

Corsair Writings – Pier Paolo Pasolini

Introductory Note

The reconstruction of this book is entrusted to the reader. It is the reader who must reunite the fragments of a scattered and incomplete work. It is the reader who must piece together these widely dispersed parts that nonetheless constitute a whole. It is the reader who must organize their contradictory moments in search of their essential unity. It is the reader who must weed out the occasional inconsistencies (that is, tentative probes or abandoned hypotheses). It is the reader who must replace the repetitions with their sporadic variants (or else accept the repetitions as impassioned anaphors).

The reader has before him two “series” of writings, which, arranged chronologically, correspond approximately to: 1) a “series” of primary writings; and 2) a “series” of more humble complementary, corroborative, documentary writings. The reader will obviously have to shift from one “series” to the other. Except for this book of journalistic writings, I have never demanded such a necessary degree of philological devotion from my readers. Such devotion is hardly common these days. Naturally, the reader is also invited to refer to other writings besides those contained in the “series” of writings in this book. For example, to the texts of the interlocutors with whom I engaged in polemical exchanges or to whom I replied or answered so stubbornly. In addition to the work that the reader must reconstruct, this book is totally lacking certain materials that are, however, essential. I am referring above all to Italo-Friulian poetry. During the period encompassed in the first “series” by the articles on the discourse of the “Jesus blue jeans” (May 17, 1973) and the anthropological transformation of the Italians (June 10, 1974), and in the parallel “series”, by the review of Sandro Penna’s *Un pò di febbre* [A Little Fever] (June 10, 1973) and the review of Ignazio Buttitta’s *Io faccio il poeta* [I Am a Poet] (January 11, 1974)—I published a collection of poetic texts in *Paese Sera* (January 5, 1974) written in the style of my new Italo-Friulian tradition inaugurated in *La Stampa* (December 16, 1973), which constitutes an essential nexus not only between the two “series” but also within the first “series” itself, that is, in the context of the most contemporary debates addressed in this book. I cannot include those verses here, as they are not “corsair” writings (or they are too “corsair”). The reader is therefore referred to them, in the books and articles cited above, or in the new, definitive collection, *La nuova gioventù* [The New Youth] (Einaudi, 1975).

January 7, 1973

The “Discourse” of the Longhairs¹

The first time I saw longhairs was in Prague. Two young foreigners, with hair hanging down over their shoulders, entered the lobby of the hotel where I was staying. They

¹ Published in *Corriere della Sera* under the title, “Against the Longhairs”.

walked across the lobby and sat down at a table in a secluded corner. They sat there for about half an hour, observed by the customers of the hotel, including myself, and then they left. The whole time they sat there, and as they walked through the crowded lobby of the hotel, neither of them said a single word (perhaps—although I don't recall right now—they whispered a few words to each other: but I suppose if they did it was something strictly practical and pedestrian).

In fact, in that particular situation—which was completely public or social, almost official, so to speak—they did not need to speak at all. Their silence was strictly functional. And it was functional simply because words were superfluous. Both of them, in effect, used a different language from the one that is composed of words to communicate with those who were present, with the observers—with their brothers of the moment.

What replaced traditional verbal language, rendering it superfluous—and immediately finding its place in the broad domain of “signs”, in the domain of semiology—was the language of their hair.

In a single sign—the length of their hair flowing down over their shoulders— all the possible signs of an articulate language were concentrated. What was the meaning of their unspoken and exclusively physical message?

It was this: “We are two longhairs. We belong to a new human category that is now making its appearance in the world, which has its center in America and which is unknown in the provinces (for example—indeed, above all—here in Prague). We are therefore an apparition for you. We are performing our apostolic mission, filled with a knowledge that is both totally overwhelming and totally exhausting. We have nothing to add orally or rationally to what our hair says physically and ontologically. The knowledge that fills us, as we perform our apostolic mission, will belong to you some day, too. For the moment it is something New, a great Novelty, which generates, together with scandal, expectation in the world: it will not be betrayed. The bourgeoisie are right to look at us with hatred and terror, because the length of our hair constitutes an absolute contradiction of their ways. But don't think of us as uneducated savages: we are well aware of our responsibility. We do not bother with you, we keep to ourselves. You should do the same and await the unfolding of events.”

I was the recipient of this communication and I was immediately able to decipher it: this language that lacked a lexicon, grammar and syntax could be understood immediately, because, semiologically speaking, it was nothing but a form of that “language of physical presence” that men have always known how to use.

I understood, and felt an immediate dislike for both of them.

Later, I had to swallow my hostility and defend the longhairs from attacks by the police and the fascists: I was, of course, as a matter of principle, on the side of the Living

Theatre, of the Beats, etc.; and the principle that caused me to side with them was a strictly democratic one.

The longhairs multiplied—like the first Christians—but they remained mysteriously silent; their long hair was their only real language and they felt no need to supplement it with another. Their language coincided with their existence. Ineffability was the *ars retorica* of their protest.

What did the longhairs say, with their inarticulate language that consisted of the monolithic sign of their hair, between 1966 and 1967?

They said: “Consumer civilization nauseates us. We are protesting radically. We are creating an antibody against this civilization by way of our refusal. Everything seems to be going smoothly, right? Our generation is supposed to be integrated, right? But take a look at how things really stand. We refuse to accept the insane fate of becoming ‘executives’. We are creating new religious values within bourgeois entropy, precisely at the moment when it is turning secular and hedonistic. We are doing this loudly and with revolutionary violence (the violence of the nonviolent?) because our critique of today’s society is total and intransigent.”

I don’t think that, if they were to be interrogated in accordance with the traditional system of verbal language, they would have been capable of expressing the meaning of their hair so articulately; but that is essentially what they said. As for me, although I have suspected ever since then that their “system of signs” was the product of a subculture of protest that was opposed to a subculture of power, and that their non-Marxist revolution was suspect, I still stood by their side for a while, finding a place for them at least in the anarchic element of my ideology.

The language of these longhairs expressed, although ineffably, Leftist “themes”. Maybe those of the New Left, born within the world of the bourgeoisie (in a dialectic that was perhaps artificially created by the Mind that rules, beyond the consciousness of particular historical Powers, the fate of the Bourgeoisie).

Then came 1968. The longhairs were absorbed by the Student Movement; they protested with red flags on the barricades. Their language expressed an increasing number of Leftist “themes”. (Che Guevara was a longhair, etc.)

In 1969—with the Milan massacre, the Mafia, the emissaries of the Greek colonels, the complicity of the government Ministers, the *trama nera*,² the provocateurs—the longhairs were everywhere: while they were not yet the majority from the numerical point of view, they were dominant in terms of their ideological impact. Now the longhairs were no longer silent: they no longer delegated the totality of their communicative and expressive capacity to the system of signs of their hair. To the contrary, the physical presence of the

² “Black plot”: referring to the police hypothesis that the bomb attacks of 1969 in Italy were perpetrated by fascists. [American translator’s note].

longhairs was relegated, in a way, to a different function. They once again returned to the traditional use of verbal language. And I do not use the word, “verbal”, casually. In fact, I place special emphasis on it. They spoke so much between 1968 and 1970 that, for quite a while after that, they would no longer be able to speak at all: they devoted themselves to verbalism, and verbalism was the new *ars retorica* of the revolution (leftism, the verbal disorder of Marxism!).

Although the longhairs—re-immersed in their verbal storm—no longer addressed their agitated listeners in their former nonverbal way, I somehow summoned the power to sharpen my decoding skills and, amidst all the noise, I tried to focus on the unspoken discourse, evidently uninterrupted, of their hair that was always getting longer.

What did their long hair say now? It said: “Yes, it’s true, we are now speaking of Leftist themes; our meaning—while performing a purely secondary role in support of the meaning of our verbal messages—is a leftist meaning.... But.... But....”

The long-haired discourse stopped there: I had to finish it myself. With that “but” it evidently wanted to say two things: 1) “Our ineffability is revealed to be increasingly more irrational and pragmatic; the preeminence that we mutely attribute to action is of a subcultural character and therefore essentially Right-Wing”; 2) “We have also been adopted by the fascist provocateurs; they are mixing with the verbal revolutionaries (verbalism can lead to action, especially when it mythologizes it): and we constitute a perfect disguise, not only from the physical point of view—our disordered flowing and waving locks tend to make all faces look the same—but also from the cultural point of view: in effect, a Right-Wing subculture can quite easily be confounded with a Left-Wing subculture.”

In short, I understood that the language of long hair no longer expressed Leftist “themes”, but rather expressed something equivocal, something that was Right-Wing/Left-Wing, which created a situation that made the infiltration of provocateurs possible. About ten years ago, I thought, among us—the preceding generation—a provocateur was almost inconceivable (unless he was a magnificent actor): his subculture was different, even physically, from our culture. We would have known him by his eyes, his nose, his hair! We would have exposed him immediately and we would have immediately taught him the lesson that he deserved. Now this is no longer possible. No one in the world can distinguish a revolutionary from a provocateur by his physical appearance alone. Right and Left have merged physically.

