D’Oro e i suoi romanzi esprimono l’esigenza di raccontare le lotte del ‘68 e degli anni successivi per opporsi alle semplificazioni e banalizzazioni della versione istituzionale...*

*L’Orda d’Oro* e i miei romanzi sono due cose molto diverse. Il testo scritto con Moroni è stata una cosa fatta molto rapidamente nell’88 perché cadeva il 20° anniversario del ‘68, quindi anche dettata da una necessità editoriale. L’idea era di raccogliere una serie di materiali che dessero un’idea di questi anni. Non è un libro di storia: è un insieme di contributi diversi di persone diverse. Ci sembrava utile avere una serie di documenti sugli anni ‘60 e ‘70.

Per quanto riguarda le deformazioni operate sulla storia dalla “versione istituzionale”, va osservato che negli anni ‘80 c’era la necessità di smarcarsi da questa generale criminalizzazione subita da tutto il movimento. Quello che era successo è stato condannato come un’azione fatta da criminali, un bagno di sangue, una sequela di lutti. Come se tutta una serie di persone “impazzite” si fossero messe ad ammazzare senza motivo oppure per delle idee distorte. Quella è stata un po’ la versione ufficiale che ne è stata data allora.

E che sopravvive tuttora. Di recente per esempio due “ex” del movimento, che hanno ricoperto una piccola carica pubblica, sono stati vittima di un duro attacco da parte dei giornali, che hanno scritto indignati: “questi sono dei terroristi, non possono più tornare ad avere delle funzioni nella vita civile!”. Vigeva ancora questa opinione dei vincitori, di quei partiti e quei poteri che hanno schiacciato tutto quello che c’era negli anni ‘60 e che continuano a criminalizzare quel periodo.

Tutto lo sforzo che è stato fatto, anche attraverso questi libri, è stato per dire che sì, ci sono stati anche questi fatti di violenza, di terrorismo. Il terrorismo è cominciato probabilmente da parte dello Stato che con Piazza Fontana ha iniziato a usare la violenza, i morti. Poi malauguratamente c’è stata una risposta violenta da parte del movimento, facendo degli sbagli, sottovalutando la forza di un avversario che li avrebbe schiacciati prima o poi. E ignorando che forse un tipo di lotta non armata sarebbe stata più produttiva, a lungo termine. Questi però sono discorsi del poi, sul momento c’erano anche delle altre spinte.

Questa visione faceva anche dimenticare completamente il punto di vista di decine di migliaia di giovani che avevano vissuto quegli anni come anni di gioia, di liberazione, di felicità, in cui si facevano tante cose insieme, con grande entusiasmo. Questo viene completamente ignorato, soffocato. Il nostro era un tentativo almeno di dire la verità su questo.

*2 – Nel corpo dell’opera avete introdotto articoli apparsi su pubblicazioni dell’epoca, interventi e frammenti di dibattiti. Per essere utile, il racconto degli anni della contestazione si deve mantenere frammentato, “aperto”? (in contrasto con l’atteggiamento disfattista di una parte della sinistra che vede come irrimediabilmente tramontata l’epoca delle possibilità, della rivoluzione)*

Dovendo abbracciare tutta una serie di persone, di movimenti di quegli anni, che costituiscono una frangia molto vasta, era impossibile riassumere il tutto in una sola posizione. Ci sono stati gruppi e tendenze di molti tipi. Abbiamo cercato anche di dire questo e di rappresentarlo. E questo ha voluto dire non interpretarli, ma solo mostrarli. Tuttavia abbiamo avuto un punto di vista molto chiaro, molto preciso: dalla parte del movimento, senza però scegliere una delle particolari posizioni all’interno di esso.

*3 – Per molti la rivoluzione vera si è fatta nel ‘68, poi ci sono stati solo strascichi e deviazioni...*

Io penso il contrario. C’è stato un apice nel ‘77/’78, un aumento già soltanto dei numeri, delle persone, dell’entusiasmo, delle attività. Il ‘68 è iniziato come una piccola cosa nelle università e poi piano piano è aumentato e cresciuto politicamente, ha attraversato diverse fasi. Io lo vedo come una cosa che ha avuto il suo massimo nel ‘77 e poi è andato incontro a delle contraddizioni interne ed è quindi impleso da una parte e dall’altra è stato attaccato violentemente dalla repressione che lo ha stroncato.

*4 – La recente fioritura di racconti sulla stagione delle lotte degli anni ‘70 e ‘60. Li vedi come un semplice tentativo di ricostruire la storia o possono aspirare a qualcosa di più, a fare politica?*

Farei una distinzione tra quelle che sono opere letterarie e le opere storiche, documentarie, giornalistiche. Per esempio il film di Chiesa, che mi è piaciuto molto, ha raffigurato molto bene anche visivamente quello che era l'epoca e questo per un fatto visivo come il cinema è molto importante. Allo stesso tempo ha inventato una storia (il tunnel scavato per rapinare una banca) che non ha niente a che fare con Radio Alice, ma che è un'allegoria, un'invenzione, per cui non è un documento. Certamente un fatto creativo e letterario usa la documentazione dell'epoca, ma per farla diventare un'altra cosa. Non è che uno va a vedere il film per avere un documento. E' una storia che dà un'immagine dell'epoca, che non è la fotografia, è qualcosa di più, diventa un'allegoria.

