

# Letters



an anti-political  
communist  
journal of  
questions and  
theory

#1

# Movement is a closed circuit.

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *Letters: an anti-political communist journal*.

With this journal we wish to understand and analyze capitalism and crisis, attack the recomposition of the Left, critically engage with our own ideas and practices, and develop a more dynamic dialogue within the communist milieu. We do not call ourselves communists in an effort to breathe life into corpses but as an acknowledgement that we are not theoretical *filis du vent*. This journal is not the expression of a political party or organization and seeks no adherents or official line

What do we mean by anti-political? A rejection of representation and representatives... a refusal of activism and militancy... the embrace of human community and revolt... Anti-politics is an open question usually expressed in inaction; a negation that we do not have the agency to realize.

Please contribute letters, responses, articles, and reviews for publication. The deadline for the second issue is March 1<sup>st</sup> 2008, and submissions can be sent by either email or post. This publication will appear three to four times a year, and individual issues are available free to prisoners upon request. Unpublished correspondence is also welcome.

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## Murmurs of crisis abound?

The object of repressive consciousness is the goal which it thinks it controls. Since there is a gap between this goal and immediate reality, this consciousness becomes theological and refines the differences between the minimum or intermediate program and the maximum, future program. But the longer the path to its realization, the more consciousness makes itself the goal and reifies itself in an organization which comes to incarnate the goal.

The project of consciousness is to frame reality with its concept. This is the source of all sophisms about the divergence between objective and subjective elements. It exists but it cannot be. And precisely because of its inability to be, it has to negate and scorn whatever is trying to emerge, to be.

Jacques Camatte, *The Wandering of Humanity*



Communism is  
rupture.

# A Plague on Both Your Houses: Against the 'Iraqi Resistance'

by Frère Dupont  
2005

*"Long live the comrades who in 1959 burned the Koran in the streets of Baghdad" - Address to Revolutionaries of Algeria, Situationist Internationale 10*

We can be certain, even though we do not know them, that right now, even now, there are comrades in Baghdad who secretly burn the Koran. We know of them, if we do not know them, because resistance to tyranny continues even under the conditions of tyranny. Should we deny them because we cannot name them? Should we make do with those the American military name 'insurgents' as recipients of our solidarity for no reason other than because the American Military has named them so?

1. I think we can assume that it is certain that the individuals who volunteer or are forced to join up with the Iraqi paramilitaries are very unhappy with their lives and the circumstances in which they live.

I think the individuals who have joined the American-British forces faced choices of the same order when they 'volunteered.'

Do any of the soldiers think they are going to make their situation better by what they are doing? I think they probably don't think about the future except insofar as they hope to get out of this alive. But war is never about the future; it is always a response to, a wallowing in, past events. War is precisely a refusal of the future.

I have never met an Iraqi 'insurgent', to this extent they remain, as individuals, in their motivations and goals, an enigma to me — however I have worked with more than several British ex-soldiers in various places, usually under factory conditions, in dead end jobs. What I can say about these individuals is that they were often lost souls, they were all more or less lunatic as well as being wholly unpredictable; sometimes they were offensive but mostly they were a lot of fun. I would also say that nobody is more militant in the workplace than an ex-soldier; they absolutely refuse all discipline, work is unreal to them after the army, and they are desperate for camaraderie.

I am trying to write beyond strategy here, I am trying not to talk as a political mouthpiece in the game of political

mouthpieces. I don't want any part in choosing a side to be on, like that made any difference. When we talk about the killing, the killers, and the killed, let us not degrade ourselves with our pseudo-participation in that established Newspeak strategic outlook whereby mutual atrocities are conceived only as 'scores' and points of a game to the death. The martyrs do not go to heaven; the slaughtered do not enjoy the freedom of democracy. It is not worth it, it is never worth it.

When I see the results on TV of American action I am appalled and I am certain that much worse things are happening that I do not see. When I see the actions of Iraqi paramilitaries I am appalled and I am certain that much worse things are happening that I do not see.

I have never felt, when I see a bomb explode on television, that this explosion is 'necessary', that it will lead to something better. We know from the history of human conflict that war does not improve things, war is not a staging post to a better world. Strategic operations conducted under capitalist conditions can only return slightly modified but otherwise essentially unchanged political institutions.

I therefore refuse the command that I must support as a solution what is called the Iraqi resistance. I refuse it and I refute it.

2. First, a working definition of anti-politics in the time of irrelevant leftism: a position that understands that politics is an administrative practice determined by, and in the service of, economic forces. Anti-politics understands there are no political solutions. In short anti-politics is anti-strategy.

Second, a working definition of insurrection in the time of misrecognizing insurrection: a position that understands there can be no transitional stages towards revolution. The insurrectionary position understands that revolutionary change cannot arise from any existing social force (military grouping, political party, union movement) or any future force that adopts these modes of organizing.

From the anti-politics position, the war in Iraq must be



understood as a competition for ascendancy within the context of unchanging economic pressures. It is a competition between a dominant and well-organized fragment of the ruling class that is driven to extend its ownership geographically, and a would-be ruling class staking its claim for the same resources, economically. However, anti-politics discerns an alliance between the opposing military-political forces against the local populace and against humanity in general. The militarily organized enemies converge at the point of their class interest, they share a common strategic understanding of the world, the goal of each is the seizure of the Iraqi land mass and the resources of the region and also to secure local political administration. The victory of either force is a defeat of humanity generally.

It is also understood that whilst what some call 'the resistance' is not politically homogenized, the class character and political forms adopted are unified in class terms and can be explained as a cross-class alliance under the auspices of an apparent bourgeoisie. I say apparent because it is not clear that this is an autonomous class or whether it is a mere client of others. The paramilitaries source their weapons, finance and politics from, amongst others, Syria, elements of the Saudi ruling class and Iran. The Iraq War therefore has elements of just another inter-capitalist conflict by proxy, with the 'resistance' fighting in the interest of half-hidden powers.

It should also be remembered at this point how established elites manage and organize their armed opponents just as they do in the democratic arena. We now know of the high level manipulation of the IRA and of protestant paramilitary groups by the British state. Equally if it seems there was state manipulation of the various red brigades in the Seventies, it is therefore very likely that, at the very least, some of the Islamist mercenary groups in Iraq have been organized by American forces to cause atrocities and inflame internal ethnic/political rivalries. This is, after all, a standard dual strategy of covert operations.

In other words, the resistance is not resisting anything of the capitalist order at all, and is certainly less of an example than that of the ordinary working class individual who pursues the interest of their own human needs as they appear to him/her, and from whom the left is utterly alienated (for example, whilst many proletarian relatives of American soldiers may endorse a straight-ahead humanistic anti-war position, they find it utterly incomprehensible, and perverse, for the left to support the actions of the enemy forces). It is perhaps the left's fatal separation from, and

consequent incomprehension of, ordinary lived life that drives them to invest so heavily in images of far away events. It is indicative of this alienation that far more is written on the 'cause' of Iraq than on matters closer to home. Because most of us in the milieu are not employed as workers we have less idea about what is going on in our own cities than we do in Fallujah.

This may seem a theoretical understanding to those who seek a return to political exigency but it is consistent with the principles of anti-politics and with class analysis. The left's denunciation of all 'theory' which does not finally fall into line with already existing conclusions hides its own much more elaborate, more alienated, and overly-strategic theoretical development by means of moral injunction. However in the case of the left's 'supporting' national liberation ideology the theoretical process remains the preserve of the leadership, only its end product is promoted for public consumption. Thus, it is the purpose of autonomous theory to challenge unthinking acceptance. We must therefore examine the function of 'supporting' those who 'are not perfect anti-authoritarian, non-racist, feminist, secular, anarchist.'



I have written all this knowing that whether I, or you, 'support' the Iraqi militias or not, it makes no difference, it neither impacts on their decision making nor does it

influence the foreign policy of the American elite. So what is the point in even discussing it?

For my part, I resist the calls to endorse the actions of the Iraqi militias because I understand that the call for support and those who are making that call are more significant than what is being supported. It is traditional practice of the left to displace the focus of its activities from everyday life onto matters of the state and in particular onto issues of foreign policy. The reasons for this are that left groups hope to merge themselves with the state and are looking for a finger hold on the levers of power but more importantly it is much easier to maintain control over the party membership by concentrating on far-off and therefore more simple issues than it is to talk on local struggles where dissent and disagreement is always going to break out. The left looks for simple stories from which agreement may be secured and control imposed, it is the function of the membership to passively repeat the moral of the stories. The 'anti-imperialist' position also acts as a compensation for sublimation of the almost complete alienation of the left from the more substantial but (to the left) incomprehensible anti-political resistance of the home-proletariat.

