

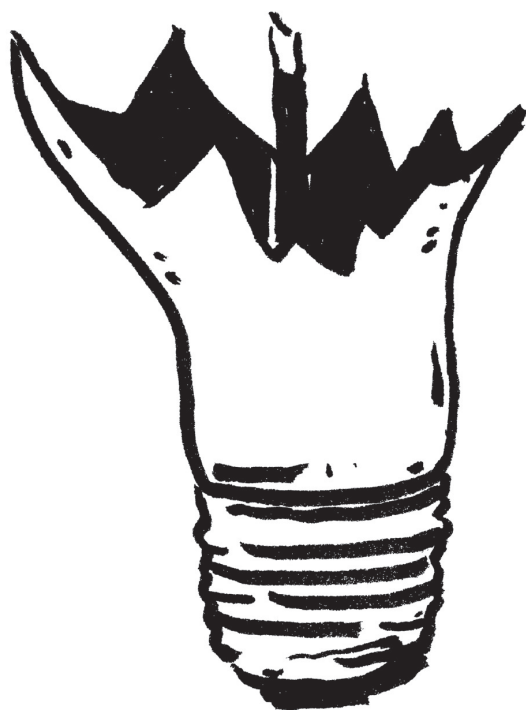
*Introduction by*  
*Franco “Bifo” Berardi*

# *Blackout*

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**NANNI BALESTRINI**

TRANSLATED BY PETER VALENTE



COMMUNE

EDITIONS

**BLACKOUT**

## COMMUNE EDITIONS

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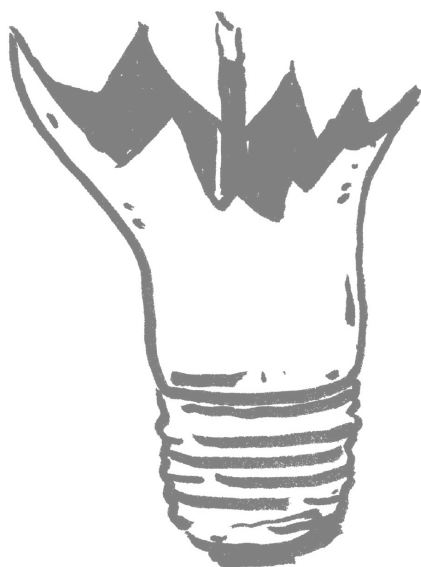
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FOR OUR PERSECUTED COMRADES  
7 APRIL 1980



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# *Introduction*

Blackout is when the electricity fails, the lights of the city suddenly shut down, and darkness spreads all over, as in New York city in the year 1977 (the year of the premonition, but also the year two ages collide).

*Blackout* is a poem about light and darkness. The contrast between eternal light and the sudden darkening of the landscape strikes the reader from the poem's outset.

In the late seventies Nanni Balestrini conceived the idea of a musical poem in collaboration with Demetrio Stratos, the singer of Area, whose exceptional voice was part of the Italian rebel movement's sound. Then Demetrio died, while Balestrini, the poet, was forced to exile in France. It was year 1979, when the Italian State banned, arrested, and persecuted a group of intellectuals, workers and activists known as *Potere Operaio* (Worker's Power). The poet was one of them.

In fact on the 7th of April, 1979, dozens of activists, workers, and writers were arrested under the false accusation of being the leaders of the Red Brigades: the

militant organization responsible for the kidnapping and murder of Aldo Moro, President of Democrazia Cristiana, the nation's governing party. Those activists, workers, and writers were actually guilty of a different crime: the crime of supporting the progressive movement of *autonomia operaia*. That day was a watershed in the history of Italian society. In this country, "1968" had lasted for ten years. This is the historical peculiarity of Italy: the long-lasting wave of social struggle had countered capitalist aggression until 1977, and beyond. After nine years of continuous social conflict and cultural mobilization, the year 1977 was marked by a widespread insurrection of a sort: more dadaist than bolshevik, more poetic than violent.

In Bologna, Rome, Milan, and many other cities in that year, thousands and thousands of students, artists, unemployed young people, and precarious workers staged a sort of ironic rebellion which ranged from carnivalesque parades, to acts of semiotic sabotage, to skirmishes with police, to peaceful and not so peaceful occupations of entire quarters of cities.

After the '77 insurrection of creativity, the Stalinists of the Red Brigades converged with the apparatus of the State in the attempt to annihilate the movement, and to enlist as many militants as possible in the project of military assault against the so called "heart of the State." The convergence of State apparatus and red terrorism resulted in the isolation and in the final defeat of the movement. Blackout.

If we want to understand the peculiarity of this enduring wave of social movements in Italy, reading the poems and the novels of Nanni Balestrini can be useful — even if Balestrini has never been a storyteller, or a chronicler of neorealist descent.

Instead, Nanni Balestrini is simultaneously the most radically formalist poet of the Italian scene and the most explicitly engaged in a political sense. He follows a methodology of composition that may be named *recombination*, as he is always recombining fragments taken from the ongoing public discourse (newspapers, leaflets, advertising, street voices, politician's speeches, scientific texts, and so on). But simultaneously he is *remixing* those fragments in a rhythmic wave that reverberates with passions and expectations and rage.

The peculiarity of the Italian movement of what would be called *autonomia* may be found in the concept of refusal of labor: workers' struggles were viewed from the point of view of their ability to destroy political control, but also and mainly from the point of view of their ability to advance

knowledge and the technological replacement of human labor time in the process of production. The reduction of labor time has always been the main goal of the Italian autonomist workerist movement.

The words “*operai e studenti uniti nella lotta*” (workers and students united in the struggle) were not simply a rhetorical call for solidarity, but the expression of the consciousness that the workers were fighting against exploitation and students bore the force of science and technology: tools for the emancipation of time from the slavery of waged work.

In this social and political framework, literature was conceived as middle ground between labor and refusal of labor. Literature may be viewed as labor, according to the structuralist vision purported by the French formalists of *Tel Quel*, but literature may also be viewed as an attempt to emancipate the rhythm of language from the work of signification. Poetic language is suspended between these two attractors.