Quanto a Wu Ming, non sono molto interessato al lavoro che fanno. Ho letto il loro primo libro, molto interessante. Mi sembrava un lavoro ben fatto. Ma poi non me ne sono più occupato.

Secondo me uno scrittore deve saper distinguere tra le due cose (politica e arte), se no non fa bene né una né l'altra. Può occuparsi di tutte e due, però mescolarle troppo non produce buoni risultati. Anch'io ho fatto attività politica, sono stato in Potere Operaio, nell'autonomia ecc. Però se scrivo un libro letterario non è per fare politica, se no torniamo alla letteratura impegnata, alla letteratura politica. La letteratura è a un altro livello, fa un altro mestiere.

Ci possono essere persone che hanno in sé queste due capacità, ci può essere un grande leader politico che magari è anche un buono scrittore, ma restano due cose separate, non possono intromettersi l'una con l'altra se no guastano sia l'una che l'altra. In genere un intellettuale o uno scrittore non ha queste attitudini del politico che deve essere molto più presente, attivo nelle cose pratiche: "la politica giorno per giorno" con tutte le manovre che ci sono dietro. Anche un intellettuale ha una visione politica ma è più dall'alto, si misura più a distanza, più sulle idee che sulle pratiche.

*5 – Crede che sia auspicabile una riforma del sistema educativo italiano a livello di programmi di insegnamento? Una forma più aperta che mantenga intatte le complessità e soprattutto un racconto senza conclusione, che prosegua oltre il limite consueto del referendum istituzionale?*

Certo sarebbe molto utile, la storia la farei cominciare dal presente per andare indietro, non il contrario. Certo non l'attualità immediata, ma forse anche quella, dei

buoni insegnanti potrebbero parlarne con gli studenti, dialogando, senza cercare di imporre le proprie idee politiche perché sarebbe sbagliato. Sono cose che renderebbero la scuola più viva, più interessante anche per chi ci va. Ma a un certo punto c'è tutta una serie di problemi che investono i libri di testo. Quale verità presentano. Sono tutti problemi che si potrebbero anche risolvere, ma spesso sono risolti male.

Tutto dipende dall'insegnante, i libri, i testi sono cose elastiche, poi uno li utilizza come vuole. Un buon insegnante dovrebbe avere anche piacere di avere un dialogo su cose vive, attuali. Anche a Carlo Magno ci si arriva meglio rapportandolo alle cose di oggi.

#### *6 – Cosa pensa dei cosiddetti No global, del movimento di Seattle?*

Io ne penso tutto il bene possibile, è la cosa migliore che ci sia oggi. Soltanto ha delle grosse difficoltà ad avere una vita politica. Questi incontri avvengono così, per i raduni del G8, per cui tutto si concentra lì, non ha scadenze proprie. C'è una difficoltà a farne un movimento. C'è secondo me una disponibilità enorme da parte delle persone a partecipare a tutto questo. Sono i modi della partecipazione che vanno ancora un po' inventati. Ma appena ci sono si vede che tutto divampa. Comunque la cosa importante è che tutto questo "orienta". C'è una tendenza, un orientamento delle idee, della volontà della gente di respingere tutta una serie di cose e questo è importantissimo.

#### *7 – Che ne dice dell'oscurantismo che ha velato i fatti di Genova (g8), allora e anche più di recente, con il processo in corso.*

C'è un tentativo di ripetere i meccanismi di repressione e falsificazione degli anni '80, solo che adesso è più difficile farlo. Perché innanzi tutto non c'è un fronte politico compatto col nuovo governo. Anche se non completamente, le cose saltano fuori e poi non c'è un fronte compatto dell'informazione, dei media che tengano coperto tutto questo, della magistratura. L'intenzione è quella, ma non si riesce più a farla franca come prima. E' un passo avanti, però il guaio è che queste cose possano ancora succedere.

## Intervista a Guido Chiesa

1 – *In Tesi sulla filosofia della storia Walter Benjamin scrive della necessità di “difendere” il passato dal modo in cui viene tramandato, dal suo assorbimento in una narrazione lineare, i cui principi guida sono il progresso e la necessità storica. Ho letto della tua idea di raccontare il passato attraverso una “memoria complessa”, che non si preoccupi tanto della ricostruzione del “come eravamo”, ma che presenti allo spettatore una trasformazione “aperta”, niente messaggi, solo ipotesi<sup>19</sup>. È questo un modo per descrivere in modo diverso anche il presente? Non più la logica e ineluttabile conseguenza di un processo storico, ma solo una delle possibilità che si potevano cogliere?*

Se colgo il senso profondo della tua domanda, direi di sì: ogni narrazione – passato, presente, futuro – non può ridursi alla somma matematica di fattori determinati, per quanto molteplici e sofisticati (economici, sociologici, politici, ecc.). Nel campo della Storia, così come di tutte le vicende umane, la complessità non è un’opzione, bensì la regola.