For me this is not a matter of the Iraqi resistance at all but of the sub-political/moralistic use of it as an example for a means of gaining greater political control 'at home.' I oppose the call to support the Iraqi Resistance because I understand the call is an alibi for the cause of subjective, short-term political expediency. It is also a betrayal, of those who are oppressed by 'resistant' nationalistic and religious ideologies, as it is a betrayal of future revolutionary principles. I reject the either/or logic that states that there is no other option but complicity with the 'empire' or 'support' for its competitors. I do not accept that the Iraqi militias are the only option for the people of Iraq or that they are even the best option from out of current circumstances.

The Iraqi people are capable of so much more than military Islamism and even of their not-so distant history of explicitly revolutionary struggle. The 'supporters' of the militias automatically cut themselves off from this history and align themselves towards the bourgeois form.

We can be certain now that there are in Iraq, as there are in Palestine and in all specified locations of the world, individuals who have independently achieved a pro-revolutionary consciousness far in advance of the dulled

grasping of western leftism. The consciousness of these individuals is derived from direct experience of determinate conditions and arrives at a place where they are forced to reject all existing forces, solutions, politics and ideologies equally. It seems to me that it would be humiliating, to ourselves and to them, to ask them to retreat back into an affirmational attitude towards one fragment of the capitalist implosion. On the contrary, we must always address the most radical and developed consciousness in all countries by holding to our basic principles no matter the pressure to modify them in the interest of our subordinate belonging to some hasty left dominated 'popular front'. Remember now the western left who turned from their own circumstances and supported Stalin, Mao, the Viet Cong at the expense of the working class of Eastern Europe, China, and Vietnam. Remember now their utter discrediting because they could not distinguish between their desire to lend support for upheavals within the existing political structure from involvement in genuinely revolutionary situations that they could not recognize.

To ourselves the anti-political message at this moment on the Iraq situation must be: the Iraqi working class has not made its move yet and the people of Iraq are capable of so much more than the closed circuits of Islamism and mere ethnicity.

To those revolutionary individuals in Iraq, and everywhere, the message is this: we are not living in an age of empire; America is not the problem; America is a symptom of capitalist dynamics; there is no political solution to the economic predicament; all existing political forces have either been generated from, or captured by, the economic substrate.

To those Western pro-revolutionaries who have lately fallen under into the politics of anti-imperialism the message is this: **always reject imposed conditions and proposed solutions from within the established array; take courage from your principles under all circumstances; there must be no compromises and no negotiations with religions, political groups, state agencies or structural panaceas; the struggle is always for humanity as its own end and against the commodity.**

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# Legacy of Dissolution

"Avant-gardes have only one time; and the best thing that can happen to them is to have enlivened their time without *outliving* it. After them, operations move onto a vaster terrain. Too often have we seen such elite troops, after they have accomplished some valiant exploit, remain on hand to parade with their medals and then turn against the cause they previously supported. Nothing of this sort need be feared from those whose attack has carried them to the point of dissolution... A historical project can hardly expect to preserve an eternal youth, sheltered from every blow... After this splendid dispersal, I realized that I had to quickly conceal myself from a fame that threatened to become far too conspicuous." — Guy Debord, *In Girum Imus Nocte Et Consumimur Igni*.

The greatest contribution of the situationists was their dissolution. If anything, it may have come later than it ought to have. Following the brief upheavals in France in 1968 hundreds attempted to gain membership to the SI. Rather than *accumulate* members and achieve a more infamous notoriety, the SI began destroying itself. This, more than any thesis in Society of the Spectacle, is the greatest contribution of the situationists. Like all great contributions by pro-revolutionaries, it was purely negative and affirmed nothing other than the necessity of negation.

In issue #24 of Green Anarchy Magazine the final period of the Situationist International, with endless splits and finally the end of the group with only two members remaining, was presented as proof of "Stalinist Bureaucracy" and the dictatorial role of Guy Debord. I think these speak to just the opposite. Bureaucracies and dictators do not dissolve themselves on their own accord! It's conspicuous but unsurprising that commentaries on this final period are disparaging (in the before-mentioned issue of Green Anarchy, the SI are attacked because "their creative production decreased over time" — and this from supposed anti-organizationalists!).

Now an absurd thesis: The rudeness of the situationists was a collective character trait that acted against organization by encouraging breaks and dissolution. None of the three forces acting to recuperate situationist theory - anarchists, academics, and 'pro-situ' — understand this. The former two recuperate with conscious or unconscious distortion and appropriation; the latter with trying to carry on something that was already intentionally ended. All three push situ-ideology in an effort to build organization or movement, if not interested only in furthering their career or trumpeting their intellectual superiority. In a difficult contradiction, the situationists themselves also claimed to be developing a 'revolutionary movement' while their activity moved against this development.

Finally, I do not want to pose the question of a theory of the SI, but of the theory of the proletariat, which the SI expressed in some way (and were thus attacked by all of their political contemporaries). It should also be said that the situationists did not share my ideas on their theory and practice! It is always easier to look at someone than for them to look in the mirror, to describe someone else than for them to describe themselves...



"Enthusiastic spectators of the SI have existed since 1960, but at first in a very small number. In the past five years, they have become a multitude. This process began in France, where they received the popular appellation of "pro-situ," but this new "French disease" has reached many other countries. Their quantity does not multiply their emptiness: all of them made it known that they completely approved of the SI and did not know what else to do. They remain the same even after becoming numerous: if you've read or seen one, you've read or seen them all. They are a significant product of modern history, but they produce nothing in return. The pro-situ milieu apparently represents the theory of the SI that has become ideology — and the passive vogue of such an absolute and absolutely useless ideology confirms *in absurdo* the evidence that the role of revolutionary ideology was realized with the bourgeois forms of revolution. But in reality this milieu expresses that part of real modern opposition that has still had to remain ideological, the prisoner of spectacular alienation, and only informed according to its own terms. The pressure of history has today increased to the extent that the bearers of an ideology of historical presence are forced to remain perfectly absent." — Debord and Sanguinetti, *Theses On the Situationist International and Its Time*

# Impotent

DA:

*Why did you propose we research the life and ideas of Sam Moss?*

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FD:

I cannot answer that question straight away without first thinking of how this text appeared in my life. Speaking straight off, without prior thought, I first thought it was a spoof piece – it does not read 'right', it does not fit into my preconceived notions of what someone in the '30's should be thinking. I have to say that although it had 'inspired us' I did not actually read it until this year when I was writing up 'Why Did You Join the AF for the 2nd Time'. I thought immediately that the piece was well within the scope of activities of the other member of Monsieur Dupont who had produced a 'final' version of the Manchester communist paper Subversion called 'Spoofversion' as well as a spoof piece of historicism as Proletarian Gob called 'Corpse of the

Millennium'. He was quite into the Stuart Home collective identity thing around 2001 and was experimenting with writing in that direction, so the Sam Moss piece read just like that, like something a modern post-situ communist would put into the mouth of an imagined communist of the past. Strangely enough, in a rare attempt where I was trying to discover some common ground with a local self-described 'council communist', I suggested this piece as reference point, and they accused me of writing it. All this sets me thinking that the piece is so striking because it is anachronistic, and it doesn't really belong to any particular tradition of thought but has just appeared, and has managed to persist through time out of sequence.

*Why (and how) do you think such a slim document, a document that exists without much discussion or connection to anything in a similar vein, has survived into this century?*

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DA:

It's funny, I never considered the possibility of the article being authored by a contemporary writer or written as satire but now that you mention it, this is probably a more reasonable response to it. The first time I saw the article was a photocopied print out of it that DN, the co-editor of *The Warrior Wind* zine I helped do, mailed to me. I came across it again on the internet and both times I read it I felt a strong affinity with it, but it also really bothered me. When I first came across it I was still holding onto a lot of positions and roles that I've since moved on from, and it helped with that process.