This double dimension is the defining feature of Balestrini’s poetics: formalism of the machine, and dynamism of the movement. Cold recombination of linguistic fragments, and hot emotionality of the rhythm. Although the event is hot, this poetical treatment transforms it into a verbal crystal, and the combination of verbal crystals gives way to the energy of a sort of a-pathetic emotion.

Since the sixties, Italian culture had been traversed by the cold fire of a certain kind of *sperimentalismo* that was named Neoavanguardia, in order to distinguish that movement from the historical avant-garde that in the first decade of the century burnt with a passionate fire, aggressive and destructive. Italian *sperimentalismo* was inspired by Husserl’s phenomenology and the French *nouveau roman*; it was influenced as well by Frankfurt School critical theory, and by the colors of Maoism spreading everywhere in those years.

Umberto Eco, Edoardo Sanguineti, Alberto Arbasino, and many others were involved in Neoavanguardia, whose style was based on the elegant game of quotations, winking and hinting. Then, from its cold fire emerged the angelical and diabolical face of Nanni Balestrini, cool head and warm heart. Or, contrarily, cool heart and hot head, who knows.

Anyway, Balestrini managed to keep a cold experimental style while dealing with very hot subjects and verbal objects. Angelic cool of the recombinant style, and diabolical hotness of the events, of the characters, of the gestures. Violence is often onstage in his writings. The well-

intentioned violence of the autonomous of Fiat workers in *Vogliamo tutto* (*We Want Everything*); the livid violence of the precarious, marginalized, and unemployed in *La violenza illustrata*; and the mad violence without historical or social explanation in *I furiosi* and *Sandokan*. In those novels violence is recounted without sentimentality and without identification. No condemnation, no celebration, a purely rhythmic interpretation of good and evil, of the progressive and of the aggressive forces that explode in the streets, in the factories, in the campuses, and in daily life.

According to a widespread common place, the seventies are recorded as the decade of violence. Yes, since 1975 many people have been killed on both fronts of the battle, when a bill passed by the Parliament allowed policemen to shoot and kill if they felt in danger. All through the years 1969-76, activists and students were killed by fascists and cops. At a certain point they decided to react, to build molotov cocktails and take up the gun. As a consequence, cops and fascists and some politicians and corporate persons were attacked, some killed.

It must be said that in those years violence was highly ritualized and charged with symbolic meaning. Nevertheless, in the following decades, and particularly in the recent years of this new century, violence is far more pervasive than it was in the seventies. It is less emphasized, less advertised, less ritualized, but it percolates in the daily behaviour, in labor relations, in the rising tide of feminicide and child abuse, and in the wave of political hatred that never becomes open protest, never deploys as a movement, but flows through the folds of public discourse.

Balestrini was literary witness in the theatre of social conflict, but simultaneously he was an actor on the stage. Nevertheless he has managed to be ironic and distant, while being involved body and soul. This is why his literary gaze is both complicit and detached. His poetics have nothing to do with the psychological introspection, or dramatic expressiveness. His work consists in combining words and freezing actions into dance. The narration strips events of their passional content, pure gesturing devoid of content. But the dance turns into breathing and breathing turns into rhythm, and emotion comes back from the side of language.

Balestrini is not uttering words that come out from his soul (does Balestrini have a soul?). Words are but verbal objects proceeding from the outside world. Voices are broken, fragmented, assembled in sequences whose

rhythm is sometimes gentle, aristocratic, and ironic; sometimes furious, violent, and crazy. The act of the poet does not consist in finding words, but in combining their sound, their meaning and their emotional effect.

Since the sixties Balestrini started writing poetry for computer, and his declared intention was already in those years to make poetry as an art of recombination, not an art of expression. The computing poet combines verbal detritus and musical waste grabbed at the flowing surface of the immense river of social communication. He assembles decontextualised fragments that gain their meaning and their energy from the explosive force of the combination (contact, mixture, collage, cut-up).

Following this poetic methodology Balestrini has traversed five decades of the Italian history, transforming events and thoughts into a sort of *opera aperta* (work that stays always open to new interpretations). He has shaped furies and utopias, euphorias and tragedies that have marked the history of the country.

*Blackout* is the work in which the relation between the history of the country and the history of the movement is more directly integrated with the life of the poet himself, the work in which his personal sentiments seep more visibly through words and silences.

*franco bifo berardi*

December 2016



INSTIGATION (ANDANTE)

# *1. Blackout*

A LOSS OF MEMORY OR AN EVENT OF FACT





1.

in front of a landscape of immense beauty that opens onto the glaciers

the view is incomparable in good weather but often obscured by fog

superb panorama of the seracs and crevasses of the glacier valley and the surrounding mountains

magnificent panorama of the immense glacier and the glittering peaks that dominate

with a wonderful view of the Aiguille du Midi which appears very close and the valley and the mountains to the O. e a N

to the plains of Lombardy in Milan and the Apennines and on the opposite side to Lyon and to the Cevennes

cloaked in the immense silence of the dazzling glacier under a clear blue sky

ruffled by waves of ice and by the seracs like a river tumbling into the valley

the gaze distinguishes the Oberland peaks on one side and the maritime Alps on the opposite

the gaze sinks from one side or the other around two slopes

razor sharp colors frayed cloud shapes full of rain flashes of light blue

a river of blue jeans

2.

the peak farthest from the valley resembles a dome but is in reality a  
crest of snow 150 meters tall and a few meters wide

the gaze sinks from one side or the other around two slopes

the dominant peak is greater than 3000 meters from the valley floor a  
straight line 12 kilometers tall

to the plains of Lombardy in Milan and the Apennines and on the  
opposite side to Lyon and to the Cevennes

even during the day the temperature is below zero

the view is incomparable in good weather but often obscured by fog

framed by a splendid sky the result of harsh contrasts between summer  
dusk and threat of storm

for days a poster illuminated the walls of Milan

dark clouds swollen with rain transitory showers that lasted the evening  
then two rainbows

a river of blue jeans

in heaven at last a glimmer of light there will be no flood

a segment of Milan is deadlocked

3.