2 – *Il tuo Lavorare con lentezza racconta dell’esperienza di Radio Alice (anche se con un approccio indiretto, lasciandola sullo sfondo). Gli inserti in bianco e nero stile film muto introducono le idee dibattute dai creatori dell’emittente bolognese: l’uso del linguaggio per trasformare la realtà, il superamento della pratica della controinformazione per passare a una informazione “altra” attraverso una comunicazione che usa l’informazione a scopo sovversivo. In Per la commissione sulla comunicazione di massa<sup>20</sup> si parla di comunicazione come arma per far emergere dalla clandestinità pratiche “trasformative”, per “inciderle nella realtà”. Il tuo film cerca allo stesso modo di “moltiplicare” la sovversione di Radio Alice e di inciderla nella realtà di oggi?*

Direi che il film, a suo modo e soprattutto (segno dei tempi?) senza le pretese escatologiche della generazione '68-'77, cerca di rimettere in circolazione alcuni dei

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<sup>19</sup> M.Fantoni Minnella, 2004. *Non Riconciliati. Politica e società nel cinema italiano dal Neorealismo a oggi.* (p.239)

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.radioalice.org/testi/conv77-comunicazioni.html>

germi circolati nell'ambiente bolognese (ma non solo) di quegli anni al fine di renderli disponibili per un'analisi critica della realtà odierna. Se alcuni sono più evidenti – oltre a quelli che tu citi, aggiungerei il rifiuto del lavoro come perno centrale della vita umana e la crisi della militanza – altri, meno appariscenti, sono forse quelli, a mio parere, più significativi e *utili* da recuperare. Mi riferisco in primo luogo all'idea di abolire le separazioni che, frutto di nevrosi che diventano Legge, producono gerarchie artificiali, e quindi sistemi di potere: pubblico/privato, maschile/femminile, arte/politica, produttori/consumatori, rappresentanti/rappresentati, ragione/emozione, ecc. Da questo punto di vista, Radio Alice è stata in Italia una delle prime e, per quanto confuse, avvisaglie di un fenomeno destinato ad incidere profondamente nel cuore della cultura occidentale: la fine del paradigma (scientifico) razionalista. Infine, LCL aveva l'ambizione, spero mantenuta, di guardare al periodo in questione e alle pratiche di quegli anni, con occhio affettuoso ma ironico, capace di prendere le distanze dai tanti velleitarismi (anche di Radio Alice), mostrando lo scarto imperante tra prassi e teoria.

*3 – La sceneggiatura di Lcl è frutto di una collaborazione con Wu Ming. Condividi il loro rifiuto dell'idea borghese dell'artista-genio come produttore dell'opera d'arte e il riconoscimento della natura collettiva dell'esperienza creativa? Può essere questa la soluzione al problema della posizione delle avanguardie intellettuali rispetto alle "masse", non casta di professoroni a difesa dell'ortodossia, ma parte integrante di un popolo creatore di miti?*

Diciamo che mi colloco in una posizione meno categorica, probabilmente anche a causa della differenza di età tra loro e me. Inoltre, WM proviene organicamente dai movimenti (Pantera, Seattle), mentre il mio percorso li attraversa senza mai lasciarsene assorbire troppo (e anzi, specie di recente, sentendosi alquanto distante). Condivido decisamente la loro critica all'idea ottocentesca dell'artista-genio, ma d'altro canto penso che c'è una differenza tra Thomas Pynchon e Giorgio Bevilacqua. E questa differenza è una differenza di individui, non di natura collettiva. Che poi il lavoro di Pynchon sia la sintesi, unica ed irripetibile, di un flusso collettivo di idee, azioni, sogni, ecc., siamo perfettamente d'accordo. Ma a me interessa molto anche quella sintesi.

4 – *Mi ha stupito la scelta di inserire nel cast un vj di Mtv e gli Afterhours, figure riconoscibilissime di una certa cultura giovanile italiana. Si tratta di un tentativo di “aggiornare” il mito della rivoluzione alla contemporaneità, di renderlo “vivo” e prevenirne la necrosi immergendolo nella cultura pop di oggi? (sto ancora citando Wu Ming, credo, ma non posso farne a meno, sono così... prolifici)*

Il mito della rivoluzione, per quanto mi riguarda, più che da “aggiornare” è da mandare in soffitta con le sue sorelle dialettica, autonomia del politico, dittatura del proletariato, avanguardie di classe, ecc. Ironie a parte, Massimo Coppola, a prescindere dalla persona in sé, incarna bene il percorso effettuato da gran parte delle migliori menti delle generazioni successive agli anni '70: da intellettuali di movimento a creativi al servizio dell'industria dello spettacolo. Che ci piaccia o no, questo è stato il destino di molti. Inserire Massimo nel film è stato un modo, indiretto e certamente obliquo, per far riflettere su ciò. E su tutta la cultura pop di questi ultimi 30 anni,

Nel caso degli Afterhours, invece, le soluzioni erano tre: 1) o riformavamo gli Area (ma sfortunatamente due di loro erano indisponibili); 2) o li facevamo rifare a delle comparse; 3) o trovavamo un gruppo che li interpretasse a modo suo, senza scimiottarli o clonarli.

