

LIVING WITH GUERRILLA WARFARE

LUCIO CASTELLANO



Lucio Castellano, a member of *Metropoli*, was arrested in June 1979.

It's a difficult task to make sense of some of the singular texts which were produced by the Italian movement during the late 70s known as Autonomia since their experience of being the high point of revolutionary struggle in the west seems so far away, but their horizons and their struggles in many ways remain close to ours and the laboratory of subversion as well as repression can provide many invaluable lessons for contemporary partisans.

This was a time when CEOs listened to the radio waiting to hear that it was someone else that day that got the bullets in his knee caps that could have just likely obliterated theirs, where when the police fired live rounds at the unruly demonstration the streets fired back, of immense multiplicitous creativity outside and against the old forms of struggle and it was also a time where thousands of comrades were in prison often held up to four years simply awaiting trial and charged with the most ambiguous crimes, crimes of association, which target collectivities rather than individual people. If we want to understand both revolution and counter-revolution we should continue to look to the area of autonomia.

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Last year an interesting study was published in England: a number of statisticians classified various professions on the basis of life expectancy of the people practicing them. The results show that miners have the shortest life expectancy — on a scale that goes from manual labor to intellectual pursuits — while those with the longest life expectancy are professors, lawyers and politicians. It is an observation, in part banal, which should be brought to the attention of the recent glorifiers of manual labor, and which has wrongly been kept out of the ongoing debate about democracy, on violence and death, on the body and on personal daily needs. It could be caustically stated in this manner: the probability that Colletti¹ will live longer than a large majority of his students is well grounded. It gives one much to reflect on.

It is however best to analyze the problem from the beginning, from the first conditions through which it presented itself.

1977 saw the overwhelming emergence of a central category — physicality, the body, personal needs, desires: in other words, the emergence of the individual — and with it, diversities and private life, both of which seek to define their place

within a collective process of liberation. The *critique of politics* — understood as that process which equalizes men in the abstraction of the State, isolating them in the concreteness of their diversity by placing itself in opposition to each of them in the “general interest” which dominates them — is the synthetic image of the passage.

Behind it there is still the re-evaluation of the concreteness of daily life in contrast to the totalitarian abstraction of the “great ideals”; the refusal to subordinate the present to the future; the indication of the materiality of one’s own existence; hatred of sacrifice, of heroism and of rhetoric. It is not important at this time to trace the genealogy of this *immediatism*: there is the worker’s stamp, radical and egalitarian of the “all now,” and the crucial role of the women’s movement; essential — in this discourse — is the break, not the continuity, the fact that for the first time this thematic block has become the point of aggregation, the moment of identification of an articulate and powerful political subject.

THE EXPLOITED POLITICAL SUBJECT

These are the terms of the question which profoundly innovate the debate on the State and politics, on the revolution and war, on the process of liberation and personal needs. In order to understand how much re-exhumed banality and tediousness, how much haughty Catholicism has had the opportunity to come forward from such a rich base, from such eversive premises, there is a knot which must be understood beforehand: the reason is that in the span of several months a mysterious distance has created, from this conglomeration of thematics, the language limited to a small group, repetitive, petulant and baroque, the language of those who have made a profession of faith of “exclusion”. Initially there was a displacement which must be accounted for: it is not true that between the movement of ‘77 and the letters to *Lotta Continua*² there exists a simple and direct thread of continuity: there is, on the contrary, a selection process, a precise and determining political filter. The ‘77 movement was not, socially, a movement of marginals — in the limited sense — nor was it one of “non-guaranteed” individuals: within it there were relevant sections of service laborers, of technicians and office workers, of young workers of small factories and students; there were also sections of part-time workers and of the unemployed. It also had a close relationship, thematic and political, to the women’s movement. The Movement was

a social subject united in large part by its being on the outside of the mechanisms of co-option of the system of parties and by its being the bearer of extremely advanced demands. It was, however, well within the processes of production and reproduction of social well-being, strongly interrelated with the whole of the social fiber, it was something which could not be isolated and was socially powerful because it was a holder of knowledge and of information by its being an inter-rebellion, but the emergence of processes of profound modifications which have gone through the whole of the social and class fiber in our country in the past few years: the fact that this political subject is external to the system of parties is not to be interpreted as its emargination, but as a profound weakness of the political and institutional asset of the "Italy ring."