on the vast expanse of glistening snow

to the plains of Lombardy in Milan and the Apennines and on the opposite side to Lyon and the Cevennes

there appeared a glimpse of blue in the sky and the sunset illuminated the crowded Arena

the bleachers glistening with water

a segment of Milan is deadlocked

the Arena of Milan was never so crowded the people so agitated

the rite is all set

the crater of the Arena has become a giant container

a river of blue jeans

a carpet that smothers the bleachers and descends to completely hide the lawn

thousands hundreds of thousands of voices for communicating

a carpet of shoulders of heads and arms that seem like agitated waves under gusts of wind

for days a poster illuminated the walls of Milan

4

in a constant restless transfer from one to another entrance from the  
bleachers to the main floor without mercy for the bed of grass the  
woven cloth

the rite is all set

all the young people all the colors are a great shock to the eyes

for days a poster illuminated the walls of Milan

tens of thousands of young people crowd the bleachers and the field  
finally even the woven cloth

a photograph of a paper heart made by crushing a concert program

marginalized student workers come from afar they are not distinct from  
the mass of pale blue jeans

a segment of Milan was deadlocked

at a certain point even the trail of woven cloth was flooded with young  
men and women

thousands hundreds of thousands of voices for communicating

each time more unpredictable and profound

because it marked the beginning of an era that will continue to return

5.

explore the artificial possibilities of the voice to reach the extreme  
boundaries of the song

thousands hundreds of thousands of voices for communicating

the voice is silent

a photograph of a paper heart made by crushing a concert program

that he could use his voice like an instrument

the rite is all set

as in May 1968 and only recently declared null and void

the public has shown itself in a different form and is altogether  
different now

all chances for recovery went up in smoke

because it marked the beginning of an era that will continue to return

they all had to admit that the ill-fated spirit of '68 had returned

much to the sorrow of many of us we are back to year zero

6.

addio with a *rock*

a photograph of a paper heart made by crushing a concert program

it is time to put your heart at ease

much to the sorrow of many of us we are back to year zero

looking back over the last ten years it is easy to find the reason for this  
stupor

you would like to ignore the consistency of the revolutionary so as to  
dream in peace

the proof is in this stupor

because it marked the beginning of an era that will continue to return

year zero because every previous cultural hegemony imposed on the  
new generations as in 1968 must recognize its own weakness

the unpleasant year of 1968 is not yet over

yet at the same time there is an end to all pretensions of cultural  
hegemony on the part of young people

the public has shown itself in a different form and is altogether  
different now

7.

as a nightmare of culture and society

you would like to ignore the consistency of the revolutionary so as to  
dream in peace

the end of this bad literature of recovery that was itself a pretense of  
hegemony

the public has shown itself in a different form and is altogether  
different now

the proof lies in the magnitude of the responses that the mass media  
has reported

the Arena is enough to stop the nightmare

who would like to continue to sell products that nobody wants anymore

much to the sorrow of many of us we are back to year zero

each day in the Italian factories more and more is happening

the ill-fated year 1968 is not yet over

there are new animals working in Fiat who recall their past their  
private lives their intolerance of the authorities

Fiat fears their hatred of the factory



8.

power on the one hand young people on the other

the ill-fated year 1968 is not yet over

they tried to recall all the young people

the Arena is enough to stop the nightmare

all that in 1968 was still latent and indeterminate has now radicalized

you would like to ignore the consistency of the revolutionary so as to  
dream in peace

for the new workers the factory is Agnelli's they tell me it's better to  
make some money and get on with your life

they are not thinking about the day they will leave Fiat

the work you do each day is boring and harmful

Fiat fears their hatred of the factory

and that means the music the stereo travel reading going to the cinema

the Fiat bosses have never seen the workers laugh and it is an outrage  
to our Lady

9.

the dream of recovery was a dream of false consciousness

the Arena is enough to stop the nightmare

others smoke marijuana and laugh like crazed people

the Fiat bosses have never seen the workers laugh and it is an outrage  
to our Lady

feminists sneer every time a male gives orders

it is the world of use-value that conflicts with the factory and production

above all the manager feels their contempt on his skin

Fiat fears their hatred of the factory

there are gays that make faces they write Long Live Renato Zero on  
the walls

by 1979 even hope is exhausted the factory is no longer the place  
where the fight for power is waged

study travel play become an artist or go to India

they are not thinking about the day they will leave Fiat

10.

the television commentator says these young people come from  
another planet

it is the world of use-value that conflicts with the factory and production

and are convinced there is no possible tool that can modify their private  
life

they are not thinking about the day they will leave Fiat

off to work but as soon as the siren sounds they flee like hares and if they  
can they go on sick leave

in the city disrupted by immigrants dehumanized in the ghettos where  
the quality of life is tragic

the salary is insufficient and the comparison between the rise in prices  
and our needs proves this

the Fiat bosses have never seen the workers laugh and it is an outrage to  
our Lady

no longer attached to your job as during the times of the economic miracle

by 1979 even hope is exhausted the factory is no longer the place where  
the fight for power is waged

11.

young people exit the factory and enter the spectacle

by 1979 even hope is exhausted the factory is no longer the place  
where the struggle for power is waged

in fact 1969 is over the mass of workers have blown away the myth of  
the big company where the employee had everything and to which it  
was linked by a professional work ethic

in the city disrupted by immigrants dehumanized in the ghettos where  
the quality of life is tragic

the salary is no longer measured as in the previous generation there is  
a disproportion

between the services performed and the amount received

it is the world of use-value that conflicts with the factory and production

12.

there is no hope in the factory

in the city disrupted by immigrants dehumanized in the ghettos where  
the quality of life is tragic





INSTIGATION (ANDANTE)

## *2. Blackout*

THE EXTINGUISHING OF ALL STAGE LIGHTS TO END A PLAY OR SCENE





13.