Abbiamo scelto la 3.

5 – *Ho letto le tue condanne all’atteggiamento disfattista della sinistra “ufficiale” italiana, che la rende incapace di accorgersi del Movimento, del suo essere in piena attività oggi<sup>21</sup>. Žižek sostiene che questa “ostalgie” è il desiderio per “tutto ciò che poteva essere e non è stato”. Può l’arte illuminare le possibilità da cogliere ora attraverso la narrazione del passato? Può essere questo il senso, la ragione della considerevole produzione letteraria e cinematografica che in questi ultimi anni si è occupata degli anni '60 e '70, o almeno di parte di essa?*

La sinistra ufficiale (e non) è incapace di rendersi conto del movimento reale delle cose perché è intrappolata nella propria ideologia, se non peggio nella sua nicchia di potere. Non che ci siano in circolazione molti altri gruppi o movimenti oggi meglio

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<sup>21</sup> M.Fantoni Minnella, 2004. *Non Riconciliati. Politica e società nel cinema italiano dal Neorealismo a oggi.* (p.240)

capaci di interpretare la realtà che ci circonda, ma l'afasia della sinistra è impressionante. Ha abdicato sul discorso della difesa dell'umano da ogni forma di alienazione in nome di un'ideologia dei diritti di stampo tardo-illuminista che non ha sbocco né futuro, se non quello della sterilità collettiva. Insegue ogni battaglia di retroguardia sul terreno del politicamente corretto, del multiculturalismo e del relativismo, per finire poi schiacciata da qualsiasi opzione che invece si richiama necessariamente a delle differenze. Insomma, non ho nessuna speranza nella cosiddetta sinistra.

Gran parte del cinema, e della cultura, che tu citi, con rare eccezioni, è in realtà la manifestazione di un bisogno identitario, logica conseguenza di quel che sostiene Žižek, ossia la necessità, dopo mille sconfitte, di costruirsi una rappresentazione di sé in grado di rendere tollerabile la miseria del proprio presente.

Tra le rare eccezioni che vanno contro questa tendenza imperante nella cosiddetta cultura di sinistra, metterei un titolo come Q (mai libro più illuminante sulla deriva dei movimenti), che non si rifugia in una visione edulcorata del passato per mascherare l'impotenza dell'oggi.

## Intervista ad Andrea Comotti

1 – *Il Sessantotto come “romanzo di formazione” (p.50). L’Organigramma si sofferma su alcuni errori di ingenuità commessi dal movimento studentesco e dalla stragrande maggioranza di chi, in quegli anni, si è buttato nella lotta politica sull’onda di un “rimbambimento ideologico” tipico dell’adolescenza. In particolare mi sembra di capire che secondo te i passi falsi siano stati lo sprofondamento nella “verbosità oblati oblati” (p.16) e il mescolare le istanze di rinnovamento del sistema scolastico con le lotte operaie... Quanto ancora oggi è determinante un sistema educativo migliore per creare degli uomini capaci di pensare da sé (interessante a questo proposito la tua meditazione sull’aggiornamento dei programmi per includere la storia recente, p.152)?*

*Ingenuità* sì, giocoforza, derivante dalla passione naif, non dal rimbambimento (quello è venuto poi, di pari passo con la senilità alzheimer galoppante): agli inizi, e parlo del 1967, dell’inverno 1967 (ma la mia memoria non è criselefantina...), per molti come me si è trattato di essere messi di fronte a un bivio di cui non avevano neanche sospettato l’esistenza. Uso anch’io l’*Organigramma* come testo base per non verbosare troppo: vedi l’episodio in corsivo di p. 67.

Per me personalmente il giudizio è che davvero si è trattato di un romanzo di formazione perché... è un mio pensiero di allora... degli anni Settanta... nel Sessantotto ero diventato da ragazzino un uomo.

I passi falsi sono stati non tanto la verbosità ideologica estremizzata quanto l’abbandono del terreno specifico di studenti - il diritto allo studio (in collegamento nel 1969 con le 150 dei metalmeccanici), l’ammodernamento delle materie (il movimento è iniziato in cattolica: in filosofia, i moderni da Marx a Nietzsche a Heidegger erano off limits), il metodo di studio (la scuola di Barbiana a modello) e l’apertura alla società mondiale (fame, Terzo, Quarto Mondo) - per una generica e ideologistramaledettissima adesione-sostegno-schieramento nelle lotte operaie. Le quali sì hanno sempre mantenuto il loro specifico sindacale-politico (qualifiche, salute, alienazione, sicurezza, consigli di fabbrica, ecc. ecc.). Il tutto è avvenuto dopo che la grande famiglia del movimento studentesco neonato - dopo la cacciata della leadership dalla Cattolica (art. 1 comportamento non conforme alla morale cattolica o giù di lì), ovvero la triade Capanna-Pero-Spada e i vari colonnelli come Schianchi,

tutti finiti tranne Marius in Lotta continua -si è frantumata in tante chiesette ultrafondamentaliste (a parte forse Ic) a conduzione familiare propria, tanti partitini bizzosi e scalciati tutti con il loro catechismo dell'ortodossia in mano, che quasi si facevano più guerra tra di loro che a chi di dovere.