Having seen 'On the Impotence of the Revolutionary Group' in the bound edition of *Living Marxism*, the journal in which it was published, I know for sure that it was actually published in 1939 and written by someone using the name Sam Moss (it remains to be seen whether or not this was a real person or a pseudonym). In *Living Marxism* it was presented as the starting point of a discussion on organization, but I was not

able to find any evidence of replies to it, except perhaps in archived correspondence between Moss and Paul Mattick (which I have not read). How has it survived? This is a harder question. The version of the article floating around the internet does not specify the year it was published; it literally says "193?". This leads me to think that whoever first typed it up and put it on the web found it somewhere other than an actual copy of *Living Marxism* or the bound collection published by Greenwood Reprint, because both of those have the date on them very clearly. In a lot of ways, the article is the nightmare of every activist or militant; it lays out the dirty thoughts that inevitably pop into one's head when doing political work but which get pushed out by pragmatism and ideology. It's honest and direct. From what I understand there was discussion of it within the Anarchist Federation in the U.K., which is chronicled in 'The Impotency of Councilism', but I think that's the only case of pro-revolutionaries really tackling it recently.

*Who found it to publish in the AF Internal Bulletin? How does understanding the history of our ideas change them?*

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FD:

As you say, the discussion of it is published as 'The Impotency of Councilism' by Monsieur Dupont, and it was included for discussion (as far as I know) by Pete. That discussion did not really impact me at the time and I only read it (despite having my name on it) this year; but I remember the various discussions, as Pete reported them to me, that this piece was a part of, and which by proxy I was participating in. Although, I have to say that I think my participation was still fairly limited at that time and I think I was only just coming up to speed with the counter-intuitive approaches that Pete had adopted. I was still at the level of: the proletariat lacks consciousness of conditions because of its conditioning and that what 'we' must do is supply the form of this consciousness and that this would contribute to countering the effect of conditioning.

These counter-intuitive (but highly coherent and realistic) approaches are clearly mapped out for us in the Moss text and refer to almost Zen-like conceptions of not-doing, and the almost cybernetic/evolutionary conceptions of category dissonance, and these might also be understood as questions of appropriate occurrences belonging to scale e.g. what is true for the individual organism is not necessarily true for the species.



Moss succinctly sets out the problem for us: we are moved by revolutionary consciousness, the proletariat is not; 'our' consciousness-based aims do not coincide with proletarian goals; there is no obvious means by which 'we' might distribute our consciousness within the proletariat because by definition our small group scale is defined by such consciousness but equally, by definition, the necessary characteristics of the proletariat do not include revolutionary (or any form of) consciousness; when we communicate our pro-revolutionary ideas we communicate only at the level we exist (in small groups) and then only to those groups who are already interested in our ideas. In common parlance this is called, 'preaching to the converted' (there is no other kind of effective preaching) and in cybernetic terms it is called 'redundancy' which means, there is a pattern of meaning shared between the transmitters of information and the receivers of it – in effect Sam Moss repeats one of the most

incisive insights of Jesus: let those who have ears hear (by implication, those who do not have ears, will not hear). Pro-revolutionary consciousness is a trap and a wall against others more than it is a platonic truth that we could release in the masses. Both Jesus and Sam Moss show us that there is no such thing as 'the universal' at the level of consciousness; consciousness indicates subjective separation from the universal (i.e. material conditions and direct expression of conditions) – where there is consciousness there is no appeal to the universal.

How does understanding the history of our ideas change them? Or put another way, how does the understanding of an idea change our history? I would have thought the positions we have developed would belong to our present, and essentially exist without precedent. Aren't we alone? That is what we are told. We are mad; our ideas are weird and have no connection to anything. And truly, that is what I often think myself – there is no connection to anything else in the world. We should have expected to find nothing to support our conclusions outside of our own arguments (a circular and doomed position). Nobody ever could have been as pessimistic as us and still remain within the communist context. And yet, despite expectations, we see this is not the case, we find ourselves as part of a tendency that has materially existed in its current form for at least 70 years (as the LPA put it, 70 years of non-existence). Moss becomes the pretext for a history we are constructing; his contribution means we can refer the interested and contemptuous to texts written by others than ourselves. Our discovery of the appearance of his writing in Mattick's journal bestows upon us three-dimensionality. And this actuality which we did not expect means we can continue, we can make further connections outwards from this point, we are not simply hitting a glass wall that separates us from everyone else (as you say, we are speaking what others suspect and yet we are not drawing the conclusions they might expect). It is likely that somewhere along the line the arguments put forward in this magazine and by Monsieur Dupont are going to be included and acted upon by others. Already, we see the use of the term pro-revolutionary (which collapses into a single word the arguments made by Moss concerning the distribution of knowledge and revolutionary capacity) by those who think they disagree with us. Even as our conclusions are repulsed the arguments we have used to reach them are adopted surreptitiously – this process is, by definition, the creation of a history.

*At this juncture we do not know what became of Sam Moss, he certainly seems to have disappeared from communist accounts as far as we can tell. In one sense his arguments seem to predict his disengagement. And yet, whilst we share his profound pessimism, we find we can continue, we do not give up, we see there is space ahead of us which we can move into. Why do you think this is the case? What is it that we hope to achieve? What are we doing? Who are we?*

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DA:

I will speak for myself here then direct those same questions to you. I know that I cannot answer your question about who we are, but I hope that this publication, as it evolves, will help point to an answer.

Why do I continue to participate in the pro-revolutionary milieu despite the profound pessimism, despite realizing that this milieu is unable to do what it wants to do (create revolution)? Thinking about it right now four things come to mind: friendship, intellectual loneliness, lack of creativity, and an unrealized desire to attack the Left.

First of all, most of the people I care about deeply are in some way connected to the milieu. I think that this will become less and less true as I get older and further away from my activist past (and my positions/inactivity push away the hardened), but for right now this is the case. Recently I've been able to engage with people I play Go with, but I am usually very intellectually lonely and unable to find others who share my interests or passions, which keeps me drawn to the pro-revolutionary milieu where all of the anachronisms (letters, books, zines, reading groups, small-run newspaper and magazines, letter-press printing, etc) that I like are still common. It is one of the few contemporary social groupings where ideas are taken seriously, though internet forums are pushing all of this into the background. I also do not know how *not* to relate to the milieu. I am stuck in this role of being critical of everything; of having frustrating conversations that I get very little from other than "that is not what I am anymore". Even though I spend most of my time learning to play trumpet or playing Go or cuddling with my romantic partner, I am continually drawn to libcom.org or anti-politics.net. I read strange Marxist books, get excited by emails from other communists, and even follow the animal rights campaign I used to be involved in. Why? My attachment is probably unhealthy, whatever that means. I do not know what else to do, especially when I sit in front of a computer for so many hours at work.

When I was fourteen or fifteen I made a really awful anarchist

zine that did not make much sense, but I distributed it at school and a few demonstrations. It had some reprinted articles, poorly laid-out graphics, and strange poetry I wrote under assumed names. The zine was met with disinterest or scorn, but I kept making little publications, which became increasingly coherent. I always wonder why everyone interested in pro-revolutionary ideas doesn't make their own zine or try to put their thoughts on paper and give them out to strangers, to their comrades, or whoever. I think that would be a lot of fun and would force people to look at their ideas face to face and probably (hopefully) reapproach old positions and start asking new questions. What am I doing? I want to stay in the milieu to open Pandora's boxes, to raise questions with uncomfortable answers, and counter the organizational/strategic logic that traps so many people in feedback loops until they burn out or become hardened and robotic. My motivation is selfish, but it's a selfish desire for community (or the closest I can get to it).

There is also a voice in my head that tells me that crisis and class struggle will push pro-revolutionaries into some amount of agency and that in a genuinely revolutionary situation, the pro-revolutionary organizations of today, if they continue to exist and have a hand in events, will play a managerial and recuperative role. If this is the case, it makes sense to attack or undermine them now while they are weak rather than waiting till the historical situation changes and makes it possible for them to accumulate members and power. This is one of the motivations for making this publication as well as my personal zine *Total Destruction*. Of course, I live in an area with no organized Left and have never been a member of a formal pro-revolutionary organization, so my ability to directly 'intervene' in the Left is extremely limited to throwing theory at people far away and having one-on-one conversations with friends of mine who are involved in that stuff. I don't want to devote my life to this – or any – strategy; my life project is elsewhere, but my activities are interesting enough in themselves that I do not feel I am sacrificing or neglecting my desires to carry them out.

FD:

Who are we? The question of we and us how such a condition can be established is always an immediate concern — how is it possible to pass from a convergence of individuals to a group condition? We are so desperate that we rush all of our pent up readiness when we encounter even the slightest opportunity. If someone replies to a thought, if someone takes a leaflet, if we read of a strike... we are infatuated.