And then came 1972.

In September of that year I was in the city of Isfahan, in the heart of Iran. An underdeveloped country, as the horrible expression goes, but also, to use an equally horrible expression, a country on the path of development [*in pieno decollo*—“taking off”].

Upon the Isfahan of ten years ago—one of the most beautiful cities in the world, maybe even the most beautiful—a new Isfahan has been built, modern and horribly ugly. On its streets, however, on their way home from work or just taking a walk, towards evening, you see the kind of young men you used to see in Italy about ten years ago: humble and dignified boys, with their smooth necks, their nice clean-shaven faces under their proud shocks of hair. And one evening I saw, walking down the main street of the city, among all those old-style, beautiful young men who were so radiant with an ancient human dignity, two monstrous beings: they were not exactly longhairs, but their hair was cut in the European style, long in the back, short in the front, drawn back and artificially slicked down around their head with two ugly shanks of hair pasted back over their ears.

What did their hair have to say? It said: “We do not belong to these starving masses, these miserable underdeveloped paupers, held back in the age of barbarism! We work at the bank, we are students, sons of rich people who work for the oil companies; we have been to Europe, we read books. We are bourgeoisie: and here is our long hair that testifies to our privileged international modernity!”

Their long hair therefore alludes to Right-Wing “themes”.

The cycle has come full circle. The subculture of power has absorbed the subculture of opposition and has made it its own: with diabolical skill it has patiently transformed it into a fashion that, if it cannot be called fascist in the classic sense of the word, is nonetheless really a phenomenon of the “extreme right”.

And so to my bitter conclusion. The disgusting masks that the young men put on their faces, making them look obscene like old whores from an absurd iconography, objectively recreate in their physiognomies only what they have themselves always condemned: reminiscent of the old faces of priests, judges, government officials, false anarchists, court jesters, pettifogging lawyers, Don Ferrantes,³ mercenaries, swindlers, self-righteous weirdos. The radical and indiscriminate condemnation that they pronounce against their parents—who constitute the evolving history and prior culture—by erecting an unbreachable wall against them, has ended up isolating them, preventing them from attaining a dialectical relation with their parents. Only by way of this dialectical relation—even if it is dramatic and extreme—can they attain to a real historical consciousness of themselves and advance beyond, or “supersede”, their parents. Instead, the isolation in which they have enclosed themselves—like a world apart, a ghetto reserved for young people—has severed them from their undeniable historical reality: and it has implied—inevitably—a regression. They have actually regressed from the position of their parents, resurrecting in their souls the terrors and conformities and, in their physical appearance, conventionalisms and miseries that once seemed to have been finally abolished forever.

Now the longhairs are repeating, in their inarticulate and obsessive language of non-verbal signs, in their underworld iconography, the “themes” of television or advertising,

³ A pretentious, dilettante bookworm.

where is it currently impossible to find a young man without long hair: something that would today be scandalous for power.

It causes me sincere and immense displeasure to say this (in fact, true desperation): but now, tens of thousands and hundreds of thousands of the faces of Italian young men are looking more and more like the face of Merlin the Magician. The freedom to wear their hair as long as they like is no longer defensible, because it is no longer freedom. The time has come to say instead to our young men, that the way they wear their hair is horrible, because it is servile and vulgar. The time has come for them to wake up and free themselves of this guilty, anxious yearning to conform to the degrading order of the horde.

May 17, 1973

The Linguistic Analysis of a Slogan⁴

The jargon of business is a language that is by definition purely communicative: the “places” where it is produced are the places where science is “applied”, that is, they are the places of pure pragmatism. Among themselves, the technicians speak a language of specialists, but according to a rigid and strictly communicative function. The linguistic canon that rules within the factory also has a tendency to spread beyond the factory: it is clear that those who produce want to have an absolutely transparent relation with those who consume.

There is only one case of expressiveness—but of aberrant expressiveness—in the purely communicative language of industry: that is the case of the slogan. The slogan must indeed be expressive to impress and convince. But its expressiveness is monstrous because it is immediately transformed into a stereotype, fixed in a rigidity that is exactly the opposite of expressiveness, which is eternally changing, open to infinite interpretations.

The phony expressiveness of the slogan is thus the climax of the new technical language that is replacing human language. It is the symbol of the linguistic life of the future, that is, of an inexpressive world, without particularities and diversities of culture, perfectly homogenized and acculturated. A world that to us, the last repositories of a multiple, magmatic, religious and rational view of life, looks like a world of death.

But is it possible to foresee the advent of such a negative world? Is it possible to foretell a future world as “the end of everything”? Some people—like me—tend to do this out of desperation: the love for the world that they have experienced and lived prevents them from being able to envision any other that would be equally real; that other values could be created that are similar to those that made their existence so precious. This apocalyptic vision of the future is understandable, but probably unfair.

⁴ Published in *Corriere della Sera* under the title, “The Crazy Slogan of Jesus Jeans”.

It seems crazy, but a recent slogan, which became an overnight sensation, that of the “Jesus jeans”—“You shall have no other jeans before me”—is presented as something new, an exception to the established rule of the slogan, revealing an unforeseen and highly expressive possibility indicative of a different development than the one that conventional practice—rapidly adopted by the desperate who want to feel the future as death—made very reasonable to predict.

Consider the reaction of *Osservatore Romano* to this slogan: with his old-fashioned, spiritualist and somewhat fatuous Italian, the journalist of *Osservatore* intoned a lamentation, one that was certainly not Biblical, posing as a poor victim or defenseless innocent. It is the same tone that characterizes, for example, that newspaper’s lamentations against immorality in literature or the cinema. In this case, however, the author’s whining and pseudo-respectable tone conceals the threatening will to resort to power: while the journalist, in effect, is pretending to be a lamb, with his lamentation in his rather old fashioned, proper Italian, the powers that be are standing behind him, ready to suppress, erase, and crush the reprobates who are the cause of his misfortune. The judges and the police are on the alert; the state apparatus immediately places itself at the service of the spirit. The jeremiad of *Osservatore* is followed by the legal proceedings of power: the blasphemous author or filmmaker is soon tracked down and forced to shut up.

Thus, when humanistic revolts occurred in the past—which were still possible in the context of the old capitalism and the first industrial revolution—the Church could intervene and exercise repression, brutally contradicting a certain formally democratic and liberal pretense maintained by the state power. The mechanism was simple: one part of the state power—the justice system and the police, for example—assumed a conservative and reactionary function and, as such, automatically placed its instruments of power at the service of the Church. There is therefore a double bond of bad faith in this connection between the Church and the State. On the one hand, the Church accepts the bourgeois State—instead of the monarchy or feudal order, conceding its consensus and its support, without which, until quite recently, state power never would have been able to survive. In order to accomplish this, however, the Church had to admit and approve of liberal demands and democratic formalities: which it admitted and approved only under the condition that it would obtain the power of the tacit authorization to limit them and suppress them. And this authorization was willingly conceded by bourgeois power. In fact, its pact with the Church as an *instrumentum regni* consisted in nothing but this: to disguise its own essential anti-liberalism and its own anti-democratic nature by entrusting the anti-liberal and anti-democratic function to the Church, recognized in bad faith as a higher religious institution. In short, the Church made a pact with the devil, that is, with the bourgeois State. In fact, there is no more scandalous contradiction than the one that exists between religion and the bourgeoisie, for the latter is opposed to religion. The monarchical or feudal power was actually much less opposed to religion. Fascism, for its part, as a regressive movement of capitalism, was therefore objectively less diabolical, from the Church’s point of view, than the democratic regime: fascism was blasphemous, but it did not undermine the Church from within, because it was a new, false ideology. The Concordat was not sacrilegious in the 1930s, but it is today; for fascism did not even

touch the Church, while Neo-Capitalism is destroying it today. The acceptance of fascism was an atrocious episode: but the acceptance of bourgeois capitalist culture is a definitive fact whose cynicism is not only a blemish, one more in an endless series of such blemishes, but a historical error that the Church will probably pay for with its decline. The Church had no idea—in its blind zeal for stability and to ensure the eternal existence of its institutional function—that the Bourgeoisie represented a new spirit that is certainly not that of fascism: a new spirit that was at first capable of competing with the religious spirit (stopping short of clericalism), and then ended up supplanting it in providing men with a total and integral view of life (and therefore no longer had any need for clericalism as an instrument of power).