Il retroterra dell'università è diventato puramente un retroterra logistico: dove riunirsi, dove organizzare cortei, dove occupare, dove stilare proclami. Fra l'altro a Milano la Statale è diventata la cittadella dell'emmesse, gli altri fuori a ritagliarsi un terreno sempre più operaio, ovvero a crearsi un portfolio di fabbriche in cui la propria sparuta rappresentanza di militanti e di fiancheggiatori fosse più forte di quella altrui, il tutto combinato con l'entrismo nei sindacati tradizionali, fino all'avvento dei cub. Non dimenticare che è questo il periodo del ritorno sulla scena sindacale dei consigli di fabbrica con la ventata di nuova democrazia sindacale, ovvero la rappresentanza che scaturiva dal consenso-coinvolgimento della base (il reparto).

Quindi l'errore non è stato *mescolare le istanze di rinnovamento del sistema scolastico con le lotte operaie...* magari... tutto l'opposto... ci siamo adagiati sul terreno operaio, chi cominciando a elaborare sulla struttura della fabbrica (Potere Operaio, per esempio, sulle qualifiche e l'organizzazione del lavoro, sulla strada dei Quaderni Rossi), chi a fornire appoggio di massa alle richieste operaie, specie se in contrasto con quelle sindacali. Quanto al "Quanto ancora oggi è determinante un sistema educativo migliore per creare degli uomini capaci di pensare da sé" ti rispondo al 1000 per cento. Sono un donmilaniano e sulla scuola risponderò sempre *l care*. Era importante nel sessantotto e lo è ancora di più oggi. Per darti un termine di paragone, sono parecchi anni che penso che se diventassi (pardon, fossi diventato) ministro della pubblica istruzione e potessi (avessi potuto) avere due mandati, varerei (avrei varato) un piano decennale con questo traguardo: elevare il livello culturale degli studenti universitari a comprendere gustare trasmettere C.E. Gadda. Allora potrei (avrei potuto) ritirarmi soddisfatto a vita privata. Saprei (avrei saputo) anche che di riflesso avrei (avrei avuto) un livello di cultura civica e politica in grado di contrastare la triste deriva rappresentativa dei nostri parlamentari quaquaraquà. Se non altro tanti don cicciogravallo saprebbero guardare più criticamente dentro le buie cose. Sono straconvinto che il grado culturale di un paese si tiri dietro il grado del suo senso civico. Non chiedermi dimostrazione però...

2 – *Piazza Fontana è stata narrata da un matto in Morte accidentale di un anarchico. Fo sceglie questa figura come protagonista di gran parte del suo teatro perché è la sola davvero libera da autorità e da regole e perciò è l'unica in grado di produrre un'arte davvero radicale. Posizionandosi al di fuori di ogni logica, di ogni schema, il "matto" può essere davvero intransigente nella sua rivoluzione, non si trova mai a dover scendere a compromessi con "la linea del partito", e in più lo status di intoccabile gli garantisce la piena libertà di parola... L'uso di un genere pop come il giallo sembra sempre dare alle narrazioni un carattere più leggero e togliere autorevolezza ai giudizi espressi. Lo status di "sans papier", di outsider, delegittima un testo, lo esclude dalla narrazione ufficiale. La combinazione dei due elementi fa sì che l'Organigramma prenda la parola dallo stesso pulpito da cui il "pazzo" di Fo aveva lanciato le sue pesanti accuse. Pensi che un'interpretazione di questo tipo sia fuorviante?*

Se l'organigramma sia un giallo, un noir molti hanno avuto il buontempo di dibatterlo alla sua webuscita, in moltissimi non avendolo letto... per me è semplicemente un *romanzo politico* che ha il suo ascendente-referente esplicito e ribadito nel pasticciaccio ma non tanto per l'aura gialla quanto perché il *Pasticciaccio* è il midollo spinale dell'organigramma. Mi spiego meglio. Il codice dell'*Organigramma*, che permetterà a Nicotrain di decrittarlo e di individuarne i tristi nomi e le brutte facce, è il *Pasticciaccio*, l'edizione fisica del pasticciaccio, alle cui pagine i congiurati organigrammati attingono per le coordinate crittate del loro codice di comunicazione. Per il resto, la gravità della strage di piazza Fontana è incommensurabilmente altro dal delitto di via Merulana. In questo senso non credo che l'ordito del giallo o la trama del noir alleggeriscano la durezza-crudezza-asprezza del giudizio o del messaggio, che la sua autorevolezza ce l'ha intrinseca... piuttosto, detto in tutta sincerità, penso proprio che lo status di sans papier, questa autorevolezza (ammesso che ci sia) la mini dall'esterno: si tratta sempre di un romanzo che l'editoria non riconosce e che trova il suo zoccolo duro nella minicerchia di quei pochi che l'hanno promosso (editorialmente in rete). Il matto è anarchico nella sua libertà e intoccabile nella sua parola. L'organigramma scava elabora (ri)porta a galla una verità che già esiste ma è sottaciuta e la sua parola più che intoccabile è intoccata... mi sa che sono davvero una sparuta pattuglia i suoi lettori... dovrei essere Dario Fo per allargarli... Fuorviante l'interpretazione? non so, forse fuori portata... fuori organigramma... Se

invece si vuol intendere che sono matto a continuare a scribacchiare alla mia maniera senza avere riconoscimento, allora sì. Il paragone col matto è calzante e mi attizza enormemente.