I think Moss has set out the inherent absurdity of groups, which he defines and sets besides the great forces of society. I see this procedure of setting out the conditions of our irrelevance as a challenge similar to that posed by the existentialists in terms of the contradiction between the essential meaninglessness of existence and the imperative of commitment. There is no earthly reason to continue the opposition to capitalism in terms of consciously organized groups (as these have proved themselves to be not up to the task) and yet we (dare I say we?) feel impelled to continue to organize such groups. The question, as Moss, addresses it, of 'other motivations' must now be based upon the understanding that there is no more opposition in what we do than there is in what everyone undertakes in their existence. Opposition is assigned to each of us, along with a share in conformity, as a sort of birthright: we are, so we oppose conditions; we are, so go along with things.



The consciousness of ineffectiveness is not an automatic rationale for giving up. It is possible to continue, but whether this is for good or ill, it is difficult to say. Perhaps it really

would be better (on what scale?) to fall into silence. I do feel there is an aesthetic involved here and that we are deriving some sort of compensation from our isolation, we are poets of nowhere else to go and perform stunts at the end of a line, becoming an object 'impotence' which fetishise this ending. This is in contrast with others who have also reached the end of the line but carry on in bad faith as if they really will recruit an anarcho-syndicalist union, or a mass revolutionary organization. There is some sense, after having encountered so many defeats, that I now wish for further defeat so as to prove my thesis. And the image that most appeals to me is that of the buffoonery of no-exit which marks the limit of what is possible in any given position.

I think of those figures who find a rhythm, or a punch line, or a ritual circuit in their defeat: Chaplain singing in 'Italian' in Modern Times; Kafka's dogs 'making water' to summon food and deny their domestication; Tom Waits' voice that is supposed to represent, above all, experience; Michel Simon, habitue of the brothel, keeper of dead hands in L'Atalante; The eternity of the peasant grimace conveyed by Toto and Ninnetto in Uccellacci e uccellini; what we might call Raymond Carver's cut-away from a cycle of decline; the Rolling Stones' weariness in '72; . All of these convey an end of the pier nihilism; they perform the same gestures over and over, finding a punch line and a rhythm in the raggedness of the edge of things. They have arrived at the limit of what is possible and the limit is a circus, an opportunity to pass the hat round, it is performed less to an audience that will carefully study it than to a crowd which merely glances as it passes on. I think Moss is also a poet of nowhere else to go, or at least we are turning his essay into such a performance.

See, we can even become cynical about our own motives; we can transform our interest into a structure and turn the structure into a fetish. We can call it Moss-ism, or Dupontism. We can define a circuit of identity and we can start accumulating experiences and developing a nomenclature in the name of our identity. We can pass time in the name of this activity; time can be given a shape in our activity. Are we as cynical in our way, as knowingly decadent (that is not really decadent), as say Mick Jagger in Performance? I admit that even after acknowledging that what is not 'mainstream' in cultural terms is still dominated by commodified gestures flaunting their perversion that I remain transfixed by, say, a Burlesque rendition of, say, Und Endlich Stirbt.

The logic of the unexpected and bizarre is still wholly predictable; it replaces the tedium of good times with the banality of complaint. But I still love it. In the world we must exist, we must exist amongst that which exists, and to express this existence we must choose the objects that suit us, and even when we know they don't suit us, we must choose them. There is nothing else than our living now amongst the things that are ours approximately and temporarily. This insight into the limit of social organization and our relation to it, i.e. that we exist in loops rather than in a progressive series means that the decadent artifact (our transgressive thought, a Sam Moss essay, or the pop-Gothic form) will only increase its allure.

Our choosing of the most perverse, and there is nothing more perverse than what we might call the Moss-position (i.e. the denial of significance in that to which we are consciously involved with), has caused us to become more intelligent. Our refusals induced subtleness in our arguments where affirmations would have rendered us blunt and unseeing. But our activities are still a choosing and a conscious alignment, a set of choices from the array of what exists and this active consumption only really makes sense when set beside the passive consumption of the mass markets. We are never perverse enough, we have fought shy from real nihilism, real negation because that would involve our personal real subsumption in the process at the level of taste that has already subsumed us objectively at the level of the commodity. Beyond the aestheticism, we really do not have much choice about where we are and what connections we might make with the revolutionary subject. We do not have the resources, the energy, the time, and the wider conditions are not in place that we might realistically derive or develop these — we cannot move from our tastes to human community. In fact our tastes are as much an obstacle as any other received behavior to the realization of human community, and must be abolished like all the others.

Even this get out can be challenged though. We might progress the Dupontist logic one step further and talk of the Impotence of Impotence as a means of illuminating our bad faith and the true character of romanticist chagrin. What is it exactly that we are hoping to defend by seemingly attacking everything and pushing all arguments into absurdity? Yes, it is true that I could carelessly argue how my constant ticking of the box 'none of the above' indicates an acute awareness of my real position as an individual vis a vis the social totality, but there remains in even the most determined consciously nihilistic gesture a sort of romantic remnant, or investment in some set of circumstances better than this

which is wholly absent from others who take no interest in such matters — the decadent gesture is a way marker, it indicates a limit and suggests something we dare not name that exists beyond it. It is a cliché to proclaim the Black Mass the supreme form of the sacred, but it is true of us. We refute the reality of a communist movement because we require a purer form of communism, and that in itself seeks to retrieve the idea of such a movement but now preserved from its more obvious and embarrassing absurdities. Nothing of what we have achieved is as negative as the behavior and opinions of those who say yes to the world we live in, those who accept it without question and shove as much of it as they can down their gob without a thought about it — that's true nihilism. And we are very pale imitators by contrast.

Nonetheless, here we are. We do what we do. We have released a certain number of restraints on the imperative of 'do something', and we have achieved this by accepting the limitations of our scale. There is nothing else than what is before us, no opportunity to do anything. We do not say that that mere individuality is all there is in the world; on the contrary, we accept that there is a totalizing process on an inconceivable worldwide scale and that our impotence (and every individual affect) is produced as an outcome of that process. But still, in the acknowledging of the limit on ourselves we have opened spaces for our activities. Where other pro-revolutionaries are bound by the idea that there exists an engineered redundancy between themselves and history (their ideas somehow express the leading edge of objective process), and also a redundancy between themselves and others (these others whose ideas must be caused to fall into line with the pro-revolutionary account of history) and they are impelled by this knowledge to behave in accordance with the restraints of this redundancy. For example, for most pro-revolutionaries, it is their duty (according to their perception of who they are) to hold public meetings, write leaflets, sell newspapers, recruit others — it is not just their duty, it is their burden. They absolutely must perform the function that is assigned to them by history. And if they don't perform, they are as bad as us — Mossists, Dupontists, defeatists, nihilists, poets of the end of the line. In fact, they are this anyway, they are in exactly the same position of us but do not recognize it, their ideas take flight into idealist organizational forms. They resemble a man who has bought a lottery ticket and who immediately discounts the one in 14 million chance of actually winning it and instead fantasizes about how he is going to spend his winnings — most of our contemporaries are generals of thin air. But by contrast to their miserable historical burden (which is pure fantasy) we define our

activity precisely in terms of the 1 in 14 million odds that we are up against. We have found a new energy for activity – for example, I do not write this, or organize a meeting, or distribute this journal because I think it will achieve anything, I do not think I am communicating anything beyond what is wholly expected, I am committed to it, I undertake it for its own sake, it defines who I am. I don't care that what I have written here is shit because I know it doesn't contribute either way to history.

Or to put it more accurately, I am involved in this because involvement on the terms I have set out turns me on – it is a joy that my being is now fused with my activities. And the condition for such joy is that my activity is objectively meaningless and not connected to the dead weight of a history or tradition. I am free to say anything I want because I see in front of us a space which we might fill, and I am directing my speech towards that space. I am not constrained to backward map my speech onto a set of principles and as a result what I have to say is not contorted by adherence and belief as the communications of our

contemporaries are (and have been for decades). I am free to talk utter shit because this freedom implies that whether a communication is true or not it has no relevance to anything, it is an outcome of our impotence in relation to convincing a mass of others on a scale in which we do not signify. There can be no connection from our 'few' to their 'many' in terms of our supplying a historic meaning (principles, organization, leadership) to their struggle and that has to be a good thing! We are freed from that pseudo-relation and are now addressing a completely different set of problems to that which can be defined as 'getting our message across' and it is in our engagement with this newly opened space that this set of problems will begin to take shape.