AGAINST THE FALSE CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE MARGINALS

The thematics of emargination has not been a *natural* identity for this Movement; it has been the toilsome product of a political administration that has reduced the radicalness of the difficult problems which had been posed into an easy identity and which has once again brought about the emergence of the new thematics within the structure of old ideologies. It has in essence split the Movement by isolating one of its components and has eliminated the problem of its identity as a political subject through the social identification of a part of it.

In this way, the political critique has lost the depth which would have permitted it to be a *practical critique of power and of the state* and has reduced itself to the practice of *exclusion from both*; the emergence of the individual and of the commoner within the collective process of liberation has been driven back into the secure guaranteeistic ghetto of "let us live" and has been sent in search of marginal spaces, while the problem of political "legitimization" of the radicalness of behavior and forms of action has found the most traditional and poor foundations: exclusion, desperation and anger. Desperation as a collective identity, as a sign of recognition and along with it, impotence. It is a reassuring identity, both for itself and for others: "I'm an angered marginal, I have no need to correct my errors, when I'm hungry I scream," "he's a poor marginal, the harm he is capable of is small, he harms himself above all." It is at this point that the letters to *Lotta Continua* become a national occurrence, a literary boom and are printed in *Espresso*. Emargination and desperation undoubtedly exist, but this is not the point: here we are dealing with

something else, with a culture, with a language, with a profession: we are dealing with a large ideological filter through which everything wishing to remain “within the Movement” must pass; it is an obligatory form of expression, a language which gives legitimacy and which compels mimicry. This language has its cultivators and administrators the sacred teachers, inflexible and authoritarian in dictating the rules of the game, the ones who have suffered from the ‘shake-up’ and the ex-singers of the praises of the service orders, the experts of “human relationships” and the feminist professionals.

CRITIQUE OF THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN PEACE AND WAR

The debate on violence seems to be the first victim of this unhappy situation. It has an important point of departure: the vindication of the right to life, the rejection of sacrifice, of heroism and of bellicose rhetoric. Political critique is also critique of war; it is the rejection of *destruction in the name of a future ideal*, the rejection of the subordination of oneself to the “greater interest of all”: it is a rejection of that aspect of the emergence in which a woman behaves like a man, and everyone behaves like a soldier, where there is no room for playing, for celebrating, where the rights of daily life do not exist, and all of the destructive forces of society are concentrated in order to “build a better future.” The discourse, however, cannot end here, otherwise it becomes natal rhetoric. *This is because the critique of war is also the critique of peace, which war produces and reproduces internally, and it is critique of that part of society which is always armed in order to guarantee peace.*

In actuality it is — it can’t but be so — a critique of the obligatory distinction between peace and war, between army and society, between soldier and civilian.

Here too there is a central problem, a problem of the displacement of the subject and of our history, both collective and personal. If we in fact look at it with the eye of the militant and of the ideologist, the ‘77 Movement was the field of battle of fiercely opposed political groups — some militant, others pacifist: within this view, organizations of diverse natures — some created for war, others for peace — disputed the political space among themselves.

If we, however, view the phenomenon from its external aspects (in other words, if we look at the face it has shown of itself), or, if we look beyond the clash, at the cohabitation of tendencies of diverse natures and at the biographies of the comrades, we see, beyond the vetoes and categorical prescriptions, that

they slip from one role to another, that they combine and have histories normally incompatible and we then realize that the Movement of the last few years, in Italy as well as the rest of Europe, has intimately interwoven, in a continuous and systematic way, legal and illegal initiatives, both violent and non-violent, of masses and small groups, and has based its actions at one time on the laws of a state of peace, at another on a state of war: this fact is not lived within a single organization, but has crossed them all, overpowering them and forcing cohabitation of different organized groups with the same social subject.

This characteristic, this capacity to mix peace and war, to produce offensive initiatives without producing soldiers, has not only constituted the strength of the Movement, but this is an element central to its being a communist and eversive movement.