It's true: as I said, the pathetic lamentations of the journalist for *Osservatore* are still immediately followed—in the cases of “classical” opposition—by the action of the legal system and the police. But this is a matter of life and death. The Vatican still finds old believers in the apparatus of state power: but they are just that—old. The future belongs neither to the old cardinals, nor to the old politicians, nor to the old judges, nor to the old policemen. The future belongs to the young bourgeoisie who no longer need to exercise power with the classic instruments of the past; who no longer have any use for the Church, which has now ended up belonging generically to that humanistic world of the past that constitutes an impediment to the new industrial revolution. For the new bourgeois power needs a totally pragmatic and hedonistic spirit in the consumers: a technical and purely worldly universe is the kind of universe in which the cycle of production and consumption can develop in accordance with its own nature. There is no longer any place for religion, and least of all for the Church. The repressive struggle that the new capitalism is still fighting by means of the Church is a rearguard struggle, destined, in bourgeois logic, to be won in the very near future, naturally resulting in the dissolution of the Church.

It seems crazy, I repeat, but the case of the “Jesus jeans” is a herald of this development. Those who produce these jeans and market them, using one of the Ten Commandments as an advertising slogan, show us that—probably with a certain lack of a feeling of guilt, that is, with the thoughtlessness of those who no longer think about certain problems—they are beyond the threshold within which our way of life and our mental horizon exists.

In the cynicism of this slogan there is an intensity and an innocence of an absolutely new type, although perhaps one that has matured over the course of the last few decades (but during a very short period in Italy). It says precisely, with the laconic mode of expression suited to a phenomenon that is immediately, completely and definitively accessible to our consciousness, that the new industrialists and the new technicians are totally secular, but secular in a way that can no longer be measured against the yardstick of religion. This secular quality is a “new value” born in bourgeois entropy, in which religion is perishing as an authority and as a form of power, and survives only to the extent that it is still a natural product for mass consumption and a profitable form of marketable folklore.

But the interest of this slogan is not only negative, not only does it represent the new way by which the Church is brutally reduced to what it really represents today: there is also a

positive interest in it, that is, the unforeseen possibility of conferring an ideological quality and therefore an expressiveness on the language of the slogan and therefore, presumably, also on the language of the technological world as a whole. The blasphemous spirit of this slogan is not limited to a plain and simple conditional declaration [*apodosis*], a pure observation that fixes its expressiveness in pure communicability. It is more than just an unscrupulous stunt (whose Anglo-Saxon model is “Jesus Christ Superstar”): to the contrary, it lends itself to an interpretation that can only be infinite: it therefore preserves in the slogan the ideological and esthetic characteristics of expressiveness. It says—perhaps—that the future that, for us—religious and humanists—seems like stasis and death, will also be, in a way new, history; that the demand for the pure communicativeness of production can somehow be contradicted. In fact, the slogan of these jeans is not limited to communicating the need to consume, but even takes the form of a nemesis—although unintentionally—that punishes the Church for its pact with the devil. On this occasion, the journalist for *Osservatore* really is helpless and impotent: even if the legal system and the police are immediately set in motion on behalf of Christian values, and they succeed in tearing down from the walls of the nation all the posters and billboards displaying this manifesto and this slogan, it has now become an irreversible, even if long-awaited, reality: its spirit is the new spirit of the second industrial revolution and of its consequent transformations of values.

July 15, 1973

The First Real Right-Wing Revolution⁵

Between 1971 and 1972 one of the most violent and perhaps most definitive periods of reaction in history began. Two aspects coexisted within it: one is deeply rooted, essential and absolutely new; the other is superficial, contingent and old. The deeply rooted nature of the reactionary epoch of the early 1970s is therefore unrecognizable; its external features are, on the other hand, easily discernable. Practically everyone has an opinion about the resurgence of fascism in all its forms, understood as the decrepit survivals of Mussolini’s fascism and clerical-liberal traditionalism, if we may use this definition that is as original as it is obvious.

This aspect of restoration (which, however, in our context, is actually an improper use of the term, for in reality nothing important has been restored) is a convenient pretext to ignore the other, more profound and real, aspect, that is inaccessible to all our habitual modes of interpretation. This latter feature is only grasped empirically and phenomenologically by sociologists or biologists, who naturally exercise the suspension of judgment or naively turn it into something apocalyptic.

The real restoration or reaction that began between 1971 and 1972 (after the intermission of 1968) is in fact a revolution. This is because it does not restore anything, and returns to nothing; instead, it actually tends to abolish the past, its “fathers”, its religions, its

⁵ Published in *Tempo Illustrato* under the title, “Pasolini on Italy”

ideologies and its ways of life (which are today reduced to mere relics). This right-wing revolution, which first of all destroyed the old right wing, has taken place factually and pragmatically. This was accomplished by way of a gradual accumulation of innovations (almost all of which are due to the application of science): and it began with the silent revolution of the infrastructure.

Of course, the class struggle has not ceased during all these years; and, naturally, it still continues. Indeed, this is the external aspect of this revolutionary reaction; an external aspect that takes the form precisely of the traditional forms of the fascist and clerical-liberal right wing.

While the first kind of reaction carries out the revolutionary destruction (revolutionary with respect to its own standards) of all the old social institutions—family, culture, language, church—the second kind of reaction (which is temporarily utilized by the first kind of reaction, in order to protect itself from the class struggle) is mobilized to protect those same institutions from the attacks of the workers and intellectuals. Thus, those years involved a false struggle over the old themes of classic restoration, in which both its supporters and opponents still believe. Meanwhile, behind everyone's backs, the “real” humanist tradition (not the false one of the government ministries, the universities, the courts and the public schools) is being destroyed by the new mass culture and by the new relation that technology has established—now from a secular perspective—between production and consumption; and the old paleo-industrial bourgeoisie is giving way to a new bourgeoisie that on an increasing scale and ever more profoundly is incorporating the working classes as well, consummating a tendency to definitively identify the bourgeoisie with humanity.

This state of affairs is accepted by the left: because there is no other alternative to this acceptance than that of dropping out of the game. Hence the general optimism of the left, and its eager attempt to integrate itself into the new world—which is totally unlike any previous world—created by technological civilization. The extreme left pursues this illusion even further (in its arrogance and triumphalist delusions), attributing to this new form of history created by technological culture a miraculous potential to rejuvenate and regenerate society. It is convinced that this diabolical program of the bourgeoisie that is tending to reduce the entire world, including the workers, to its own dimensions, will conclude with the explosion of the entropic condition thus created, and the last spark of working class consciousness will then be capable of causing this world that was destroyed (due to its own fault) to rise again from its ashes in a kind of palingenesis (the old bourgeois-Christian dream of the non-working class communists).

So everyone pretends not to see (or maybe they really cannot see it) the real new reactionary trend; and thus everyone is fighting against the old reaction that serves to divert attention from it. The assigned topics for the most recent examinations for the baccalaureate in Italian literature exemplify the false dilemma and the false struggle that I have outlined above. First of all, on the part of the authorities there has evidently been some kind of tacit compromise agreement: the right wing traditionalists have made some concessions to the moderates and to the progressives, and the latter have made some

concessions to the traditional right: in this way the clerical-liberal academic and governmental world is perfectly expressed.

The liberal theme proposed by the Hispanicized passage from Croce, is balanced by the fatalist theme clumsily taken from DeSanctis; the reading that can only be modern, even if it has the agnostic and sociological attributes of a city-dweller, is balanced by the merely scholastic reading of Pascoli and D'Annunzio, etc., etc. The fiction, however, is all of the same cloth; all those who have invented these lovely themes still cling to a classic traditionalism and reformism, and all of them are equally unaware of the fact that these terms of reference are totally devoid of any relation to reality.

The "fathers" referred to in the passage from Croce are fathers who were good enough for the sons of the late 19th century or even the whole 20th century right up until only about ten years ago: now, this is no longer true (although the children, as we shall see, do not know this or only have a vague intimation of it). Semantically, the term "father" began to change, naturally, after Freud and psychoanalysis, so that the "legacy" of the father is no longer necessarily a positive thing; it may to the contrary be legitimately interpreted as totally negative. The term "father" has been transformed even more by the Marxist analysis of society: in fact, the "fathers" to whom Croce candidly refers are all virtuous bourgeois gentlemen (like himself) with solemn beards and venerable bald pates, seated at desks covered with papers, or reclining in a most dignified manner on damasked sofas: they are, in short, fathers of privilege and power. There is no reference whatsoever to fathers who are trash collectors or bricklayers, day laborers or miners, mechanics or lathe operators, much less thieves or vagabonds. The legacy of which Croce speaks is a class legacy of fathers defined in a class-bound way. There can be no doubt that it takes a lot of effort to keep privileges "solidly" embedded. Apart from all of this, however (which I was able to observe even ten or fifteen years ago), there is also something totally new: and that is precisely the real, new power that has no desire at all to be associated with such fathers. It is precisely this power that no longer wants its children to inherit a legacy composed of such ideals.

The relation between the people who have designed these examinations and those who have taken them is therefore a relation that is located on the margins of a pretend power that the real power still concedes to its defenders and its adversaries, as it academically disposes of the old sentiments.