I suppose the short version of all this is that we wrote Nihilist Communism because we had to express our Will-to-honesty. We were scathing enough to know that what we said was unpalatable in the present and would only find readers in the future. We were impelled by a Will-to-honesty and we were scathing, but there was a limit to the honesty and to what we were scathing about. Other illusions immediately took root.

*We see in Sam Moss's arguments an implied laissez-faire attitude to those who will continue on their way regardless. Who are we to bother trying to change the direction of those whose direction we cannot change? Obviously, this attitude (realistically) rejects the underlying assumption of all political activity, so: A. how do you think this fatalism (if that is what it is) effects the relation with our contemporaries and B. How do you think the ideas we are exploring here re-define the relation between pro-revolutionaries and the proletariat?*

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DA:

I will answer the second part of your question first. I do not think our ideas or any ideas can re-define the relationship between pro-revolutionaries and the proletariat. This relationship has been codified and defined by conditions over the last two centuries and will not change because of argument or discussion. We arrive at the end of a Go game; the only moves remaining are the defining of borders. No territory can be captured. The Ko fights are over. We wait until the stones are thrown in the air or the board cracks in half.

Insurrectionary anarchists have attempted to redefine the relationship by arguing that pro-revolutionaries are of the exploited; that the actions of pro-revolutionaries cannot be distinguished from the constant class struggle carried out by exploited as a whole. When an insurrectionary anarchist hurls a petrol bomb at a bank or carries out other clandestine actions (usually “in solidarity with” a prisoner/foreign indigenous group/etc), they say that they are accumulating actions onto the mountain of the “social

war” – after all, there is no time to wait, attack now! This rings false to me for a number of reasons. First, pro-revolutionaries are distinguished from the proletariat objectively: most pro-revolutionaries are not proletarian. Secondly, all of this “attacking” is divorced from class struggle (which expresses itself as the pursuit of immediate interests) and does not change conditions. The number of actions and extremity of slogans do not bring us closer to revolution and communism, or I would have moved to Greece or Italy a long time ago. Of course, the lack of actions and slogans does not bring us closer either, though armed struggle groups (in collision with the state) have acted against revolt in the past and will most likely do so in the future.

As I've said in a letter, I could go out each night and break windows, spray-paint slogans against the police, or put industrial glue into parking meters (as someone from the Red & Anarchist Action Network did where I live), but I would still be ‘waiting’. Waiting is something I cannot break out of.



I cannot attack until conditions change and I have room to move. I would never condemn those who get pleasure from destroying property or whatever, but I think it's telling to see the positions arrived at by those who fall into the role of 'those who act only at night'. The clandestine group seems to always fall into leftism (or in the case of animal rights types – an extreme moralism). Why is that? Why is the gaze of those who wear masks always directed to images of far away events?

I'm confused by my relationship to my contemporaries. On the one hand, in discussions I feel as though I'm speaking a different language, but I've also become closer to a few friends since coming to these sorts of positions. I've found them to be more popular (or at least less unpopular) than I thought they would be, though most people do not go as far as we do. There is a lot to talk about in defining the borders

of our Go game, even if they are meaningless on anything other than the most immediate, human scale. Sometimes in conversations I propose the idea of attacking the Left now while the Left is relatively weak. What better time to disband organizations and disrupt movement? I cannot do this where I live, but it would interest me if others tried it. At the same time, I think that any successful attack on the Left would face repression as other sectors of capital come to the Left's defense, probably along lines of "free speech" or "political freedom". Attacking the Left could be approached as a game, not a political strategy. Like most things I write or say, I propose this without thinking that anyone will take me up on my proposition. I always tell myself that it is better to expect failure and be surprised, though I'm sure certain friends of mine would say that this 'fatalism' diminishes my capabilities and my arguments against agency are a self-fulfilling prophecy.

*To finish – what limitations can we try to overcome or illuminate as this journal develops?*

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FD:

You are right of course that the relation of pro-revolutionaries to the proletariat is not altered by the ideas we are exploring, or at least not from the perspective of history. On the other hand, I do think it changes the proletariat as an object in our account and I think we may encounter some unexpected logical problems as more people engage with us and we might therefore want to develop the positions we have defined in terms of nuance, and the embracing of parallel arguments. For example, it is difficult for us to argue that communist workers are in fact less advanced than those who have no political consciousness at all – we would have to explore our notions of creative and destructive roles and how the proletarian category is defined as a subject.

I also think our relationship to the proletariat is changed subjectively, a new set of activities becomes open to us which is not propagandistic, and which does not address the issue of converting subjective qualities of consciousness into mass scale quantities. A new set of irrelevant tasks is set before us, or a new set of tasks that are based on their non-centrality to the major forces of society, and we must choose between them on the grounds of some criteria that are not altogether apparent at the moment – I mean, what is it exactly that we are supposed to do? In the end, it seems we carry on but can we find any justification in that? Or is this question of justification the entirety of our project, reconnecting with the right to think and act? Are we a comet

that is already on its return course towards some form of intervention and perhaps a (deliberate) transgression of our original insights?

You ask what limitations can we try to overcome? Well, I suppose, starting modestly, it is either to be engaged with seriously by our contemporaries, or else it is to provoke them into paroxysms of rage and thereby establish a new readership. This second option would suggest a participation in a para-milieu similar to those milieus generated by the Surrealists, Situationists, Tropicalia, Os Cangaceiros, Crimethinc etc in relation to the 'workers' movement' and if we took that route would we exist 'internally' without ever making contact with the 'traditional' milieu? Maybe that choice is not really ours to make anyway – it is difficult to gauge what the limits are, whether we are beyond the pale or not. Maybe the significant boundaries have already been breached.



If this journal encounters a near-total non-response it could either be considered proof of an interesting direction or else

of a complete disaster. And from each branch of this divergence there would be created the invitation to two further choices: does either of the original outcomes, or neither, or both, mean 'go on' or 'stop now'? And then yet another branching occurs if we stop do we do something else, or do nothing? And if the project is continued when there has been no response, should it be distributed in the same places, or different ones? But if there has been favorable response, should it therefore be distributed elsewhere to reach different people, or should a longer dialogue be developed with the same people?

At each branching, the decisions to be made are not historically self-evident... in evolutionary terms what is required is twenty different journals all producing more or less the same content and each exploring their own way through the options. This blanket betting on all early outcomes would give the milieu a more clear idea of what we are on about, and also to the limits to our activities. At the moment our singular little efforts might at any moment produce the wrong outcome simply because an incorrect direction has been taken for a misinterpreted reason. When analysis of outcomes depends on individual choices the analysis itself becomes extremely brittle and precarious.

In cybernetic terms there is in any circuit two sources of energy: the first is that energy which belongs to the circuit

as such and the second is that which belongs to the switch that activates/deactivates the circuit. The usual example for this is that the electricity that activates a light bulb depends on the agency of someone to turn it on. Plainly, there is some intrinsic truth, or energy, inherent to the questions we are exploring, but the fact is that this truth can only operate if we subjectively invest our energy into activating its circuitry. If we do not throw that switch and activate the circuit of questions concerning the pro-revolutionary's role, then these questions die. We are the only ones presently who are talking in the terms that we are talking, and obviously, from an evolutionary perspective, that is not a good place to be — in the same way, these ideas, as they appeared to Sam Moss had to lie dormant for perhaps sixty years before they were seriously evaluated. So, the limit that you talk of, the ultimate limit that we must encounter and address is the autonomy of our ideas. When we find ourselves in a position where we can throw the switch on our project to turn it off, walk away from it and thereby deprive it of our personal commitment but then still encounter the ideas that it contains elsewhere and independently of our actions, it is then that we will know those ideas have crossed a significant threshold.

I will leave it here for you to sum up or answer.