To erode the distinction between peace and war means placing oneself on the terrain of critique of the State, it means doubting the principles of legitimization of political power, which affirms a distinction between 'State' and 'society,' 'public' and 'private,' 'general' and 'private.' The general interest is armed whereas the private interest is evaluated on the basis of the laws that govern peace. The arming of the State guarantees the disarming of society; the fact that one part of society — the repressive and military apparatus — erects itself as a separate body and functions according to the laws of "war," guarantees that the rest of society live in "peace." "Peace" means only that "war" has become the *private matter* of a few men who thrive on it (the police and the military), or of those private men who take command over others, demonstrating through fact that they — being the guarantors of peaces of all — also govern it by being a ruling part of it. War guarantees peace, the threat of war conserves peace, within States and in relationship between different States. The concept of State in Western political culture seems to be founded on the distinction between peace and war.

VIOLENCE DOMINATES SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

This distinction between peace and war forces the definition of violence in categorical terms and, by making a *private matter* of a group of private men, it truncates the links with other forms of action and of social communication: '*violence*' is presented not for what it is — a feature of every human activity within the relationship of capital, present in every form of expression within the relationship of

of the relationship of power, but appears as an activity alongside all others, yet specialized and monstrous and which blackmails the rest.

Every relationship of power has its military aspect and every human relationship is primarily a relationship of power: for this reason the war machine sinks its roots into relationships of peace, and the violence which dominates them is given its general representation in the “infinite destructive power” of the modern State. *The repressive apparatus, with its war specialists, is a synthesis of the violence with dominates social relationships, and it is the armed guarantee of their reproductions: in order that salaried labor not be uncovered as violence, violence that is immersed in daily violence, it is presented to him as the profession of another “laborer,” the policeman.* Placing an upside down world back on its feet means revealing the violence that is hiding in daily life and confronting it for what it is, without giving in to extortion or terror, attacking the machine in order to sabotage it: it means learning to use violence, so as not to have to delegate it, so as not to be blackmailed; it means learning to recognize it or live with it.

WHO WILL DISSOLVE THE RED ARMY?

The Movement of the last few years has not been insurrectionalist or militaristic because it has not been pacifist, because it has not respected the succession of peace which prepares war or its apparatus (its ordered army) nor has it respected the succession of war which prepares new peace; because it has not seen violence concentrated in the Nth hour of the rendering of accounts — the blind, inhuman and abstract violence of armies — but has seen it unfolded and apprehended along the entire arc of the political struggle for liberation.

Two are the roads (and the “pacifists” are always demonstrating it) which can be taken: a) political struggle excludes the use of violence in its horizon and consequently respects the existing military apparatus, or else it hastens to organize one that is an alternative and an equivalent to the existing one, eventually passing on to a phase of war, open or “legitimate,” army against army, State against State (it is a story which we already know, and like parrots have learned to ask the question: who will dissolve the Red Army? who will fight against the State when the working class has become the State?); b) the process of liberation is not first “political” and then “military;” it learns the use of arms throughout its course; it frees the army to carry out the thousand functions of political struggle; it mixes in the life of everyone, the civilian with the

fighter; it forces everyone to learn the art of war or peace.

One cannot claim to live the process of communist liberation and to have the same relationship to violence, the same idea of beauty and of good and right, of desire, the same idea of normalcy, the same habits of a middle-aged bank clerk from Turin: living with earthquakes is living always with terrorism and in order not to have a “heroic” idea of war one must first of all avoid a beggarly idea of peace.

Pacifists such as Lama³ enlist policemen, while those “most to the left” ask for the legitimization of “violence of the masses,” of the “armed proletariat.” The actual Movement was more realistic and less bellicose, more human and heroic: it put peace up for debate because it criticized war and it shattered the criterion of delegation and legitimization because it rejected the army; it has done this with errors and inaccurate approximations, with terrible deviations, by cultivating absurd myths, all within a history. It has been contradictory, but it has learned and has improved a process that has modified reality more than an insurrection.