Furthermore, the marvelous right to "internalization" (attributed, moreover, by way of a falsified DeSanctis to a falsified Leopardi) no longer harbors any relation to present day reality: for, obviously, one can only internalize what is external. The average man of the time of Leopardi could still internalize nature and humanity in the ideal purity that was objectively contained in them; the average man of our time can internalize a Chevy or a refrigerator, or maybe a weekend in Ostia. Something in which there is a residue of humanity thanks to the passion and the chaos in which even these new values are experienced. As it awaits the time when passion will be totally sterilized and homogenized and when chaos will be technically abolished, the new, real power still concedes a vague terrain where the old-style, false power can proclaim the goodness of

internalization as a noble form of escapism, in the sense of the scorn for possessions and consolation for possessions lost.

The students strictly abide by the rules of the game that authority imposes on them. The vast majority of students will certainly have written their essays in accordance with what they suppose are the desires of the authorities: and the latter will generously describe the efforts of the students, as good children, to assimilate the paternal exploits. Or they will sing the praises of the inner life.

In any case, debate is useless: in the antics performed on the stage of the old, false power in a world of all-out reaction, the scholastic authorities and the students understand each other perfectly, in their mutual odious, pragmatic zeal for integration. There will naturally be cases, however, where students will engage in polemical disputes with the “apodictic” statements of the proposed examination topics (passages deceitfully extracted from their context), but in this case as well, the scenario in which the confrontation between scholastic authorities and students can take place is the same: one in which the new, real power, in its revolutionary reaction, makes a cynical concession to the old ways.

The students who have written their essays on these themes (by accepting them or by challenging them), are the younger brothers and sisters of the students who engaged in the rebellions of 1968. It would be a mistake to believe that they have been forced to remain silent, reduced to a state of passivity, by a type of old-style reaction, like that of the essay guidelines (as the themes examined above prove) of the academic authorities. In most cases, their silence and their passivity have the appearance of a kind of terrible euphoric neurosis that causes them to accept without any resistance the new hedonism which the real power is substituting for all the moral values of the past. A small minority, on the other hand, displays the characteristics of anxiety neurosis, which is why it preserves the possibility for new protest movements. In fact, however, it is the latter, truly the latter, who are really humanists. They are young parents, as we are old children. Everything is destined to disappear, not only that which connects us to them but also that which has been bequeathed to us: tradition, religious belief, fascism. We are being replaced by new men, the bearers of values that are as indecipherable as they are incompatible with the values, so dramatically contradictory, that we have lived by until now. This, the best of the young people understand instinctively; but I think they are incapable of expressing it.

December 9, 1973

Acculturation and Assimilation⁶

Many people complain (in these times of *austerity*) of the inconveniences caused by the lack of an organized social and cultural life outside of the “bad” Center, in the “good”

⁶ Published in *Corriere della Sera* under the title, “A Challenge to Television Network Executives”. The last part of the article (the “Challenge”) is omitted.

peripheries (seen as dormitories without services, without autonomy, without real human relations). This is merely a rhetorical lament. If the things that are said to be lacking in the peripheries were to exist, they would in any case be organized by the Center. The same Center that, over the last few years, has destroyed all the peripheral cultures in which—precisely up until a few years ago—their own way of life was safe, and essentially free, even in the most impoverished and miserable backwaters.

No fascist centralism ever managed to do what the centralism of consumer civilization has successfully accomplished. Fascism proposed a reactionary and monumental model that was nonetheless a dead letter from the start. The various particular cultures (peasants, sub-proletarians, workers) carried on undisturbed and continued to live in accordance with their age-old models: repression was limited to obtaining their verbal support. Today, however, adherence to the models imposed by the Center is total and unconditional. Real cultural models are repudiated. The renunciation is complete. One is therefore justified in saying that the “tolerance” of the hedonistic ideology of the new power is the worst kind of repression in human history. How has this repression been exercised? By way of two revolutions, which have taken place within bourgeois organizational forms: the infrastructural revolution and the information systems revolution. Highways, cars, etc., have today strictly united the periphery with the Center by abolishing all physical distance. But the revolution of the information systems has been even more radical and decisive. By means of television the Center has assimilated the whole country, which was historically so differentiated and rich in original cultures. A project of homogenization commenced, destroying all authenticity and all concrete legacies of the past. It has imposed—as I said—its models: they are the models sought by the new industrialization, which is no longer content with inducing men to consume, but seeks to create a situation in which no other ideology is even conceivable other than the ideology of consumption. A neo-secular hedonism, blindly oblivious to every humanistic value and blindly alien to human knowledge.

The old ideology that was formerly favored and imposed by power was, as everyone knows, religion: and Catholicism was, in fact, formally the only cultural phenomenon that “homogenized” Italians. Now it has a competitor in the new “homogenizing” cultural phenomenon that is mass hedonism: and the new power has in the last few years begun to liquidate its competitor. For there is nothing religious about the models of the Young Man and Young Woman offered and imposed by television. They are nothing but two people who only value life in terms of their consumer goods (and, of course, they still go to Mass on Sundays: in a car). Italians have enthusiastically embraced this new model that television is imposing on them in accordance with the norms of Production that are bringing prosperity (or, more accurately, that are saving them from poverty). They have embraced this model: but are they really in any position to take advantage of it?

No. They either partake of its benefits only in part, becoming caricatures, or they fall so far short of its realization that they become its victims. Frustration and neurotic anxiety are now collective states of mind. Sub-proletarians, for example, until only a few years ago, respected culture and were not ashamed of their ignorance. To the contrary, they were proud of their own popular model of illiteracy that nonetheless was privy to the

mystery of reality. They viewed with a certain arrogant scorn the “spoiled brats”, the petit bourgeoisie, from whom they dissociated themselves, even if they had to serve them. Now, however, they are beginning to be ashamed of their own ignorance: they have renounced their own cultural model (the youngest people no longer have any recollection of it at all, they have completely lost it) and the new model that they are trying to imitate does not have a place for illiteracy or the old rustic ways of life. Sub-proletarian young men—humiliated—cross out the name of their trade on their IDs and replace it with the word, “Student”. Naturally, ever since they have begun to be ashamed of their ignorance, they have also begun to despise culture (a petty bourgeois characteristic, which they have rapidly acquired by mimesis). At the same time, the petit bourgeois youth, by adapting himself to the model young person depicted on television that was created and imposed by members of his own class, and which he finds perfectly natural, unexpectedly becomes uncouth and miserable. If the sub-proletarians have become bourgeoisified, the bourgeoisie have become sub-proletarianized. The culture that they produce, insofar as it is of a technological and strictly pragmatic character, prevents the “man” that still lies dormant within them from being developed. This results in the stifling of their intellectual and moral faculties.

The responsibility of television in all of this is enormous. Not so much as a “technological medium”, but as an instrument of power and even as power itself. It is not just a place through which messages are transmitted, but a center for the elaboration of messages. It is the place where a mentality that would otherwise find no point of application can become concrete. It is through the spirit of television that the spirit of the new power is concretely manifested.

There can be no doubt (as can be seen by its results) that television is more authoritarian and repressive than any other means of disseminating information that has ever existed in the history of the world. Fascist newspapers and Mussolini’s slogans emblazoned on the walls of farmhouses are just laughable: like ox-drawn plows compared to tractors. Fascism, I repeat, was never capable of even scratching the surface of the soul of the Italian people: the new fascism, by way of the new communications and information media (especially television) not only scratch its surface, but lacerate it, violate it, brutalize it forever....

March 1974

The Intellectuals in 1968: The Manichaeism and Orthodoxy of the “Imminent Revolution”⁷

There was a time, a few years ago, when it seemed that the revolution could break out any day. Along with the young people who—beginning in 1968—believed in the imminent revolution that would overthrow and destroy the very foundations of the

⁷ Published in *Dramma*, as a contribution to a survey on the political views of the intellectuals.

System (as it is now obsessively referred to, and which has since become a pejorative term of shame), the intellectuals who were not so young, or who already had gray hair, also shared this view. Among them, this certainty regarding an “imminent revolution” did not have even the justifications that were common among the younger people: they are guilty of having neglected the first duty of the intellectual, that is, to exercise, above all else and without any concessions, a critical examination of the facts. And if they did in fact engage during those days in veritable orgies of critical diagnostics, what was missing was the will to engage in real critique.

There is no rationality without common sense and concreteness. Without common sense and concreteness rationality is fanaticism. And, indeed, on the maps around which the strategists of today’s guerrilla warfare and tomorrow’s imminent revolution crowded, the idea of the “duty” of the political intervention of the intellectuals was not based on necessity and reason, but on blackmail and partisan politics.

Today it is clear that all of this was the product of desperation and an unconscious sense of impotence. At a time when Europe was embarking on a new form of civilization and a long future of “development” programmed by Capitalism—which thus carried out its own internal revolution, the revolution of Applied Science, which is just as important as the Dawn of Agriculture upon which the age-old peasant civilization was based—it was felt that all hopes for a working class Revolution were receding. This is why the word “Revolution” was shouted so loudly. For what was clear at that time was not so much the impossibility of a dialectical development as precisely the impossibility of any compatibility of technological capitalism and humanist Marxism.