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*“But this question may be raised, why, then, realizing the futility of the act, do you band together into groups? The answer is simply that the act serves a personal need. It is inevitable that men sharing a common feeling of rebellion against a society that lives by exploitation and war should seek out their own kind in society, and in whatever weapons fall to their command. Unable to rebel against the system with the rest of the population, they will oppose it alone. The fact that they engage in such action however futile it may appear establishes the basis for the prediction that when the large masses, reacting to the compulsives of the objectively revolutionary situation, feel similarly affected, they too will band together out of the same urgency and they too will use whatever weapons fall to their disposal. When they do so, they will not rise from ideological factors, but from necessity, and their ideologies will only reflect the necessities then, as do their current bourgeois ideologies reflect the necessity today.” — Sam Moss*

# Discussion

*Although then, technically speaking, the old system of division of labour is thrown overboard by machinery, it hangs on in the factory, as a traditional habit handed down from Manufacture, and is afterwards systematically re-moulded and established in a more hideous form by capital, as a means of exploiting labour-power. The life-long speciality of handling one and the same tool, now becomes the life-long speciality of serving one and the same machine. Machinery is put to a wrong use, with the object of transforming the workman, from his very childhood, into a part of a detail-machine. [103] In this way, not only are the expenses of his reproduction considerably lessened, but at the same time his helpless dependence upon the factory as a whole, and therefore upon the capitalist, is rendered complete. Here as everywhere else, we must distinguish between the increased productiveness due to the development of the social process of production, and that due to the capitalist exploitation of that process. In handicrafts and manufacture, the workman makes use of a tool, in the factory, the machine makes use of him. There the movements of the instrument of labour proceed from him, here it is the movements of the machine that he must follow. In manufacture the workmen are parts of a living mechanism. In the factory we have a lifeless mechanism independent of the workman, who becomes its mere living appendage...*

*At the same time that factory work exhausts the nervous system to the uttermost, it does away with the many-sided play of the muscles, and confiscates every atom of freedom, both in bodily and intellectual activity. [105] The lightening of the labour, even, becomes a sort of torture, since the machine does not free the labourer from work, but deprives the work of all interest. Every kind of capitalist production, in so far as it is not only a labour-process, but also a process of creating surplus-value, has this in common, that it is not the workman that employs the instruments of labour, but the instruments of labour that employ the workman. But it is only in the factory system that this inversion for the first time acquires technical and palpable reality. By means of its conversion into an automaton, the instrument of labour confronts the labourer, during the labour-process, in the shape of capital, of dead labour, that dominates, and pumps dry, living labour-power. The separation of the intellectual powers of production from the manual labour, and the conversion of those powers into the might of capital over labour, is, as we have already shown. Finally completed by modern industry erected on the foundation of machinery. The special skill of each individual insignificant factory operative vanishes as an infinitesimal quantity before the science, the gigantic physical forces, and the mass of labour that are embodied in the factory mechanism and, together with that mechanism, constitute the power of the "master." — Marx, Capital Vol 1, Ch. 15*

In the next issue of ***Letters*** we will begin a dialogue about technology, the destruction of our capabilities, and the decomposition of humanity, with a focus on the discussions of subjectivity in Marx's ***Capital***.

Please send contributions on this subject for publication.

# The Unseen

by Nanci Balestrini

(Translated by Liz Heron)

## 1

The cellars are a maze of passageways lit every twenty to thirty yards by dusty fluorescent strip-lights swinging from long ragged electric wires that hang from the ceiling its rough cement fissured by long deep cracks it seems to go on for ever and here and there bulges downwards as if pushed by some enormous weight up there crushing buckling breaking through and every four or five yards props made from great beams hold it up the wood rotten moldy the ground covered in a film of putrid water the cloving sickening stench of putrefaction mingling with the stench of mould every so often at a turn-off or the junction of two passages are little piles of sand of cement sodden collapsed trampled shovels and other rusty tools left lying there the air is damp and from our mouths come little puffs of vapor as we breathe that nauseating air

the irregular shuffling of the small silent procession merges with the continuous jangling of the chains the sound echoes whenever the gangways of rotting wood are crossed the shadows lengthen behind each step whenever it gets close to the sections lit by strip lights they disappear and all of a sudden reappear ahead and the steps lengthen they move forward slowly paying attention to where they tread and to the chains so that they don't drag too much in front or behind trying always to leave the same distance between the one in front and the one behind taking care not to brush the right shoulder against the shiny wet wall and on the left keeping clear of the sub-machine gun barrels leveled straight as the small procession turns repeatedly to the right and the left to the left and the right until all sense of direction is lost

then we climb a narrow stairway semi-darkness suffocating with long lights high steps aching tugs as the chains hurting the wrists and at the end of the last flight the light of a small door and we come out high up at the top of a stairway tiers spreading into a room brightly lit full of people moving down there beneath us all of a sudden against my leg I feel an animal muzzle that growls threateningly the black pupils dilated the large eyes protruding two long very white teeth bared by the light red mouth a huge massive dog the smooth black fur on end on its back arching its ears pointing up quivering all the time *carabinieri* (ed. *Italian political police*) holding its leash is impassive in his bullet-proof overalls the latest in anti-terrorist style

from where we are the tiers fall away steeply to the floor of the room and from there rising all around up to the ceiling thick cylindrical iron bars varnished in gun-metal grey the enormous cage is full of officers in bullet-proof overalls in gun-metal grey everywhere we turn with more big black dogs growling and nervous one after the other the *carabinieri* remove our chains take the handcuffs off the sore red wrists the photographers blinding flashlights flare on our faces they too are dogs no jackals and they writhe they bend they stretch up on tiptoe an anxious ballet arms raised straining higher and higher with the sleeves of their jackets slipping back to the elbows higher and higher

we rub our red wrists we light cigarettes we walk up and down the steps a bit we wave to relatives we sit down together in twos and threes talking quietly the photographers below us get on their knees they jerk their torsos to right and left like contortionists in the circus they lean towards the animals inside the cage

they try to get their heads sideways through the bars sliding their long lenses between the legs the arms of the *carabinieri* who form a motionless barrier their fingers twitch in a frenzy they jiggle the cameras up and down they shoot pictures and let off dazzling flashlights at the faces inside the cage then in a faraway corner an even more dazzling light goes on and the whirr of the television cameras starts up

I sit down on the highest step of all and far beneath me I can see the lawyers with their black gowns thrown carelessly back on their shoulders chatting calmly among themselves in small groups behind the tables of peeling wood on the right parallel to the cage the court is assembled with the investigating judge dour lost in thought sitting in the middle on a high-backed chair so high it rises well above his head then the assisting judge perched sideways on another great high chair and to the right and left the jurors and women nearly all with their faces hidden behind wide dark glasses the broad tricolor sashes across the pale pullovers the puffed blouses with their starched collars the doubled breasted jackets in various shades of grey the ties greenish bluish yellowish and the far end on the right there's the public prosecutor's solitary little stand

above the heads of the court millions of small fragments make up a vast mosaic of dusty and faded reaching the ceiling and depicting a scene of confusion a furious battle on the left are the forces of evil represented by strange being contorted monstrous entangled in dominant colors of green and mauve and on the right the forces of good angelic transparent harmonious blue and feather-light clashing in the centre in a furious battle but the forces of evil are already clearly defeated they are beating a retreat pursued by the implacable forces of good below in a gilded oval stands the imposing figure of justice blindfolded holding in one hand the sword in the other the scales a little lower the legend-in relief says the law is equal for all

on the left behind the barricade of *carabinieri* are the wooden screens behind the screens is the public gallery it's almost totally empty but for some relatives mother father sister brother cousin uncle sister-in-law no friend no comrade because they're all afraid because seen from outside the law-court looks like a stage-set for war metal screens and barbed wire cordons of police and *carabinieri* a succession of barriers and armored cars in strategic spots while other armored vehicles circle the building continually then dogs and metal detectors at the door and searches questing like threats warning hints and all the rest

the small door behind us opens once again and in the midst of another swarm of *carabinieri* emerging at the top of the steps are the women they too in chains and all of them handcuffed we all get up and go towards them the cage is filled with shouts with greetings with smiles with different perfumes all of them have dressed in the brightest of colors long skirts bright shirts bright scarves rings on their fingers necklaces chains brooches bracelets pendants on their wrists big fantastic earrings clasps on their hair in the chaos the *carabinieri* get edgy they shout orders the dogs growl menacingly the photographers flash guns burst into light again the journalists make frenzied noises in their notebooks the handful of relatives wave and shout hello behind the screens and other shouts and greetings answer them

one after another the *carabinieri* slip off the chains and remove the handcuffs the girls run to us we run to them on the steps we mingle we entwine we entangle in a mosaic of embraces of hugs of kisses of voices all that interests us now is to talk talk about so many things talk about everything at last to talk to talk as long as we can to touch and hear one another as men and women together everything vanishes around us the courtroom the *carabinieri* the photographers the dogs the judges everything that's on the other side of the bars is alien to us it doesn't exist presents get passed across good luck tokens small objects everything that could be brought there right into the cage we exchange clothes too shirts sweaters kerchiefs scarves



a bell rings out from the court bench and the investigating judge dourly begins reading the long list of individuals charges this one that one charged with etcetera etcetera with having etcetera etcetera this one that one charged with etcetera etcetera with having etcetera etcetera in accordance with the law in unvarying monotone hurried offhand this one that one charged with etcetera etcetera with having and so on you can follow none of it he hurries to the end and then come the preliminaries and the lawyers with no conviction and as pure formality bring the usual futile objections therefore recess and the court's withdrawal to decide on the defense's objections and a few minutes and they're back already and the bell's rung again to say that of course all the defense's objections are overruled and the bell's run again and the court declared in session and the investigating judge declares debate open