COMMUNIST CRITICISM OF DEMOCRACY

Consequently, a critique of politics is also a critique of the war/peace distinction. The peace to which we refer is the peace of democracy and the violence which it uses is “legitimate violence,” which the majority has delegated to the institutions of the State: to criticize that violence means to criticize the most developed principles of political legitimization, democracy. That is because the problem of legitimacy is the problem of the majority, and the problem of the majority is that of the institutions through which it expresses itself, in other words, the State: “majority” and “minority” belong to the universe of political thought, they divided their hold over the “common interest,” they live through the separation of “public” and “private,” of State and society, immersing their roots into the relationship of dominion which alone forces men to see themselves in terms of quantity. *The majority constitutes itself in order to administer power:* the more power is concentrated, the more the majority can do, and the less each individual can do; the more the “public” is well off, which is the interest of everyone, so much the more is the “private” poor, expropriated; the more dispossessed, destitute of expression, is the individual interest. Democracy is both the maximum development of State power, the maximum concentration of political power, and the seat of the uncontested command of the principle of the majority: *the point* is not that in the

modern State there is little democracy, that the minorities are not safeguarded; but — on the contrary — that there is a fight to the death against all that is not expressed in terms of majority or minority, which is not expressed in terms of power and administration. It is for this reason that the communist movement for liberation is outlawed everywhere, because it places itself outside of the democratic code, and this code defines the universe of politics in an exclusive manner. The radical Marxist criticism of democracy individuates the categories which are the foundation of the struggle between democracy and communism, between democratic power and communist liberation. The rest is destitution, entanglements *ad usum delphini*⁴.

In a democratic State it is obligatory to “fight for the majority” because without a majority nothing can be accomplished, not even the production of a pin, or the playing of a clarinet. Everything can be asked of the State, but without the State nothing can be done, and the relationship of power is presented as the universal language through which everyone condenses or translates himself. The struggle for the majority is obligatory, whatever majority it might be; and the majority of a small group defers to the majority of a larger group, while the parliamentary institutions develop throughout the social fabric, and growing armies of delegates learn the mystery of the conciliation of maximum divisibility of power with maximum concentration.

With the majority all is possible, without the majority nothing is possible: the only recognized social action is the struggle for the majority (“it is the dictatorship of the lawyers over American society” as was written by a journalist many years ago with regard to the US Congress); the only social relationship recognized is the one of assemblage, of majority and minority. Maximum concentration of power, its best administration. Capitalism concentrates the means of production and social wealth while democracy administers them according to a code, the code of the relationship between the majority and the minority; it’s the best code, but it belongs to the world of capitalism.

We do not know another code to “legitimize” political power; the socialist State moves within the same horizon. This means that we are fighting against political power, against the State-form, against democracy, against the universe of capitalist relationships of production, for *communism*.

1 *Lucio Colletti* was an Italian Western Marxist philosopher and academic.

2 *Lotta Continua* (LC) was one of the largest radical organizations to the left of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) up until it disbanded after the Rimini conference in 1976, with many of its former members becoming the loose dogs, without master or “party,” of autonomia.

3 *Luciano Lama*, a communist party tough, was chased out of La Sapienza University by students in 1977 for attempting to end their occupation, which then gave justification for the police to raid the university, which then gave justification for widespread rioting.

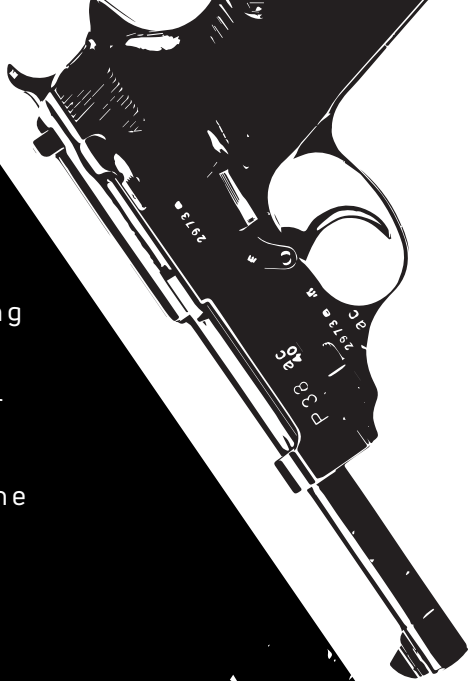
4 Means “for the use of the Dauphin” and was a collection of Greek and Latin texts concerning sovereign instruction.

This text was first appeared in English in the book **Autonomia: Post Political Politics** put out by Semiotext(e) and edited by Sylvère Lotringer and Christian Marazzi in 1979, the same year that Lucio Castellano was imprisoned.

The type was set in **Uni Neue**, a modern geometric sans serif typeface with a lot of character, for titles and non-body text elements and **Gill Sans MT Pro**, an older modern geometric sans serif typeface as an updated classic, for the body text.

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