Hence the rallying cry that resounded throughout Europe, in which, more than anything else, it was the word “Marxism” that predominated. Those who gave voice to this cry did not want—rightly—to accept the unacceptable. The young people desperately lived this long outcry, which was a kind of exorcism and a farewell to Marxist hopes: the adult intellectuals who stood by their side, however, committed, I repeat, a political error. A political error that was not, on the other hand, committed by the Italian Communist Party. The PCI realistically took account at that point of the inevitable nature of the new historical course of capitalism and its “development”: and it was probably during those days that the idea of the “historic compromise” began to take shape.

Assuming that, with respect to a non-political intellectual—a scholar, or a scientist—one may speak of the “duty” to participate in politics, then that was the time to do so. In 1968 and immediately thereafter, the reasons to take action, to join the struggle, to speak out, were profoundly just, but historically premature. The student revolt broke out almost overnight. It had no real, objective reasons for its emergence (other than, perhaps, the idea that the revolution would have to take place now or never: but this is a form of abstract and romantic thought). Besides, for the masses, the real historical innovations were consumerism, prosperity and the hedonistic ideology of power. Now, however, there are objective reasons for total commitment. The state of emergency has profoundly affected the masses: indeed, it has affected them above all.

I shall summarize the reasons for this in two points: first, an “imposed” struggle against the old fascist murderers who are now trying to exacerbate the degree of tension not by throwing their bombs, but by instigating disorders in the streets that are in part justified by the extreme degree of discontent; second, to reestablish the basis for discussion of the “historic compromise”, now that it no longer describes a position on an inevitable course—“development”—identified with our whole future; but rather appears as a life raft for the men in power to maintain order. I will not say, simplistically, that the “realism” of the historic compromise has definitely been superseded: but it is at least being redefined beyond its character as a strictly “political maneuver”. Therefore, a desperately backwards form of struggle, and an extremely advanced form of struggle. But it is in these ambiguous, contradictory, frustrating, inglorious, and odious conditions that a cultured and educated man must commit himself to the political struggle, forgetting the Manichaeic rage against all Evil, a rage that opposes one orthodoxy to another.

March 28, 1974 **Prediction of Victory in the “Referendum”⁸**

Fascism was in power for twenty years. It has been thirty years since it was overthrown. It should now therefore be forgotten, or at least a vague memory, no longer fashionable, without any popular resonance. And so it is. A Fascism like that of the years between 1922 and 1944 will never again have any possibility of seizing power in Italy: unless its illogical ideology ceases to be oriented exclusively towards “Order” as a completely autonomous or simply technical concept: an “Order”, that is, which is no longer at the service of “God”, the “Fatherland”, and the “Family”, things that no one believes in anymore, above all because they are indissolubly linked with the idea of “poverty” (not to say “injustice”).

The “hedonism” of the power that rules over consumer society has rapidly disabused the Italians, in less than a decade, of the acceptability of the idea of resignation or sacrifice: Italians are no longer prepared—and this feeling is deeply entrenched—to abandon the share of comfort and prosperity (even if it is a rather meager prosperity) that they have to various degrees attained. What any new kind of Fascism must therefore promise is precisely “comfort and prosperity”: which constitutes a contradiction in terms.

In fact, however, there was, and still is, a new Fascism in Italy whose power is based precisely on its promise of “comfort and prosperity”: and this is precisely what Marco Pannella calls the new Regime, perhaps a little too imaginatively but accurately, nonetheless. Although the power of this Regime is based on principles that are substantially opposed to those of the classic Fascism (which has repudiated over the last

⁸ Published on the page devoted to the LID [*Lega Italiana per il Divorzio*—Italian League for Divorce] in *Il Mondo*. I published this brief text to prevent anyone from being able to accuse me of “20/20 hindsight” with respect to my article, “A Study of the Anthropological Revolution in Italy”, which was actually written *after* the “referendum”.

few years its collaboration with the Church, which has for its part been reduced to a ghost of its former self), it can still legitimately be called fascist. Why? First of all, because the organization of the State, or the sub-State, has remained practically unchanged: indeed, by means, for example, of the intervention of the Mafia, the gravitational force of the forms of the sub-State has been increased. This archaic dead weight which the new Regime—so modern, so unprejudiced, so cynical, so flexible—drags in its wake, powerless to free itself of this ballast, renders the presence of men of power like Fanfani, for example, perfectly logical and historical. In this Regime, its old features (legalism, clericalism and intrigue) can peacefully coexist with its new features (superfluous production, hedonism, cynical and indiscriminate development): because this coexistence is an objective reality of the Italian nation.

The continuity between the twenty years of fascism and the thirty years of Christian Democratic rule is based on moral and economic chaos, on political indifference [*qualunquismo*] and immaturity, and on the marginalization of Italy from the stage of history. What distinguishes, formally, the old fascist masters from the new Christian Democratic masters (which have nothing to do with Christianity: they have cynically cast aside their disguise) is the exercise of power: the twenty fascist years were a dictatorship, the thirty Christian Democratic years were a parliamentary police state. Parliamentary government is a luxury that has been allowed by the new (anti-fascist!) masters due to the presence of the Church. The enormous majority that the Christian Democracy has always won in the elections of these last thirty years, thanks to the masses of Catholic voters who followed the instructions of their priests, has made it possible to maintain the appearance of democracy, which is dishonestly used as evidence to prove that it has nothing in common with fascism. During these thirty years the Christian Democracy has suffered a few minor setbacks and a few coups: but never a defeat.

Today, for the first time, the Christian Democracy is facing the possibility of defeat: the masses of consumers have escaped its control, forming a new “modern” mentality; that, and the collapse of the ecclesiastical organization and its prestige, expose the Christian Democracy to the defeat that might force it to cast aside the mask of democracy, and to have no other alternative than that of resorting to the same instruments of power that classic fascism used. I think this is historically untenable, however. The threat that Italy faces today is a *coup d'état* similar to the one that took place in Ethiopia (or Portugal?): one in which the army will remain outside—so I believe—the old fascist ideological universe. The latter can be utilized solely on the basis of the slogan to restore “order”: but an “order” maintained to protect not conditions of poverty and injustice (like fascism and the Christian Democracy of the 1950s), but to protect “development”, which is what the industrialists want.

For all of these reasons, I think there will be a direct confrontation that will give rise to the first defeat of the Christian Democracy. Therefore, not only am I not afraid of the “referendum”, but I am in favor of the great challenge launched by the Radicals with their proposal for an “eight point referendum”. Apart from that, of course, there are two considerations that would in themselves be sufficient to convince me to take this position: 1) the legislative changes called for by the “eight point referendum” are sacrosanct, the

minimum required for a “real” democratization of public life (I personally have some doubts only on the question of abortion); 2) it is no longer necessary, in any case, to be afraid of the immaturity of the voters: this is brutally paternalistic; it is the same kind of reasoning that is indulged in by censors or magistrates when they consider the “public” to be too immature to see certain works.

March 1974

Another Prediction of Victory for the “Referendum”⁹

Yesterday evening (Holy Thursday?) I saw a small group of people in front of the Coliseum: nearby, there was an enormous “squad” of police and urban traffic wardens. At first I thought that some vagrant had climbed onto the upper wall of the Coliseum. No. It was a religious function that was supposed to be attended by Paul VI. There was only a handful of people; traffic would not be affected at all. Of this small group of people, about half were tourists and soldiers on leave (about a dozen of them); some old people and a group of those semi-lay sisters, followers of DeFaucault, who observe the rule of silence. I don’t think that there was even one Roman present. A more complete failure would be impossible to imagine. Not only do the people not have any respect for the prestige of the Church, but they no longer see any need for it. They have unconsciously renounced one of their most deeply-ingrained habits. For something worse than religion, no doubt. And still without overcoming the ignorance to which the diabolical pragmatism of the Church had condemned them for centuries. In this context—the collapse of ecclesiastical values determined by a blind decision of the masses who are presently the bearers of other values—the problem of divorce *must conclude with a great victory of the secular forces*.¹⁰ At least theoretically: because I did not say that everyone will cast their votes in full knowledge of the things in which they really believe. That which is existentially experienced is always much more advanced than that which is consciously experienced. Besides, the masses of women might still be dominated by the old ecclesiastical pragmatism (it is in a practical, rather than liturgical, way that a “simple woman” stands by the indissoluble nature of marriage).

March 1974

Devoid of Charity, Devoid of Culture: A Language without Roots¹¹

⁹ This is my article written in response to a request from *Nuova Generazione*, but never published. See footnote 7 above.

¹⁰ The italics are from May 1975, when this book was released.

¹¹ Preface to a collection of *Sentences of the Sacra Rota* [the highest Appellate Tribunal of the Roman Catholic Church], edited by Francesco Perego.