## 2

The agree on day arrives and early in the morning before they open the gates we'd put up a big poster to announce the mass meeting and inviting everybody to come along we are taking the meeting not asking for it says in big letters and underneath Gelso had added as well as everything else we need to headmaster Mastino gets in first as usual and he starts reading the poster then his face turns ugly and he scowls at us stares at each of us as if to say I'm marking you down and I'll see to you later then the teachers get there and they read it without saying a word just look at us as though we're crazy a few minutes later out comes a bunch of janitors that Mastino has told to pull down the posters

the bravest janitor who was also the stupidest one reaches up to remove the poster but Cocco gets in front of him in a rage with his armes raised wit this long black overcoat the scarlet lining and he lets out a scream at him the janitor stops in his tracks taken aback and then the rest of us get in front of the janitors they don't know what to do they look up at Mastino who looks down at the them from the window of the headmaster's room but in the end they decide to go back inside because they realize if they push it it'll come to blows the first students to arrive have seen what happened they start talking it over with us and they don't go in and gradually the group gets bigger than Mastino decides to make a move himself and he comes out under the arcade so we can see he's there and he starts pacing up and down

I feel as if I'm watching the boss pacing in front of the factor in those stories I've read about the first workers' struggles the first strikes the same kind of intimidation and in fact the students get scared somebody starts saying he wants to o inside they come up and no end of excuses even though we keep explaining that if we all stay outside Mastino can do nothing he can't suspend us all but there's too much wavering and too m much fear and a first little group heads shamefully inside it's like a general signal and the others all rush in too within a few minutes nearly everyone's gone in only twenty or so are left outside along with the six of us and Mastino goes back in too with a smug grin on his face

we're left in a lurch Malva's upset but Cocco's determined we'll go in and do it just the same those of us there are he says we have to do it just the same anyway we've got nothing to lose now he shouts and that way we'll persuade the others to hold the meeting just the same way we all go in together and we install ourselves in an empty classroom on the ground floor and we've only been there a minute and we haven't even started speaking when Mastino arrives yelling what are you doing here you you and you you're all suspended come to my room one at a time and he walks out leaving the door open Scilla kicks the door and then he barricades it we shove two benches in front of it we're silent for a moment we must do something we eye one another but we don't know what to do we feel trapped

then in a flash I can see as if it was in front of me the page of a pamphlet I've read this summer about forms of struggle in the factories and all that stuff I can see that page in front of me with the heading in bold print indoor demo and I say indoor demo we must have an indoor demo what says the others yes an indoor demo we'll go into the classrooms and we'll get all the other to come out at least we can try we'll

start with the top class and we'll go through them all everyone agrees we go out and form a small procession in the corridor and we reach the first classroom the lesson had already started we burst in we all go into the classroom together in silence the teacher notorious as Mastino's toady takes fright and doesn't say a word all the students are facing the door

Valeriana is firm when she talks she is nervous of course but clear her voice carries well and her words are distinct the headmaster says he has suspend us all because we wanted to hold a mass meeting without his consent everyone knew it you all knew it too that this meeting was planned we've been talking about it for a fortnight now today you came inside out of fear but if you're scared today you'll be scared tomorrow as well and always and we'll never be able to settle our problems ourselves so you've got to make a start now right away we must all hold the meeting right away to show that in this school we aren't slaves we have to do it so we can do what they're doing in all the other schools to show that we're the ones to decide because the school is ours it's not Mastino's

Cocco and Scilla give the teacher threatening looks as I to say don't you dare open your mouth and he doesn't he keep quiet all right some people at the desks stand up and the first comments start coming that's right let's get out there let's all get out there yes we'll go round all the classrooms Mastino arrives from the other end of the corridor and runs up against the procession he starts screaming but now nobody's scared anymore Cocco stops right in front of him and shouts in his face mass meeting mass meeting Mastino goes on shouting purple with rage and threatens them all with suspension and screams to go back into class but the procession bursts into another classroom the method is to enter en masse without warning

by the time Valeriana's halfway through the speech they're all up and ready to walk out there's no need any more even to talk they've got the idea already the noise is bringing everyone out from the rest of the classrooms the procession swells and the whole ground floor is swept in we take the stairs in procession up to the first floor and go into the first classrooms we come to by now there are so many people that they can't all get in and there too all the students come out right away the ones pushing in collide with those pushing out we don't even go into the other rooms the students come out by themselves all over the place on the second floor too we see some leaning over the banisters screams of everyone out and we climb up the stairs to the second floor and when we reach the corridor they're already all out of the classrooms and they join the procession

the procession has come to a halt up on the stairs they're all crowding up the whole length of the stairs you can hear Mastino below screaming something but it's unclear it's hard to make out what he's saying there's an incredible din then we lean out and see Mastino down on the ground floor in the centre of the stairwell tearing his hair desperation on his face all you can hear is him screaming the stairs the stairs paper pellets are raining from above and landing on Mastino's head then from the first and second floors come a hail of biro erasers pencils then exercise books and textbooks too they're all throwing down at Mastino who is down there alone in the centre of the stairwell he's not even trying to shield himself his hands are thrust in his hair but not as a shield and he keeps screaming the stairs the stairs

the teachers are nowhere in sight the janitors have vanished some teachers have run into the empty classrooms and locked themselves in in one classroom after another the glass door panels cave in and the teachers can be seen standing scared stiff with their backs to the wall down below Mastino delivers one one last desperate shout that succeeds in being audible the stair's giving way the shouts quieten down less because of Mastino's works than because people have now let rip enough Gelso looks at me from behind his little round glasses he asks what the fuck's the shit shouting and Cocco says he's bluffing he's got nothing else left beneath us Mastino lifts his outstretched arms imporing boys and girls boys and girls stop the stair can't hold all that weight calm down and walk down the stairs at an orderly pace no running no noise

but these are orders don't you hear him he's still giving orders shouts Cocco now you can take back all your threats take it all back in front of everybody no more suspensions and mass meetings whenever we want them there's a great rumbling roar mass meeting mass meeting everyone's shouting below Mastino holds out his arms and then lets them drop when he manages to speak he pants out yes yes all you want but come down here at once I can entreat you I'm saying it for your own good come down here come down quietly don't run I beg you there won't be suspensions you can have your own meetings but come down I beg you everyone's shouting victory victory but no one's going down nobody believes all that about the stair's collapsing nobody takes the least bit of notice

Gelso is cleaning his glasses contentedly Malva and I hug in delight and you can still hear Cocco's great horse voice yelling so that's the end of your big talk now eh and then he adds Mastino you're suspended permanently go to the headmaster's room when we send for you Valeriana's voice can he heard saying we ought to go down to the yard now to hold the meeting because it's the only place where there's room for us all together and everyone shouts in agreement everyone shouts mass meeting mass meeting yard yard and they start coming down the stairs and instead of coming down at an orderly rate as Mastino wanted they all run down and what's more thudding along with leaps and bounds to spite him and all shoving Mastino is still there motionless with his arms raised and his head down shouting no no quietly quietly and then everyone knows how it ends



*(Each issue of this journal will include a segment from **The Unseen**, a fictionalized account of class struggle and repression in Italy in the late 70's. This novel is very hard to find in the U.S. — though the entire Italian edition is available free on the internet - and has had an unfortunately small readership despite being an amazing tale of revolt and defeat. The entire book was written without punctuation but is not difficult to read once one gets into it. These segments will be printed in order so that eventually the entire book will be available in the pages of this journal..)*

# The Legend of Pygmalion (Books)

A gifted young creator of Cypress, named Pygmalion, was a commodity-hater.