the vocal chords do not vibrate as a result of the air pushed out by the lungs but from impulses in the center of the brain

transplanting the spinal chord is a most difficult operation

the voice as an instrument of drives behind which there is an entire universe of desires

attentive to the area that lies between the psychic universe and the communication links between thought and word

the development of an absolute vocal system brought to the limits of discovery

each day it is necessary to completely wash away the blood

as someone said it was a *performance* that broke through the current communication gap

the things I do are spoken about by everyone

sing with the voice to liberate it from the conditioning of a cultural prison

an attempt to free ourselves from the condition of listener and viewer to which culture

and politics have accustomed us

when the lights went out the *niggers* raged boasted a black youth

after a few minutes the night was illuminated by fires the streets invaded by looters

14.

hospitalized since April 25<sup>th</sup> in critical condition at Memorial Hospital  
in New York with bone marrow aplasia

an attempt to free ourselves from the condition of listener and viewer to  
which culture and politics have accustomed us

who considers every expressive frontier impoverished and ventures  
beyond without fear

each day it's necessary to completely wash away the blood

this work should not be assumed a listening that suffers passively

transplanting the spinal chord is a most difficult operation

bonfires in the streets an explosion of Afro-Latin vitality a torchlight  
procession to lofty Broadway

the music was drowned out by the howling of alarms and the sound of  
broken glass

for the vast majority in the streets it is a festival a Christmas night a New  
Years in July

after a few minutes the night was illuminated by fires the streets invaded  
by looters

prices skyrocket but there won't be pricing when we're finished Broad-  
way won't exist

a woman called me and said they are travelling on Bushwick Avenue  
like buffalos

15.

like a game in which lives are at risk

each day it is necessary to completely wash away the blood

it's as if a fever had struck them they came out with trucks vans caravans  
anything that could walk

a woman called me and said they are travelling on Bushwick avenue like  
buffalos

at 9:30 pm the lights went out at 9:40 pm they were already ravaging the  
shops

we're going to take what we want and what we want is what we need

in the Bronx inside an Ace Pontiac reception room they knock down a steel  
door take 50 new cars start the motors simultaneously and then walk away

after a few minutes the night was illuminated by fires the streets invaded  
by looters

the metal grilles for the protection of shop windows are unhinged with  
crowbars knocked down by cars and torn with brute force

a fifty-year-old woman with a shopping bag enters a store saying today she  
shops for free

a third street was demolished as if it had been bombed reported a  
police official

the music was drowned out by the howling of alarms and the sound of  
broken glass

16.

they park hired trucks in front of a store and calmly upload sofa beds  
refrigerators televisions

we're going to take what we want and what we want is what we need

who wants televisions shouts one discovering stock under the dim light  
of the candles on top are guitars and a sax announces another

the music was drowned out by the howling of alarms and the sound of  
broken glass

on 111<sup>th</sup> street a crowd moves hurriedly amid the ruins of the supermar-  
ket like hundreds of ants carrying out the goods

when I left the area was on fire and the flames seized whatever small  
amount the looters had left behind

destroyed were pawn shops for jewelry a supermarket liquor stores it is  
like an all-out war

a woman called me and said they are travelling on Bushwick avenue  
like buffalos

a young woman arose from the crowd and introduced herself as  
Afreaka Omfress she said it really is wonderful they are all out together  
on the streets there is a *party* atmosphere

a fifty-year-old woman with a shopping bag enters a store saying today  
she shops for free

17.

what the fuck do I care about the Law

a fifty-year-old woman with a shopping bag enters a store saying today  
she shops for free

the shelves of the new supermarket Fedco glistened white and empty  
while a mush of various foods stained the floors

when I left the area was on fire and the flames seized the small amount  
the looters had left behind

jets of black water from the broken hydrants swept away what remained  
of the plunder to the center of the street

we're going to take what we want and what we want is what we need

18.

a young man with two saxophones stopped me and said five years ago  
in Brooklyn I had to pawn my sax now I'll start playing again

when I left the area was on fire and the flames seized the small amount  
the looters had left behind

19.

at this point answer yes

a new concept is emerging it is the concept of direct counterpower



20.

at this point the question you asked me could be rephrased in these terms

in the first place the definitive fall of the state's ability to mediate power  
by law

if the shift in the status of the worker is a shift that allows him to bring  
political problems to the attention of the interior

a new concept is emerging it is the concept of direct counterpower

the force of the movement its continuity its determination to establish  
from time to time degrees of analysis that correspond to degrees of  
political activity

the relationship has become a relationship of power

21.

namely the problem of power as the fundamental problem

the relationship has become a relationship of power

disintegration confusion chaos and general unrest there's no end in sight and it's doubtful anyone would deny this

it is the level to which he said the internal contradictions of the bourgeoisie have fallen

but the fact remains the movement is obstinate and not just capable of renewing itself

it is a new concept emerging it is the concept of direct counterpower

to continually renew the conceptual forms in which it expresses the struggle

they have turned all the struggles in this direction

and I believe that the entire series of factors that we are beginning to understand now as conclusive confirms the struggle of the worker

in the first place the definitive collapse of the state's ability to mediate power by law

22.

once the problem is exposed we must resolve it by any means

it is the level to which he said the internal contradictions of the bourgeoisie have fallen

from the point of view of capital there is a continuous mobilization of force

in the first place the definitive collapse of the state's ability to mediate power by law

in which large demographic and geographic spaces require continuous restructuring

any historical analysis that we bring forward on the large reality of the proletarian world proves this

that is to say the marginal elements that we are able to find again in the crisis have completely fallen

the relationship has become a relationship of power

where the crisis continuously acts as a factor in the restructuring of class

they have turned all the struggles in this direction

reentry will occur on a strip of land between 50 degrees North and 50 degrees South

the reentry of the 85-ton cylinder is now expected by

23.

concerning this issue I am convinced today for the first time that our problem is really an American problem

they have turned all the struggles in this direction

obviously if we are talking about needs historical necessity constituted nothing immediately humanistic about it

any historical analysis that we bring forward on the large reality of the proletarian world proves this

the ratio of present needs to power is a fundamental point

it is the level to which he said the internal contradictions of the bourgeoisie have fallen

striking it with a speed of 60-90 meters per second

the strip bombarded by debris will be 6000 kilometers long and 160 wide

the impact with the dense atmospheric layers will certainly cause it to break in two

the reentry of the 85-ton cylinder is now expected by

and then a myriad of other fragments most of which will burn up

the flying observatory would have had to stay up there until at least the end of

24.

what is the American standard...well Marx already defines it in his writings on Carlyle

any historical analysis that we bring forward on the large reality of the proletarian world proves this

the us space lab has gone out of orbit

the flying observatory would have had to stay up there until at least the end of

the space lab in orbit around the earth for five years

the body of the lab itself the solar observatory

is going to fall on its head it was launched by the Americans to study the sun

the reentry of the 85-ton cylinder is now expected by

it's likely that debris weighing two tons will reach the earth

heaven is alarmed if the Skylab falls it can strike a city

three quarters of an area covered by the ocean but where you find the major capitals of the world

the strip bombarded by debris will be 6000 kilometers long and 160 wide





PERSECUTION (MINUET)

### *3. Blackout*

SUPPRESSION CENSORSHIP CONCEALMENT ETC.