3 – *Gadda, Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana. Anche il tuo giallo per certi versi rimane irrisolto, se per soluzione si intende nome e cognome del colpevole e sua incriminazione ufficiale. Quanto il tuo personale approccio alla scrittura è simile a quello di Gadda? L'Organigramma è un tentativo di sciogliere lo stesso "pasticciaccio", il garbuglio che sta dietro a una lettura lineare (e per questo falsa o troppo semplificata) della storia? Anche per te la letteratura è strumento utile per l'indagine del reale in quanto capace di rappresentarne la complessità (anche attraverso un uso espressionista della lingua e del dialetto)? Ci vuole una voce gaddiana per analizzare le contraddizioni del movimento studentesco del '68 e il "cortocircuito delle istituzioni" (p.28) di quegli anni?*

Questa qui è la domanda più imbarazzante... perché troppo striderriverente il paragone mio con Gadda e dell'organigramma con il pasticciaccio. Vado per ordine con la tua domanda. L'organigramma non è irrisolto<sup>22</sup>... Nicotrain ha l'elenco di tutti i congiurati e insegue per anni fino a salargli il codone il loro capintesta. E anche il pasticciaccio sarebbe risolto se solo Gadda non avesse avuto gli anni che aveva e la nausea delusione che si trovava addosso quando Garzanti gli ha proposto di finirlo. Il garbuglio gaddiano della realtà e il suo corrispettivo della lingua pastiche sono e appartengono a Gadda. Io non ho nessuna affabulazione da fare... almeno non me la propongo, quasi, anzi, la aborro... che siamo in un mondo di merda e ci comportiamo da merdacce, questo sì... che la mia lingua... che parolona... il mio modo di scrivere debba sintonizzarsi e omologarsi su questa cruda realtà... è tutto da vedere... non so che dire... forse lo è ma restrittivamente... esprime la rabbia che ho dentro... il disgusto rivoltante che ho vedendo quanto il buon senso in primis e la giustizia in ultimis siano vituperati e sottotacati... allora sarebbe un linguaggio di reazione alla realtà non un'omologazione ai suoi (anti)canoni... Sì, dopo tanti anni, penso proprio di sì: non so al momento, ossia finora, concepire una fiction che non sia realistica... che tutta la letteratura debba essere un piede di porco che scoperchi l'irrealtà della realtà... forse no, non so... che poi lo debba fare necessariamente con

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<sup>22</sup> vedi seconda e terza parte della trilogia

un linguaggio fontaniano (la tela lameggiata) come quello di Gadda non è affatto detto... oppure è semplicemente fatto... basta avere la statura di Gadda... che difatti è in splendido isolamento, come lo sono nelle loro note John e Miles, no?

*4 – Un'Olivetti comprata in Senigallia. La crisi di creatività politica porta Nicotrain alla scrittura. Insisto nell'identificarti con il tuo personaggio e ti chiedo se anche la tua passione per il raccontare si nutre della stessa energia ritirata dal fronte moribondo dell'attivismo politico. Hai accennato al tuo essere in debito con il '68, al bisogno di deporre la tua testimonianza. Come Nicotrain scrivi di "casi neri e veri" (p.9). Anche tu hai la memoria corta? Quanto lo scrivere è, oltre che un piacere, un modo per documentare un periodo, delle idee e salvarli dal riassorbimento nel calderone della storia dei vincitori, quella che si studia a scuola e che spesso si ferma allo sbarco in Normandia (vabbeh, facciamo al referendum istituzionale)?*

Prima domanda: sì. Hai trovato la metafora giusta. L'aggiusto solo per darne meglio il succo: l'energia dell'onda ritirata dalla spiaggia che prepara lo tsunami (in sedicesimo) che va oltre la riva naturale e scontata, e altrove, in un altro ambito, sulla terra, dove non ci si muove con le pinne, ma a piedi nudi e si tenta di correre, e di correre ancora, malgrado la palta. Seconda domanda: sì. La mia memoria è corta, Nicotrain forse l'avrebbe migliore ma si è dovuto adeguare alla mia. Terza domanda: sì. (Non starò diventando uno yesman?... ) Piacere e bisogno di rendere testimonianza, certamente, soprattutto di una storia vissuta in un contesto collettivo, non solo mio, l'io individuale a braccetto di tanti altri io ma tutti insieme nel bel mezzo di un io collettivo... il calderone della storia dei vincitori mi interessa solo per il fatto che ne venga prima o poi fuori anche la minestra vera dei vinti... cui appartenevo e appartengo ma senza nessun senso di disfatta... no, questo no... disfatta nei fatti... le cose non sono andate come meglio sarebbero potute solo se... non disfatta nel senso storico di esserci fortunatamente stato... sarà ambiguo incoerente ma giuro che "sento" positivo ricordando... (negativo solo quando devo razionalizzare, come tutti e come sempre, gli inevitabili errori, per portata e grandezza). La storia sì... la storia über alles... la storia manca terribilmente negli interessi bagaglio dei giovani... ne ho un riscontro in mia figlia e figlio... e anche loro ce l'hanno... mia figlia, che si chiama Naima... sta addirittura tentando di ficcare capziosamente un esame di storia contemporanea nel suo stitico e recalcitrante piano di studi... Se la storia siamo noi,