Detesting the faults beyond measure which nature has given to commodities, he resolved never to marry his subjectivity to the productive mode responsible for their distribution. His art, he told himself, was enough for him. Nevertheless, the creation he made and devoted all his genius to was that of a commodity. Either he could not dismiss what he so disapproved of from his mind as easily as from his life, or else he was bent on forming a utopian commodity and showing men the deficiencies of the kind they had to put up with.

However that was, he labored long and devotedly on the realization of his ambition and produced a most exquisite work of art (in the form of "publishing house"). But lovely as it was he could not rest content. He kept on working at it and daily under his skillful fingers it grew more beautiful. No commodity ever born, no publishing house ever made, could approach it. When nothing could be added to its perfections, a strange fate had befallen its creator: he had fallen in love, deeply, passionately in love, with the thing he had made. It must be said in explanation that the publishing house did not look like a publishing house; no one would have thought it was ivory or stone or based in the reproduction of ideology, but warm human flesh experimenting beyond the distributive reproduction of past systems, motionless for a moment only due to surrounding social constraints. Such was the wondrous power of this disdainful young man. The supreme achievement of creation was his, the art of quelling reactionary distributive praxis within the present.

But from that time on, the commodities he scorned had their revenge. No hopeless lover of a utopian commodity was ever so desperately unhappy as Pygmalion. He kissed those enticing lips of exemplary praxis — his contemporaries could not kiss him back; he caressed his books by hand — cloistered mass-production qua unliving capital reigned on; he took his books in his arms and actively intervened in the selling process — his contemporaries carried on to the contrary, remaining in cold and passive form.

For a time he tried to pretend, as children do with their toys. He would dress the publishing house in rich language, trying the effect of one delicate or glowing color of rhetoric after another, and imagine it was an expression of the avant-garde. He would bring it the gifts revolutionaries love, little birds and gay flowers and intensified self-management, and then dream that it thanked him with eager affection. He put the publishing house to bed at night, and tucked it in all soft and warm, as little girls do their dolls. But he was not a child; he could not keep on pretending. In the end he gave up. He loved a lifeless thing and he was utterly and hopelessly wretched.

This singular passion however did not long remain concealed from the forces of Passionate Love and Revolutionary Contempt. Life was interested in something that seldom came her way, a new kind of lover, a new kind of subversion, and she determined to help a young man who could be enamored and yet original...



# My Beliefs

Renzo Novatore  
(1920)

GOD: The creation of a sick fantasy. Inhabitant of senile and impotent brains. Companion and comforter of rancid spirits born to slavery. A pill for constipated minds. Marxism for the faint of heart.

HUMANITY: An abstract word with a negative connotation, long on power, short on truth. An obscene mask painted on the mean face of a shrewd vulgarian for the purpose of dominating the multitude of sentimentalist idiots and imbeciles.

COUNTRY: Penal servitude for the semi-intelligent, a cowshed of imbecility. A Circe who transforms her adoring fans into dogs and pigs. A prostitute for the master, a pimp of the foreigner. Child-eater, parent-slanderer and scoffer at heroes.

FAMILY: The denial of love, life and liberty.

SOCIALISM: Discipline, discipline; obedience, obedience; slavery and ignorance, pregnant with authority. A bourgeois body grotesquely fattened by a vulgar christian creature. A medley of fetishism, sectarianism and cowardice.

ORGANIZATIONS, LEGISLATIVE BODIES AND UNIONS: Churches for the powerless. Pawnshops for the stingy and weak. Many join to live parasitically off the backs of their card-carrying simpleton colleagues. Some join to become spies. Others, the most sincere, join to end up in jail from where they

can observe the mean-spiritedness of all the rest.

SOLIDARITY: The macabre altar used by capable comedians of all sort to display their priestly talent for reciting masses. The beneficiaries pay nothing less than 100% humiliation.

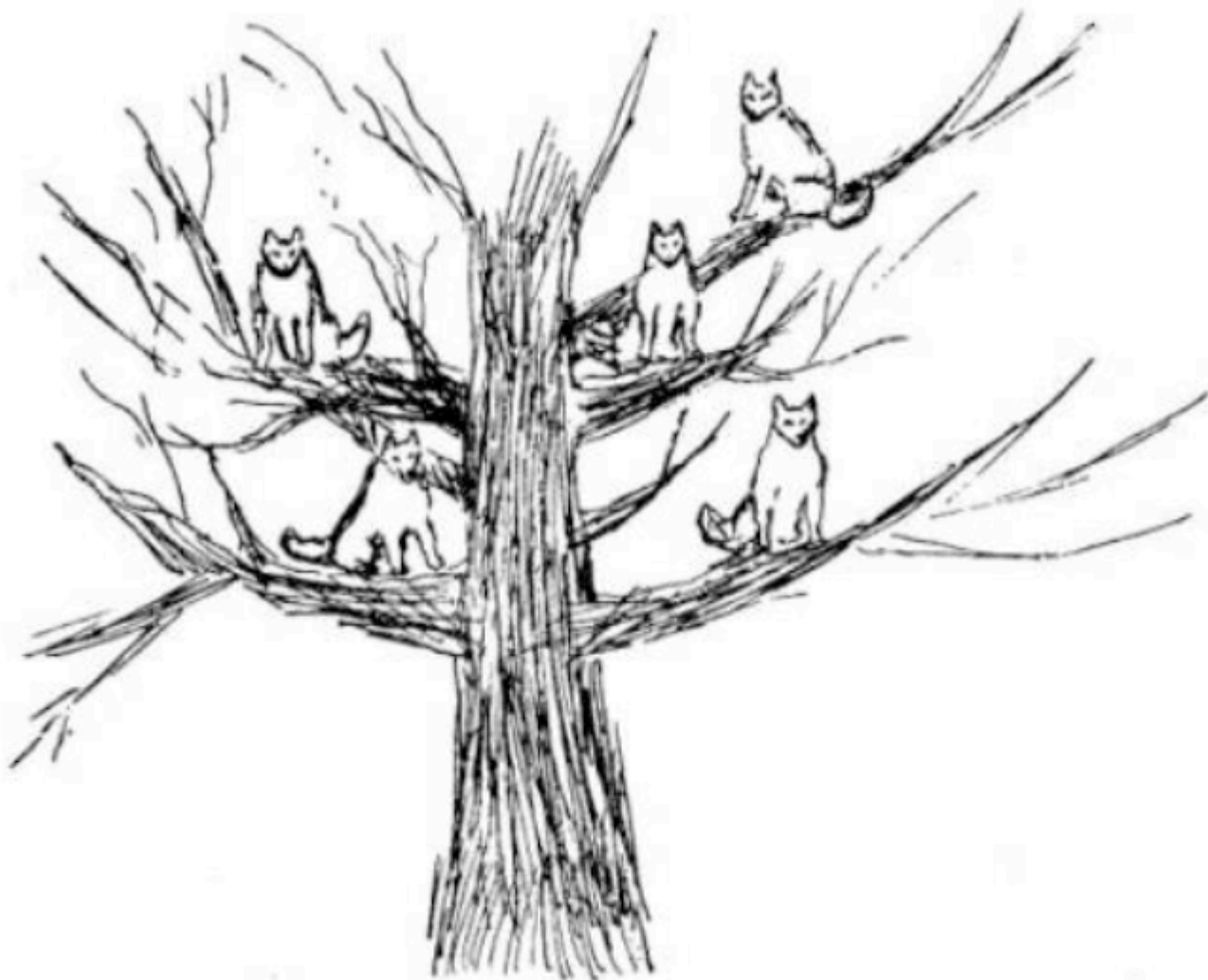
FRIENDSHIP: Fortunate are those who have drunk from its chalice without having their souls offended or poisoned. If one such person exists, I urge them to send me their photograph. I'm sure to look upon the face of an idiot.

LOVE: Deception of the flesh and damage to the spirit. Disease of the soul, atrophy of the brain, weakening of the heart, corruption of the senses, poetic lies from which one gets ferociously inebriated two or three times a day in order to consume this precious but stupid life more quickly. And yet I would prefer to die of love. It's the only swindler, after Judas, that can kill with a kiss.

MAN: A filthy paste of servitude, tyranny, fetishism, fear, vanity and ignorance. The greatest offense one can commit against an ass is to call it a man.

WOMAN: The most brutal of enslaved beasts. The greatest victim shuffling on earth. And, after man, the most responsible for her problems. I'd be curious to know what goes through her mind when I kiss her.





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