25.

I write to you opposite the balcony from whence I contemplate the  
eternal light whose radiant fire slowly fades on the distant horizon

I often imagine the world turned upside down and the sky the sun the  
ocean the entire earth aflame in the void

I assume a thousand arguments I overlook a thousand ideas I reject  
then go back to choose again finally I write tear up cancel and often  
lose the morning and evening

perhaps I think too much but it seems impossible to me that our  
homeland is so ravaged in our time

if I had sold the faith denied the truth busied my wits instead do you  
believe I would have lived a more honorable and peaceful life

you persecute your persecutors with the truth

but when I pass before the venerable poor who grow weak as their  
veins are sucked by the omnipotent opulence

and when I see so many men ill imprisoned hungry and all the suppli-  
ant ones under the terrible scourge of certain laws

no I cannot reconcile myself I shout for revenge

I know my name is on the wanted list

Doctor Pietro Calogero our substitute magistrate for the republic ap-  
proves the actions of the penal procedure no.710 / 79 A

with regard to articles 252 253 254 of the penal code we order the arrest of

26.

not laws but arbitrary courts not accusers not defenders on the contrary  
spies of thought new and inventive crimes committed by those who are  
not punished and punishment endured without appeal

I know my name is on the wanted list

meanwhile this occasion has unmasked all the petty tyrants who swore  
to me that they would eviscerate our friendship

you persecute your persecutors with the truth

after all I live as calmly as one can but to be honest I gnaw at my  
thoughts please send me a book

I often imagine the world turned upside down and the sky the sun the  
ocean the entire earth aflame in the void

accused of a crime under articles PP. 110 112 # 1 270 of the criminal code  
concerning a dispute with each other and with other people being in  
number not less than five

carried out in homes and adjacent closed rooms in the middle of the  
night organized and directed a group called Workers' Power and other  
similar groups variously referred to as

with regard to articles 252 253 254 of the penal code we order the arrest of

but connected to each other and related to all the so-called autonomous  
workers' organizations to direct the violent overthrow of the systems that  
constitute the state

27.

redirect your letters from Nice to Provence because tomorrow I'm leaving for France and who knows I may travel much farther

you persecute your persecutors with the truth

either by propaganda or the incitement to mass illegality by the practice of the CD

to direct the violent overthrow of the systems that constitute the state

bombings of prison barracks of offices of political parties and of associated groups and the CC. DD. dens of illegal labor

expropriations and searches proletarian fires and corruption of the public good kidnappings and sequestering of persons beatings wounds

both by training in the use of small arms ammunitions explosives and by incendiary devices

with regard to articles 252 253 254 of the penal code we order the arrest of

and finally because of illegal acts of violence and armed attacks against certain of the objectives specified above

and it is imposed because of the exceptional gravity of the threat to the state and its institutions

capture is mandatory in view of the type of crime

carried out in houses and adjacent closed rooms in the middle of the night

28.

the high degree of social danger inherent in the choice of implements and the method of execution

expropriations and searches proletarian fires and corruption of the public good kidnappings and sequestering of persons beatings wounds

sufficient evidence of guilt can be inferred from the laws as formulated in the index books

carried out in houses and adjacent rooms in the middle of the night

1) the copious documentation seized or acquired above all those parts that celebrate and program the violence and the armed struggle

the final goal being the general overthrow of the existing system

they will arise and assert themselves subversive acts by their nature promote and incite the violent overthrow of the system

to direct the violent overthrow of the systems that constitute the state

2) from the Red Autonomous magazines that reveal counter-information and from many other newspapers brochures flyers and from writings that contain subversive content

and it is imposed because of the exceptional gravity of the threat to the state and its institutions

29.

3) the testimonies and the investigative findings from P.18 show the nature the method and the means of criminal activity carried out by each defendant

and it is imposed because of the exceptional gravity of the threat to the state and its institutions

both the associations between the one and the other and their common anti-judiciary stance

the ultimate goal being the general overthrow of the existing system

finally both their affiliation and actual participation as executives and organizers in the groups make it easier to impose a felony

expropriations and searches proletarian fires corruption of the public good kidnappings and sequestering of persons beatings and wounds

30.

in Padua until April 7, 1979 and subsequently up to the date of capture  
the final goal being the general overthrow of the existing system

31.

explain to us now what it means to adopt a superior mobilization than  
that of the opponent

on this occasion the Italian press as a whole



32.

summons the defendant to provide a defense with regard to the following evidence against him

where opinion is no longer based on critical judgment but becomes some other thing

according to delusional projects of subversion a new October Revolution on the horizon

the Italian press as a whole apart from a few sporadic exceptions and some isolated symptoms of nervousness

has demonstrated maturity a few years ago it was still in the dark

because we know almost everything we need to know

33.

get to the point what does it mean to create impenetrable sanctuaries

we know almost everything we need to know and we don't need lessons

here's a bit of Hemingway *For Whom the Bell Tolls* is considered  
somewhat *middlebrow* compared to *A Farewell to Arms*

a tiny fanatical elite supported by sleazy backers

frustrated victims of '68 spent in vain refugee politics without patience  
and without modesty engaged in a blind race taking the short cut  
always without a gun

on this occasion the Italian press as a whole

has hinted that the accused were found guilty before the magistrate  
had finished collecting the evidence