allora vediamo di farcela raccontare bene, per filo e per segno, a scuola. Se la scuola nuova... mi chiedevi prima... deve contribuire alla nuova coscienza civile, alla storia toccherebbe quanto meno il ruolo della coppia di cavalli di testa...

*5 – Vibrisselibri e la pratica del copyleft. L'esperienza nel mondo dell'editoria in qualche modo ha determinato il grado della tua adesione al progetto? Nel '68 di Nicotrain (e di Andrea?) c'è anche l'incontro con il mestiere del redattore. Descrivi il particolare taglio editoriale che il gruppo di studenti-redattori riescono a "imporre" su un'enciclopedia in fascicoli. Si tratta di una forma di appropriazione di mezzi di comunicazione/divulgazione di massa (o quantomeno popolari) per la diffusione di una cultura altra rispetto ai programmi ufficiali per l'indottrinamento del popolo. È quindi in qualche modo ricollegabile al lavoro di "guerriglia culturale" portato avanti negli ultimi anni da Luther Blissett per esempio?*

Prima domanda: no. La possibilità-onore di pubblicare in Vibrisselibri mi è stata offerta da Giulio Mozzi, il mio pigmalione, con cui non mi sdebiterò mai, dopo i suoi tentativi contro il muro editoriale ufficiale, anche della casa editrice di cui è direttore letterario responsabile. Non sapevo neanche cosa fosse il copyleft... adesso lo so... un copyright di sinistra e perciò povero in canna... di consensi, non sto affatto pensando alla lira... Per quanto riguarda l'episodio in corsivo dei redattori enciclopedici non ha nulla di edificante, non è una riappropriazione dei mezzi di comunicazione... semmai la sua caricatura. Se riappropriazione dovesse essere non è certo così... Se un paragone ci può stare è questo: l'editore è scadente e scalcagnato, e la guerriglia culturale è al suo stesso livello, sgarrupata come mai... La controcultura è tutt'altra cosa... Ti racconto un episodio di quando negli anni Settanta lavoravo alla De Agostini, prima correttore poi come redattore. Si pubblicavano enciclopedie a fascicoli essenzialmente. Sindacalmente abbiamo sfiorato... proprio avvicinandoci all'orlo e poi ritraendoci... non erano i tempi forse... il punto di mettere i piedi dentro il piatto culturale: di discutere non solo il come si produceva ma anche il cosa: il contenuto delle opere che lavoravamo e di cui alla fine della catena commerciale eravamo anche i consumatori diretti o i padri dei consumatori diretti: i libri finivano in mano a noi, ai nostri amici e ai nostri figli. Era un punto di contropotere: che io sappia nessuno è andato mai oltre, a mettere in discussione l'ultima parola dell'editore in materia di pubblicazione. Utopia, scellerata

fanciullaggine, anarchismo matto (il matto di Fo?) o... Non è stato ma anche non sarà? Ai posteri... io non ho più tempo...

## **Ancora due chiacchiere con Andrea su tante cose, Vibrisselibri, il Social Forum, il Che...**

### **SUI PROBLEMI DEL COMUNISMO**

I tentativi del comunismo (il cosiddetto socialismo reale) sono stati deludenti fin'ora. Cuba compresa, purtroppo... Alla prova dei fatti ancora oggi ci sono stati più risultati positivi sul piano materiale, sociale e culturale in paesi a capitalismo "nordico" (Scandinavia, Danimarca) con una forte politica di welfare.

Le rivoluzioni hanno spesso lasciato più scorie dopo la "fiammata" di quelle che avevano tentato di bruciare. Il problema ancora irrisolto rimane la contraddizione tra libertà individuale (nel creare, nel credere, nell'esprimere il proprio dissenso) e la forma-stato che vincola e censura ma che viene purtroppo assunta per forza quando si sale al potere. Non c'è solo l'Urss, c'è anche la parabola stupefacente del Vietnam: da campione dell'antimperialismo a paese aggressore e invasore... Da chiedersi ahinoi ma per chi cazzo abbiamo lottato tanti anni? Certo che se così va il mondo...