As long as the Church, the peasant world and the paleo-industrial bourgeoisie comprised a single whole, Religion could be recognized in each and every one of these three moments of a single culture. And also—as everyone knows—in the Church: in the Vatican. The crimes against Religion perpetrated by the Church—if for no other reason than the mere fact of its existence—were justified by Religion. It was possible to understand the humanistic indifference of its prelates according to whom, precisely, the ends could justify the means: an alliance with Fascism, for example, might seem to be a means justified by the end, which consists in preserving Religion for centuries to come. On the other hand, nothing could make us believe that the religious world of the peasants (and the paleo-industrial bourgeoisie of peasant origin) would have come to an end so rapidly. The latter therefore had a right to its Religion and its codified Religion (a contradiction in terms that had no effect, however, on a peasant, whether Lucanian or Breton, Friulian or Andalusian, whose way of being religious was far beyond this contradiction).

The Concordat between the Church and Fascism was something very serious, then; so serious that the pact was a blasphemy before God: but it is much more serious today. Why? Because the Italian people of that time were “solidaric”—in the sense that the structuralists understand this word—with the Church. And the Church, for the purpose of restoring its lost *agape* with the people, could afford the “cynical” luxury of disregarding the disgrace of Fascism.

Today, however, the people are no longer “solidaric” with the Church: the peasant population, after about fourteen thousand years of existence, has disappeared almost overnight. The Concordat between the Church and the post-fascist State, which is still in effect, is therefore a pure and simple power alliance, and is no longer objectively justified by the existence of an anonymous religious peasantry. Take the family, for instance. Or rather, that imitation of that refractory material, the Family. In the religious-peasant world (all the world’s religions are profoundly similar), the Family was the Cell of the Church: there would have been no gods in the Temples if there had not been *lares* in the huts.

At the same time, the Family was the nucleus of that economic condition (which was precisely the peasant condition: the cycle of the seasons, its type of production and consumption, the market, thrift, poverty, slavery) that rendered the presence of the Church not only possible, but even historically indispensable. The peasant economy and the Church were a single reality. This was still true when the modern bourgeoisie began to take shape during the first industrial revolution. It was at this point, however, that the cynical dissociation of the Church commenced: it came to an understanding, for reasons of power, with a social class whose faith was no longer pure, or had simply evaporated. The Church used this new ruling class, and the latter allowed the Church to use it. There was an immense herd of people (and, I repeat, they were classically religious) that had to be governed and controlled. But let us suppose that the Church was acting in good faith, and let us interpret its abject pact with the fascists as a way to remain in solidarity with the people, who were then exploited and starving. Now—and this took place almost overnight—the Family is no longer that smallest, cellular, primal “nucleus” of the peasant

economy that it had been for thousands of years. As a result, as a perfectly logical repercussion, the Family has also ceased to be the smallest “nucleus” of the Church.

What, then, is the Family today? After having practically been on the verge of dissolution along with its dual economic-religious myth—according to the predictions of secular progressive intellectuals—today the Family has once again become a solid reality, more stable, more fiercely privileged than before. It is true, for example, that with respect to the education of children, external influences have grown much more powerful (so much so that, I repeat, that a definitive revision of pedagogy was conceived, completely removed from the Family). Nonetheless, the Family is once again that powerful and irreplaceable, yet infinitesimal center of everything that it once was. Why? Because consumer civilization needs the family. An individual cannot be the consumer that the producer wants. That is, he can only be a sporadic, unpredictable consumer, free to choose, hard to reach, maybe capable of refusal: capable of rejecting the hedonism that has become the new religion. The notion of the “solitary individual” is inherently contradictory and irreconcilable with the demands of consumption. This individual must be destroyed. It must be replaced (as everyone knows) with the mass-man. The family is precisely the only possible concrete “*exemplum*” of the “masses”. And it is in the bosom of the family that man really becomes a consumer: first, for the social requirements of the couple; then, for the social demands of the family properly speaking.

Therefore, the Family (I once again use the upper case), which for so many centuries and millennia was the minimum “specimen” of both the peasant economy and religious civilization, has now become the minimum “specimen” of the civilization of mass consumerism.

The Church, in its rigid (and sacrilegious) pragmatism, and in its triumphal eschatological optimism (that End that has so horribly justified every Means throughout its entire history), is oblivious to this fundamental transformation of the Family. The only thing that it has noticed is the formal reality: that is, that the Family has survived (after having almost disappeared in a different development, of a humanistic, secular and Marxist character), and is extremely important. What does the Family, understood as the “basis” of the life of a totally industrialized world, whose only ideology is a materialist and secular neo-hedonism, in the most stupid and passive sense of those terms, have to do with Religion? The completely external, calculated and formal (and narrow-mindedly pious) relation of the Church with this new type of Family can be examined under various aspects and on various levels. The point of view of the problem of divorce (which the Sacra Rota has so cynically contested) is one of many points of view from which the relation between Church and Family can be analyzed.

For my part, I can say that I was scandalized by these rulings issued by the Sacra Rota. But let’s get one thing straight: I was scandalized, not because of their moral and political aberration, or their craven servility towards their traditional allies (the Christian Democratic and Fascist politicians), or their aura of fraudulence, intrigue, hypocrisy, bad

faith and the unctuousness of privilege that has never been so obviously displayed in all its repugnance. I was scandalized for two reasons that I would define as cultural rather than moral.

First: the total absence of any form of Charity. Of Faith and Hope, there are some rare, purely formal and verbal indications: the latter, however, only appear as formulaic expressions which are, furthermore, oddly precipitous and laconic. The sacerdotal nature of these fleeting and cynically precipitous indications leads us to associate these *Sentences* with the most obtuse official decrees of any priesthood in history. OK. But the total absence of Charity, in the examination of the cases in which it should play an essential role, cannot seem to us as a predictable and normal fact. It constitutes a brutal offense against human dignity, which is not taken into consideration at all. The human experience upon which these Sentences are based in examining cases is perfectly anti-religious: the pessimism of its pragmatism is limitless. The internal life of men is reduced to mere calculation and mental reservations: to which are added, naturally, their actions, but in their pure, formal nakedness.

My second reason for being scandalized: the total absence of any form of Culture. The authors of these *Sentences* seem to be unfamiliar not only with men—who are viewed as being part of a dismal, tangled web of actions dictated by raw sensations or infantile interests—but with any other book besides Canon Law and Saint Thomas. If by chance they address “cultural problems” (in one of these *Sentences* they speak, for example, of the literary and ideological tendencies associated with D’Annunzio [*dannunzianesimo*]), they do so as if cultural problems were “facts”, perfectly understood pragmatically by virtue of their public and social value. Furthermore, examined linguistically and stylistically, the texts of these *Sentences* remind us of *nothing and no one*. Their Latin would seem to have been learned directly from a book of grammar that includes, as examples, fragments of authors quoted completely at random. With respect to the texts, from these *Sentences*, effectively, one cannot offer one quotation. No exegesis would be possible. They seem to have been born from themselves. Their purely pragmatic interpretation (devoid of Charity) of human actions is therefore derived from this absence of culture; or at least from that purely formal and practical culture. This absence of culture becomes in turn an insult against human dignity when it is explicitly manifested as disdain for modern culture, and therefore expresses nothing but the violence and the ignorance of a repressive world in its totality.

June 10, 1974

A Study of the Anthropological Revolution in Italy¹²

June 9: In *L’Unità*, on the front page, there is a banner headline of the kind reserved for major news stories that reads: “Long Live the Anti-fascist Republic”.

¹² Published in *Corriere della Sera* under the title, “Italians Are Not What They Used To Be”.

Of course, Long Live the Anti-fascist Republic. But what *real* meaning does this sentence have? Let us attempt to analyze it.

It actually arises from two events that fully justify it: 1) The overwhelming victory of the “No” vote on May 12; and 2) the fascist massacre at Brescia on the 28th of the same month.

The victory of the “No” vote is in fact a defeat for Fanfani and the Vatican, yet, in a certain sense, it is also a defeat for Berlinguer and the communist party. Why? Fanfani and the Vatican have shown that they have understood nothing of what has happened in our country during the last ten years: the Italian people have proven to be—objectively and clearly—ininitely more “progressive” than anyone would have thought possible, overcoming the old peasant and paleo-industrial *sanfedismo*.

It is necessary, however, to have the intellectual courage to say that Berlinguer and the Italian Communist Party have also proven that they have a deficient understanding of what has happened in our country over the last ten years. In fact, they did not want the referendum; they did not want a “war of religion” and they were extremely fearful with respect to the possible positive outcome of the vote. Indeed, on this point, they were decidedly pessimistic. The “war of religion” turned out instead to be an abstruse, archaic, superstitious and totally unfounded prediction. Italians have proven to be infinitely more modern than even the most optimistic communist could have imagined. Both the Vatican as well as the Communist Party were mistaken in their analyses of the “real” situation in Italy.