Italian justice is not guilty of foul play

as those French say who without embarrassment always affirm with  
certainty those propositions concerning remote facts and persons  
unknown

where opinion is no longer based on critical judgment

34.

let us move forward which means attacking the enemy on the territory  
favorable to us and inviting them to immerse themselves in our territory

a tiny fanatical elite that attempt to exorcize their frustrations supported  
by sleazy backers

well known connections provide irrefutable evidence in the procession  
of mournful events

opinion is no longer based on critical judgment it has become some  
other thing

thought and action in a lucid and orderly probative context appear like  
inseparable moments of a merciless unity and a rough subversive design

there won't therefore be a bit of wisdom other than much caution  
behind the silence and obscurity of intellectuals

tolerably cannibalistic and regurgitating auto-indulgence and auto-com-  
plaisance writing and speaking between draws and finished sentences

fewer constitutional false alarms at least on the job because we know  
almost everything we need to know

the judge must work in peace

not guilty of foul play they say lightly and in bad faith

among the dead that come to life perhaps the most sinister is the most  
constant and the least sexy

he has no personality he is only an arm driven by a mind that is foreign

35.

the decade of struggles that are now behind us form the principal  
background for the activity of underground groups

as those who really engage in foul play say lightly or in bad faith

this poem should not be published because it is also a political manifesto

a bit of wisdom other than much caution behind the silence and obscurity  
of intellectuals

it will then be a partial and short-sighted point of view however it is  
someone without money nor factories nor business in trade who does  
the job of writing

that attempt to exorcize their frustrations

proving an excellent guardian of secluded gardens also serves as a scarecrow

is a dead man reduced to a dumb automaton faithfully following orders

in homage to his docility also takes the nickname Sucker

has no personality he is only an arm driven by a mind that is foreign

but you should never feed him salt that would make him immediately con-  
scious of his state without a moment's delay he would run to the tomb

36.

it is important to provide all citizens with a legally guaranteed  
institutional channel through which the accomplishment of the duty  
to report becomes less difficult

behind the silence and obscurity of intellectuals

the system requires him to embrace a corpse and glue his lips to theirs  
in order to be enlightened

without a moment's delay he would run to the tomb

the dead body does not seem to accept this forced awakening and  
usually wriggles sticking out his tongue

quickly then the sorcerer cut him with a clean bite

the dead man finally awakes as a slave

he has no personality he is only an arm driven by a mind that is foreign

equipped with most of the reactions of a beast of burden who will  
eat anything

with the same obedient detachment he can behave like a good assassin

in this case he is zombie-like in other words like a boorish specter

is a dead man reduced to a dumb automaton faithfully following orders





REPRESSION (RONDO)

## *4. Blackout*

A MOMENTARY LOSS OF CONSCIOUSNESS OR VISION





37.

there were electrical engineers who installed two additional floodlights in front of my cell

the 500-watt lights were mounted at a distance of about 5 meters and aimed directly at the windows of the cell

38.

when I realized that I couldn't sleep under the bright lights I began to read through the night until morning

the guards on the night shift shouted at me to remove the cover from the window

after a week I remained in an apathetic trance where I could only sleep for a few moments at a time

the 500 watt lights were mounted at a distance of about 5 meters and aimed directly at the windows of my cell

the sleep that overtook me during the day was systematically disrupted by the prison routine that began at 6AM.

from the night of August 1<sup>st</sup> three floodlights illuminated my cell every day

39.

I saw the first flurry of snow at the end of August

from the night of August 1<sup>st</sup> three floodlights illuminated my cell every day

I was very nervous and unable to read I couldn't retain any thoughts for a long time nor reflect on my situation

like at the cinema when the film ends

I was in the grip of a dangerous disorientation my sense of space and time was slowing down

the 500-watt lights were mounted at a distance of about 5 meters and aimed directly at the windows of the cell

the more I sharpened my focus the more the view became vague and immobile

threads tangled and transformed into spots whose dance moved ever more slowly

if my concentration waned the glass melted into single dots that swirled crazily

the guards on the night shift shouted at me to remove the cover from the window

40.

I was afraid when the snow came into the cell

like at the cinema when the film ends

white threads stirred at the window's double bars and drifted through  
the openings

guards on the night shift shouted at me to remove the cover from  
the window

it was like looking through a milky glass sheet

with my eyes closed I walked back and forth in the cell four steps forward  
four steps back

I didn't want them to think I was clutching the bars or looking outside  
and planning an escape

from the night of August 1<sup>st</sup> three floodlights illuminated my cell every day

the contours of the roof and the wall that faces the courtyard for the vans  
were cancelled in the storm

threads are entangled and transformed into spots whose dance moved  
ever more slowly

forty or fifty thousand people a vast tide of colors and sectors in constant  
motion

split up minute after minute in front of the cables that no longer  
transmitted the occasional sounds to the vacant air and to life

41.

I close my eyes and start to sing

threads are entangled and transformed into spots whose dance moves  
ever more slowly

I sang my repertoire then I started the monologues

with my eyes closed I walked back and forth in the cell four steps  
forward four steps back

I invented dialogues for two characters that spoke different languages  
like at the cinema when the film ends

there are those who make love who smoke there are those who  
merely exist

but perhaps something already broke inside each of them

the perception of being in this knot over the Italian situation for years  
it remains unresolved the problem intact

split up minute after minute in front of the cables that no longer trans-  
mitted the occasional sounds to the vacant air and to life

now in the stadium there are sixty thousand people a mixture of lights  
gestures sounds

with so much anger

42.