Lo scenario europeo del secondo dopoguerra (ormai prossimo) era totalmente diverso da quello del primo dopoguerra, quando le rivoluzioni hanno trovato terreno, anche in Italia con il movimento gramsciano dei consigli e l'occupazione delle fabbriche. Il primo esempio in Italia l'abbiamo avuto con la svolta di Salerno ('44), quando Togliatti, tornato dalla Russia, ha cominciato a imporre la via della moderazione, delle riforme, anziché proseguire e guidare la rivoluzione proletaria. Anche come forma di svincolamento da Mosca, come originale via italiana al socialismo.

La rivoluzione "fatta con le armi" oggi è forse possibile solo in America Latina, dove sono ancora impegnati nella lotta per la liberazione dalla condizione coloniale. Sepulveda stesso ha detto: "il Che è il nostro futuro". La violenza rivoluzionaria non sta più tanto nella lotta armata, nella modalità fisica, ma nella rottura con le teorie, con le "richieste" fatte fin'ora. Nell'uscita trasgressiva dagli schemi consolidati e mummificati, anche nel campo del costume. La rivoluzione è spostare più avanti gli

obiettivi. Gli interlocutori dovrebbero essere i giovani, tra i quali dovrebbe tornare in auge che “ribellarsi è giusto”.

Una politica “di sinistra” oggi è una politica che guarda al futuro, ma che, per farlo, incide davvero nel presente. Passo a passo, nei settori giusti: la scuola, la ricerca, il lavoro. Guarda caso sono tutti settori in cui i giovani sono chiamati a essere protagonisti. Perché un popolo istruito può trainare il proprio governo, può individuare le soluzioni ai suoi bisogni e proporle “da sé”. Le popolazioni vanno consultate, coinvolte.

Il patrimonio del Comotti-reduce, quello che ho acquistato dal '68, è il bisogno di schierarsi, di mettersi in gioco per lotte che prefigurino avanzamenti. Certo che tra il dire e il fare... in tutti questi anni mi sono messo in ammollo e visto che c'ero e ci stavo comodo, mi sono messo a scrivere... Scrivendo avanzo e/o faccio avanzare? servo a qualcosa? sto di nuovo lottando, con le mie armi personali? mah... mi tengo i miei dubbi... Forse più che “bisogno di schierarsi” (che non l'ho fatto) è il sapere di essere schierato con certezza con chi. Il movimento studentesco del '67/'68 aveva una potenza data dal fatto che era un corpo sociale, una categoria ben definita che si muoveva all'unisono per la prima volta. Lo stesso potenziale umano c'è ancora, potrebbe essere ancora così forte. Potrebbe... guarda la differenza fra noi e la Francia sulla questione vitale della legge sulla flessibilità del lavoro: da noi la Biagi impera senza che gli studenti azzardino un “minchia, ma no”... in Francia una manifestazione nazionale fa ritirare la legge del governo...

### **IL MOVIMENTO OGGI**

Va bene il movimento sociale, va bene andare contro sistema capitalistico, ma cosa propongono il movimento di Seattle, del Social forum? Mi sembra soffrano della mancanza di una pars costruens più sostanziosa... Questo fa sì che molti di questi movimenti siano immaturi e privi di contenuti e che anche qui, come all'interno del movimento studentesco degli anni 60, ci sia spesso la stessa ricerca dello scontro con la polizia, la stessa idea che il grado di successo di una manifestazione dipenda dal grado di violenza del tafferuglio.

### **LA FORMA LETTERARIA**

La forma è un aspetto importantissimo quando si racconta la storia. Prendi le trasmissioni di Bruno Zavoli “La notte della Repubblica”, l'uso dell'illuminazione

nell'intervista a Moretti (capo Br). Riflettere su questo tipo di problemi è importante. Ovvero: importante è il modo (anche rivoluzionario, d'avanguardia) in cui si racconta. Cosa sarebbe della storia più bella del mondo raccontata da cani? Se è la più bella va raccontata nel modo migliore, se no succede come a Valentino Rossi messo su una moto più scarsa... il titolo mondiale va a farsi benedire...

### **VIBRISSELIBRI**

Vibrisselibri è una casa editrice - agenzia letteraria per testi "scartati" (o testi che non verrebbero mai presi in considerazione, per ragioni di stile o di marketing o di altro) dall'industria dell'editoria che Giulio Mozzi (che fa il direttore editoriale, ma anche lui deve sottostare al veto di un editore-capo che nelle scelte è guidato dal mercato, dall'economia) ha ottenuto di poter aprire on-line.

Anche in questa piccola realtà indipendente però si ricreano gli stessi meccanismi di selezione e censura, le stesse strutture vincolanti, che vigono in una casa editrice. Perché la "commissione di lettori" che sceglie i testi è guidata da un moderatore-presidente, e perché comunque Mozzi stesso è così carismatico da risultare influente su tutti. Gli stessi creatori del progetto si sono accorti di quanto sta accadendo. Interessante a questo proposito è leggere il dibattito su vibrisselibri (blog-forum) tra Paola Borgonovo e Mozzi che discutono del rapporto dialettico autore-editore: chi deve avere l'ultima parola?

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### **Interviews by the author\***

(Available in appendix)

COMOTTI, A. 2007. Interview;

BALESTRINI, N., 2007. Interview;

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\*Quotations from these have been translated by the author.