Both the Vatican as well as the communist party have proven to be poor observers of the Italian people and have demonstrated that they did not believe that Italians were capable of such rapid evolution, far beyond any possible forecasts.

Now, the Vatican is regretting its mistake. The Italian Communist Party, however, pretends that it made no mistakes and is rejoicing over its unexpected victory.

But was it really a victory?

I have good reasons to doubt it. Almost a month has passed since that happy day on May 12 and I can therefore allow myself to exercise my critical faculties without being afraid of being accused of untimely defeatism.

My opinion is that the fifty-nine percent who voted “No” does not miraculously prove a victory for secularism, progress and democracy—far from it—but instead demonstrates two things:

1. that the “middle classes” have radically, even anthropologically, changed: their positive values are no longer clerical and Sanfedist values but the values (still experienced existentially rather than “nominally”) of the hedonistic ideology of

- consumerism and of the consequent modern tolerance of the American type. It was Power itself—by way of the “development” of the production of superfluous goods, the imposition of the mania for consumption, fashion, information (above all, most impressively, television)—that created these values, cynically jettisoning traditional values and the Church itself, which was their symbol;
2. that peasant and paleo-industrial Italy has collapsed, it has been vanquished, it no longer exists, and in its place there is a vacuum that probably awaits being filled by a complete bourgeoisification, of the type that I mentioned above (modernizing, falsely tolerant, American-style, etc.).

The “No” vote was undoubtedly a victory. But what it really indicates is a “mutation” of Italian culture: a mutation that is just as far removed from traditional fascism as it is from progressive socialism.

If this is the case, then what is the meaning of the “Brescia massacre” (and the Milan massacre)? Are they fascist attacks, which therefore call for anti-fascist indignation? If it is words alone that count, then we have to respond in the affirmative. If it is the facts alone that count, then our response can only be negative; or at least one that reexamines the old terms of the problem.

Italy has never been capable of generating a major Right Wing movement. And this, probably, is the decisive fact in all its recent history. But this is not a cause, but an effect. Italy has not had a major Right Wing movement because it has not had a culture that was capable of expressing such a movement. It was only capable of generating that crude, ridiculous, and ferocious Right Wing movement known as fascism. It is in this sense that parliamentary neo-fascism is the faithful continuation of traditional fascism. In the meantime, however, every form of historical continuity has been severed. The “Development” pragmatically desired by Power has been historically established in a kind of *epoché*,¹³ which has radically “transformed” the Italian world in just a few years.

This “qualitative” leap therefore pertains to both anti-fascists as well as fascists: it is in fact the transition from a culture which consisted of the illiteracy (the common people) and the shabby humanism (the middle classes) of an archaic cultural organization, to the modern organization of “mass culture”. This event is of enormous importance: it is a phenomenon, I insist, of anthropological “mutation”. Above all, perhaps, because it has transformed the necessary characteristics of Power. “Mass culture”, for example, cannot be an ecclesiastical, moralistic and patriotic culture: for it is directly bound to consumption, which has its own laws and its own ideological self-sufficiency, capable of automatically creating a Power that no longer needs the Church, the Fatherland, the Family or other similar superstitions.

¹³ *Epoché*: a Greek philosophical term associated with the skeptical tradition of Pyrrhonism, which can be translated as “radical suspension of judgment” [American translator’s note].

The “cultural” homogenization that has resulted from this development affects everyone; the common people and the bourgeoisie, workers and sub-proletarians. The social context has changed in the sense that it is extremely unified. The same womb now gives birth to all Italians. There is therefore no appreciable difference—besides political choice, like a dead framework that is filled with gesticulations—between any fascist Italian citizen and any anti-fascist Italian citizen. They are culturally, psychologically, and—most impressively—physically interchangeable. In their everyday, imitative, somatic behavior, there is nothing that distinguishes —except, I repeat, at political rallies or other political activities—a fascist from an anti-fascist (this is true of middle-aged persons and young people; as for the older people, you can still tell them apart). This applies to your average fascists and anti-fascists. As for the extremists, the homogenization is even more radical.

The horrible massacre at Brescia was the work of fascists. But let us take a closer look at their fascism. Is it a fascism that is based on God? On the Fatherland? On the Family? On traditional honor, on an intolerant morality, on the military regimentation of civilian life? Or, if this fascism is even stubbornly self-defined as being based on all these things, is this a sincere self-definition? The criminal, Esposti—to cite just one example—if fascism were to be restored in Italy by bombs, would he be ready to accept the Italy of his phony rhetorical nostalgia? An Italy based not on consumerism, but on spartan and heroic values (as he believed)? An Italy of the hard life of rustic simplicity? An Italy without television and without prosperity? An Italy without motorcycles or leather jackets? An Italy where women are locked up in their homes and wear veils when they go out in public? No: it is obvious that even the most fanatical of the fascists would consider it to be anachronistic to renounce all these conquests of “development”. Conquests that nullify, by their mere existence—which has become total and all-encompassing—all the mysticism and moralism of traditional fascism.

Therefore, fascism is no longer traditional fascism. Then what is it?

The young people of the fascist groups, the youths of SAM,¹⁴ the youths who kidnap people and put bombs on trains, call themselves, and are called, “fascists”: but this is a purely nominal definition. For they are all in every way identical with the vast majority of their contemporaries. Culturally, psychologically, physiologically—I repeat—there is nothing that distinguishes them. They are distinguished only by an abstract, *a priori* “decision” that, in order to be known, must be spoken. You could have a casual conversation for hours with a young fascist bomb-thrower and not notice that he is a fascist. About ten years ago, however, such a person did not have to speak even one word; all you had to do was look at him in order to know what he was.

The cultural context from which these fascists come is very different from the traditional one. The last ten years of Italian history that caused the Italians to vote “No” in the referendum, have produced—by way of the same profound mechanism—these new fascists whose culture is identical to that of the people who voted “No” in the referendum.

¹⁴ *Squadre d’Azione Mussolini*: Mussolini Action Squads [American translator’s note].

In fact, there are only a few hundred, or a few thousand of them: and if the government and the police wanted to do so they could have totally eliminated them from the scene as early as 1969.

The fascism of the massacres is therefore a nominal fascism, without its own ideology (nullified by the real life experienced by these fascists) and, moreover, artificial: this is what Power wanted, which after having liquidated, always pragmatically, traditional fascism and the Church (the clerical fascism that was indeed an Italian cultural reality), then decided to keep alive certain forces—in accordance with a Mafia and Secret Police strategy—to oppose communist subversion. Those who are really responsible for the bombings at Milan and Brescia are not the young monsters who planted the bombs and their sinister chiefs and financial backers. So it is useless and rhetorical to pretend to attribute any real responsibility to these young people and to their nominal and artificial fascism. The culture to which they belong and which contains the elements for their pragmatic madness is, I repeat, the very same culture of the majority of their contemporaries. But it plunges them into intolerable conditions of conformism and neurosis, and therefore extremism (which is precisely the conflagration resulting from the mixture of conformism and neurosis).

If their fascism should prevail, it would be the fascism of Spinola, not that of Caetano: that is, it would be a fascism that would be even worse than the traditional variety, but it would no longer be precisely fascism. It would be something that we are in fact already experiencing, something that the fascists are experiencing in an exasperated and monstrous way: but not without cause.

June 24, 1974

The Real Fascism, and Therefore the Real Anti-fascism¹⁵

What is a nation's culture? It is currently believed, even by educated people, that it is the *culture* of scientists, politicians, professors, authors, filmmakers, etc.: that is, it is the *culture* of the *intelligentsia*. This is not the case, however. And it is not even the *culture* of the ruling class that, precisely by way of the class struggle, tries to impose it at least formally. Finally, it is not even the *culture* of the ruled class, that is, the popular *culture* of the workers and peasants. The culture of a nation is the totality of all these class cultures: it is the average of all of them. And it would therefore be abstract if it were not so recognizable—or, more accurately, visible—in experience and existence, and if it did not have as a consequence a practical dimension. For many centuries, in Italy, these cultures were distinguishable even if they were historically unified. Today—almost all at once, as if in a kind of Advent—historical distinction and unity have given way to a homogenization that realizes in an almost miraculous way the inter-classist dream of the old Power. What is the cause of this homogenization? Evidently, a new Power.

¹⁵ Published in *Corriere della Sera* under the title, “The Power Without a Face”.

I write “Power” with a capital P—which is why Maurizio Ferrara accused me of being irrational, in *L’Unità* (June 12, 1974)—only because I sincerely do not know what this new Power consists of and what it represents. I only know that it exists. I do not identify it with the Vatican, or the powerful Christian Democrats, or the Armed Forces. I do not even identify it with big industry, because it no longer consists of a limited number of big industrialists; for me, at least, it appears rather to be a totality (total industrialization) and, moreover, a non-Italian totality (transnationals).