I improvised two characters

with my eyes closed I walked back and forth in the cell four steps  
forward four steps back

someone gets up from the sea of young men on the lawn

with so much anger

hundreds imitate him they do not know what has happened

everyone looks at you and at everyone else

you don't hear anything the music is absorbed by the rough cloth or  
perhaps by both the rough cloth and the mass of people I don't know

split up minute after minute in front the cables no longer transmitted  
the occasional sounds to the vacant air and to life

they only want to keep count see how many there are we are one  
hundred thousand

as I stood up I felt a gust of wind and heard music that seemed to  
issue directly from the center of the sky

an experience that once again reveals itself as dislocated  
diminished postponed

but perhaps something already broke inside each of them

43.

on the slopes they ignite a thousand fires

everyone looks at you and at everyone else

it's the music that felt like a break in the rules of the game

but perhaps something already broke inside each of them

his irreducible voice like yours resigns from every inhuman thing that surrounds you

passing between the restless bodies almost running all the space before them pushed aside

if a new vocal system comes into existence it should be experienced by all and not just one person

with so much anger

pour salt on my anger you have awakened me to a world that is no longer mine

as I stood up I felt a gust of wind and heard music that seemed to issue directly from the center of the sky

we are inadequate without arms traps access to candles

a storm is approaching lightning over the sea and above the row of trees



44.

it was written that this concert represents the desire not to give in to  
death

as I stood up I felt a gust of wind and heard music that seemed to issue  
directly from the center of the sky

I loved Jonathan but his death has only strengthened my will to fight

passing between the restless bodies almost running all the space before  
them pushed aside

all of them looked in search of a familiar face a friend to greet

everyone looks at you and at everyone else

finally we started off together with our friends loaded with sacks of stuff  
dogs pots etc.

I woke up in the morning completely covered with red spots

just outside Firenze near Siena under a diabolical sun a friend's car  
breaks down

a storm is approaching lightning over the sea and above the row of trees

we decided to move on close together following my lead up to Colle Val  
d'Elsa where we arrived at a bar and ate waiting for the tow truck

and as a consequence sleep extended the state of general boredom  
accompanied by yawning

45.

a common fear of being alone

passing between the restless bodies almost running all the space before  
them pushed aside

in short I am always the last to arrive to get a shot at the ball to go for a  
swim in the sea to make provisions

and as a consequence sleep extended the state of general boredom  
accompanied by yawning

at about 7PM we arrive at the house we are here because it is surrounded  
by 2 or 300 cows and calves grazing in the pasture

insects of all types woodpecker nests in the window birds dead pheasants  
and wood pigeons whizzing past all of us

almost terrified we worked hard but Pippo was not afraid and succeeded  
in breaking the lock so we were able to access the house

a storm is approaching lightning over the sea and above the row of trees

I rush to shut the car windows and anything else

so here we are in this beautiful summerhouse where things seem pos-  
sible there is a table and wooden benches where you can read or relax it  
is as if you were here

here in these endless fields we eat delicious melons found in large  
quantities at the point of ripeness

I woke up in the morning completely covered with red spots

46.

where we find that 1) there is no water 2) there is no light 3) the lawn in front of the house is full of cow shit 4) raging horseflies

insects of all types woodpecker nests in the window birds dead pheasants and wood pigeons whizzing past all of us

but the spaghetti with zucchini is good and finally we go to bed

I woke up in the morning completely covered with red spots

the wonderful sea and then the sweet desert sand a forest of oaks and pines descending on the abandoned beach

seated at the large table on the porch with a gas lamp in front I begin to write to you

it was the hives an allergic type reaction so bring down the antihistamines

and as a consequence sleep extended the state of general boredom accompanied by yawning

it seems there is great joy in Texas or who knows where with the full moon on the wheat fields and the cows and you finally crouched in a corner asleep

so here we are in this beautiful summerhouse where everything seem possible there is a table and wooden benches where you can read or relax it is as if you were here

even the giant computers that follow the course of operations both

financial and commercial of the large Wall Street banks have finally  
come to a halt

only the torch of the Statue of Liberty stays lit thanks to a separate power  
supply

47·

here is the detailed chronicle of the rather eventful beginning of  
the holidays

so here we are in this beautiful summerhouse where everything seems  
possible there is a table and wooden benches where you can read or  
relax it is as if you were here

Pippo went mad began to engage us in fights chasing his victim at  
a gallop

then on August 4<sup>th</sup> we were slowly able to organize ourselves to keep  
the cows away otherwise you could barely walk

seated at the large table on the porch with a gas lamp in front I begin  
to write to you

insects of all types woodpecker nests in the window birds dead pheas-  
ants and wood pigeons whizzing past all of us

airports are closed

there was a collective guttural cry when the lights went out

they also jam the elevators the electronic locks of doors air condition-  
ers and water pumps

only the torch of the Statue of Liberty stays lit thanks to a separate  
power supply

with the refrigerators off the preserved as well as the frozen food  
begins to rot

we were admiring the view when New York suddenly disappeared say  
some tourists

48.

it's finally over I'm almost healed of the red spots they are all black now

seated at the large table on the porch with a gas lamp in front I begin to  
write to you

completely in the dark and a prey to chaos with the car traffic outside and  
no limit to the amount of congestion

we were admiring the view when New York suddenly disappeared say  
some tourists

spilling out of the subway from baseball stadiums theaters and movie houses

in the confusion some weep but there is no panic

only the torch of the Statue of Liberty stays lit thanks to a separate  
power supply

hundreds of thousands of people are trying to go home or to find shelter for  
the night

some passengers come from the Long Island Rail Road and are stranded  
in Queens

according to a company spokesman

two trains are stopped on the Manhattan bridge

there was a collective guttural cry when the lights went out







# Composition

EDITOR'S NOTE: drawing on sources listed by the author below, Balestrini arranged the book's text according to a pattern drawn from a patchwork quilt with strips sewed at 45° angles across a checkered base, developing a chart (not reproduced here) indicating which borrowed fragments would be placed in which numbered sections, in varying ratio depending on the cut. And so for example the first section draws largely from A, 29 features a mix of N and O, 44 makes use of T and U, etc.

- A) Tourist guide 1:50,000, Mount Blanc. With a map of the view, trails and shelters, with descriptions of walking tours. Published by the Udine tobacco company.
- B) *Il Corriere della Sera*, *Il Corriere d'informazione*, *Epoca*, *L'Espresso*, *Il Giorno*, *Lotta continua*, *Il Manifesto*, *Il Messaggero*, *La Notte*, *Paesa Sera*, *La Repubblica*, *Il Resto del Carlino*, *La Stampa*, *L'Unità*: chronicles of the concert at the Civic Arena in Milan, Thursday June 14, 1979. In particular: Elvio Facchinelli, "Who knows if Berlinguer knows Stratos" (*L'Espresso* 24.6), Mario Gamba, "You switch on the one hundred thousand lights of Woodstock" (*Il Manifesto* 16.6), Claudio Kaufmann, "In Memory of Demetrio Stratos" (*Lotta continua* 16.6) Franco Vernice, "Even a funeral can become a feast" (*La Repubblica* 16.6), Fabrizio Zampa, "With so much anger" (*Il Messaggero* 16.6).
- C) Gianni Sassi, "Young people rapidly pursued" (*Alfabeta* no.5, September 1979).
- D) Carlo Rossella, "Here they broke the chain" (*Panorama* July 30, 1979).
- E) photo by Winston.
- F) See B)
- G) Paolo Bertella Farneti and Giuliano Buselli, "Blackout in New York" (*Magazzino* no.1, June, 1979).

- H) David Hurn photo – Magnum
- I) Toni Negri, “From the mass worker to the social worker” (Multhipla Editions, Milan, 1979)
- L) Giovanni Maria, “My God the Skylab falling may strike a city” (*La Repubblica* May 3, 1979)
- M) Ugo Foscolo, “Last letters to Jacopo Ortis”
- N) Pietro Calogero, Order of arrest no.710/79, Prosecutor of the Paduan Republic, April 6, 1979
- O) *Les Fédérés prisonniers passent devant les ruines encore fumantes de l’Hotel de Ville. Composition de Léon y Escosura* (1871), Musée de Saint Denis Cl.: Ed. R. Laffont.
- P) In order of appearance:
- Achille Gallucci (Order rejected requests for release, official instruction from the Tribunal of Rome)
  - Corrado Augias (“The Negri Case and the Italian press,” *La Repubblica* 23.5)
  - Guido Guasco e Francesco Amato (Under questioning, Negri responds to Roberto Chiodi, *Europeo* 10.5)
  - Alberto Arbasino, “A distant friend silenced, Dear Nanni if instead we had been born a cricket, a mouse, a groundhog,” *La Repubblica* 12, 13, 21.6)
  - Claudio Vitalone (Interview with Giuseppe Catalano, *Europeo* 10.5)
  - Giampaolo Pansa (“Red diaper baby was born a terrorist,” *L’Espresso* 23.3.1980)
  - Leo Valiani (The fault is with the Justice system: it is too slow, *Il Corriere della Sera* 3.9)
  - Lucio Magri (Comrades, suppose you were born a BR, we are partly to blame for Franco Vicente) *La Repubblica*, 23.3.1980)
  - Giuliano Ferrara (Statement to the Press in March ’79)
- Q) Ornella Volta, *Il vampiro*, Milan 1964. Glossary: entry “Zombie” PP. 229-30
- R) Photo by Aldo Bonasia from *Life in Milan* 1976. (17.4.1975, the brain of Zibecchi on the asphalt)
- S) Karl Heinz Roth, “Inside the whale,” *Magazzino* no.2, May, 1979.
- T) See B) and also “The Lips of Time” and “Quotation from G.L. Jackson” by Area (sung by Stratos) Cramps Records, Milan
- U) Letter from P., August 8, 1979
- V) See G)





## TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

15 Here begins, as noted below, the series of excerpts from the writings of Demetrio Stratos. Stratos was born in Alexandria, Egypt in 1945 and died on June 13, 1979 in New York. He was only 34 years old. In his time he recorded many solo albums and with the band, Area. He toured extensively in Europe and in the US. He also worked with artists, directors and poets such as John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Jasper Johns, and Andy Warhol. He studied ethnomusicology, psychoanalysis, and the relationship between spoken language and the psyche. He considered the limits of spoken language and studied the possibilities of extending the voice as a tool for psychological and political liberation. This study of the voice as an instrument carried him to the limits of human capabilities.

18 Giovanni Agnelli, better known as Gianni, was an Italian industrialist and Chairman of the Fiat Corporation. Under his control Fiat became the most important company in Italy and one of the major automobile manufacturers in Europe. Fiat was by far the largest employer in Italy. Agnelli himself was considered above the law and became the richest man in modern Italy.

43 Doctor Pietro Calogero — an Italian magistrate whose name is linked with the series of arrests that took place on April 7, 1979. The so-called “Calogero Theorem” was that the

top leaders of the Autonomy workers party that included Antonio Negri were the brains behind a “project of armed insurrection against the powers of the state.”

44 Balestrini was one of the founders of *Potere Operaio* (Workers’ Power) in 1968. In the mid ’70s he was a supporter of *Autonomia* (the network of groups under the name Autonomy). In 1979, as a result of accusations stemming from the April 7<sup>th</sup> arrests he fled to France and later Germany.

45 Christian Democrats — the central conservative wing of Italian politics in the post war period. Aldo Moro, the 36<sup>th</sup> and 38<sup>th</sup> prime minister of Italy was largely responsible for the “historic compromise” which led to collaboration between the Christian Democrats (CD) and the Communists (PCI) in the ’70s. He was kidnapped and later murdered in March, 1978 by the militant terrorist group, the Red Brigades.

47 *Prigione di Guerra* (Prison of War) or military camp. Here referring to those arrested on April 7, 1979 and incarcerated.

75 From 1972 to his death in 1984, Enrico Berlinguer was the national secretary of the Italian Communist Party (PCI).

76 *The Last Letters to Jacopo Ortis* is an epistolary novel by the Italian poet Ugo Foscolo written between 1798 and 1802. It was partly modeled on Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther* and inspired by political events in Northern Italy that led to Foscolo’s exile in Milan.

76 *Brigate Rosse*, the Red Brigades.





I close my eyes and start to sing  
threads are entangled and transformed into spots whose dance moves  
ever more slowly  
I sang my repertoire then I started the monologues  
with my eyes closed I walked back and forth in the cell four steps  
forward four steps back  
I invented dialogues for two characters that spoke different languages  
like at the cinema when the film ends  
there are those who make love who smoke there are those who  
merely exist

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