I also know, because I see and experience them, certain characteristics of this still-faceless new Power; for example, its rejection of the old *sanfedismo*¹⁶ and clericalism, its decision to abandon the Church, its determination (crowned with success) to transform peasants and sup-proletarians into petty bourgeois and, above all, its mania, one might even say its cosmic mania, to pursue “Development” to its logical conclusions: produce and consume.

The police file of this face of the new Power, whose sketch still remains a blank sheet of paper, vaguely attributes it with “modern” features, due to its tolerance and its perfectly self-sufficient hedonistic ideology: but also ferocious and essentially repressive traits. Its tolerance is in fact false, because in reality no one has ever been compelled to be as normal and as conformist as the consumer; and as for its hedonism, it obviously conceals a decision to reconfigure everything so ruthlessly as to be without historical precedent. This new Power therefore represents no one, and due to a “mutation” of the ruling class it is in reality—if we would like to preserve the old terminology—a deadly form of fascism. But this Power has also culturally “homogenized” Italy; it is therefore a repressive homogenization, even if it was obtained by way of the imposition of hedonism and *joie de vivre*. The strategy of tension is a telltale sign, although essentially anachronistic, of all of this.

Maurizio Ferrara, in the article cited above (just like Ferrarotti, in the June 14, 1974 edition of *Paese Sera*), accuses me of estheticism, and therefore tends to dismiss me, and to place me beyond the pale. Alright: my view might be the view of an “artist”, that is, as the good bourgeoisie would have it, that of a madman. But the fact, for example, that two representatives of the old Power (who now in fact serve, however, although as middlemen, the new Power) have tried to blackmail each other over Party financing and the Montesi case, might also be a good reason for going crazy: that is, to bring so much discredit in such a way on a ruling class and a society before the eyes of a man, until it makes him lose his sense of proportion and limits, plunging him into a veritable state of “anomie”. It has also been said that the viewpoint of madmen is worthy of being taken into account: at least unless one wants to make progress in everything except the problem of madness, conveniently keeping it at a distance.

¹⁶ From “*Santa Fede*” [Holy Faith]: a reactionary, anti-liberal and clerical tendency, with very particular historical roots in Italian History (Spanish translator’s note).

There are some madmen who look at the faces of people and the way they behave. But not because they are epigones of a Lombrosian positivism (as Ferrara crudely insinuates), but because they are acquainted with semiology. They know that culture produces codes; that the codes produce behavior; that behavior is a language; and that at a historic moment when verbal language is completely conventional and sterilized (technified), the language of behavior (physical and mimetic) assumes a decisive importance.

Thus, to return to the starting point of our discussion, it seems to me that there are good reasons to maintain that the culture of a nation (in this case, Italy) is today expressed above all by way of the language of behavior, or physical language, rather than just a certain quantity—completely conventional and extremely impoverished—of verbal language.

It is at this level of linguistic communication that the following phenomena are manifested: a) the anthropological mutation of the Italian people; b) their complete homogenization according to a single model. Therefore: to decide to grow your hair over your shoulders, or to cut your hair and allow your sideburns to grow (in a throwback to the 19th century); to decide to wear a headband or to pull your cap down over your eyes; to decide to dream of a Ferrari or a Porsche; to faithfully watch television programs; to know the titles of certain best-selling books; to wear pants or T-shirts that are strictly in conformance with the latest fashion trends; to have obsessive relations with girls that one keeps at one's side like ornaments, but at the same time insisting that they are "free", etc., etc.: all of these things constitute cultural acts.

Now, all young Italians do these same things, they express themselves in the same physical language, they are interchangeable; something as old as the world, if it is limited to a single social class, to one category: but the fact is that all these cultural acts and this somatic language are inter-classist. In a square full of young people, no one can distinguish, by virtue of their external appearance, a worker from a student, a fascist from an anti-fascist; something that was still possible in 1968.

The problems of an intellectual who belongs to the *intelligentsia* are different from those of a party or a political man, even if they have the same ideology. I would like my current left-wing opponents to understand that I am in a position to state that, should development come to a halt and if there was to be a recession, if the Parties of the Left do not support the ruling Power, Italy will simply collapse; if instead, development continues to advance along its current course, then the so-called "historic compromise" will undoubtedly be the only way to try to reform this development, in the sense indicated by Berlinguer in his report to the Central Committee of the Communist Party (see *L'Unità*, June 4, 1974). However, just as Maurizio Ferrara wants nothing to do with "faces", this maneuver of practical politics is not my affair. Indeed, if anything, I have the duty to exercise my critique on it, quixotically and perhaps in an extreme way. So what are my problems?

Here is one, for example. In the article that gave rise to this controversy (*Corriere della Sera*, June 10, 1974), I said that those who were really responsible for the Milan and

Brescia bombings are the Italian government and the police: because if the government and the police had wanted to prevent them, these attacks would have never taken place at all. This is a commonplace. So, at this time, I will definitely get a few laughs by saying that we, too—progressives, anti-fascists, leftists—are responsible. In fact, in all these years we have done nothing:

1. because talk of “State-sponsored massacres” did not become a commonplace and everything stopped there;
2. (and more serious still) we have done nothing because the fascists do not exist. We have condemned them only to gratify our conscience with our indignation; and the more strident and petulant our indignation the more tranquil our conscience.

In reality we have behaved towards the fascists (I am speaking here only of the young ones) in a racist manner: hastily and therefore ruthlessly we wanted to believe that they were congenitally destined to be fascists and, faced with this predestination, there was nothing we could do. And let us not deceive ourselves: we all knew, deep down, that when one of these youths decided to become a fascist, it was purely by accident, it was nothing but a gesture, unmotivated and irrational; one word might have been all it would have taken for this not to happen. But none of us ever spoke with them or to them. We immediately accepted them as inevitable representatives of Evil. And maybe they were adolescents, eighteen-year-old boys, who knew nothing about anything, who plunged into this horrible adventure simply out of desperation.

But we were incapable of distinguishing them from the others (I am not saying that we could not distinguish them from the other extremists, but from everyone else). And this is our appalling justification.

Father Zosima (literature for literature’s sake!) was immediately able to distinguish, among the crowd of people in his monastery’s reception room, Dmitry Karamazov, the parricide. Then he rose from his chair and prostrated himself before him. And he did so (as the younger Karamazov later said) because Dmitry was destined to perform the most horrible act and to endure the most inhuman suffering.

Think (if you have the courage) of that boy or of those boys who planted the bombs at the public square in Brescia. Wouldn’t it be necessary to get up and prostrate oneself before them? But they were youths with long hair, or with Edwardian moustaches, they wore headbands or maybe a cap pulled down over their eyes, they were pale and presumptuous, they were obsessed with dressing fashionably, all alike, to have a Porsche or a Ferrari, or motorcycles so they can drive them like little idiot archangels with their ornamental girlfriends behind them, yes, but modern, in favor of divorce, of women’s liberation, and of development in general.... They were, in short, young people like all the rest: nothing distinguished them in any way. Even if we wanted to, we would not have been able to prostrate ourselves before them. For the old fascism, even if only by its rhetorical degeneracy, stood out: while the new fascism—which is completely different—has no outstanding qualities at all: it is not rhetorical in a human way, it is

pragmatic in the American style. Its goal is the brutally totalitarian reorganization and homogenization of the world.

July 8, 1974

The Limits of History and the Immensity of the World of the Peasants¹⁷

Dear Calvino:

Maurizio Ferrara says that I am nostalgic for a “golden age”, you say I am nostalgic for “little Italy”¹⁸: everyone says I am nostalgic for something, implying that my nostalgia is a bad thing and therefore an easy target.

As for what I am nostalgic about (if one can call it nostalgia), I have clearly indicated what it is, although in verse (*Paese Sera*, January 5, 1974). The fact that the others pretended not to understand this is natural. But I am puzzled by the fact that you did not want to understand it (for you have no reasons not to do so). What is this about me being nostalgic for “little Italy”? But then you have not read a single verse of *Gramsci's Ashes* or *Calderón*, you have not read a single line from my novels, you have not seen a single frame of any of my films. You know nothing about me! Because everything that I have done and everything I am, excludes by its very nature the idea that I could be nostalgic for “little Italy”. Unless you think that I have undergone some kind of radical transformation: something that forms a part of the miraculous psychology of Italians, but which precisely for that very reason does not seem to me to be worthy of you.

“Little Italy” is petty bourgeois, fascist, Christian Democratic; it is provincial, and it is outside of history. Its culture is a formal and vulgar scholastic humanism. Do you want me to feel nostalgic for all that? As for me, personally, this “little Italy” has been the country of the police who arrested me, put me in jail, persecuted me, tormented me, and hounded me for almost two decades. A young person might be unaware of this. But not you. Maybe I have possessed that minimum of dignity that allowed me to conceal the anxiety of a man who for years and years has expected any day the arrival of a summons from the courts and had to be afraid of browsing the newsstands so that I did not read some atrocious, scandalous newspaper headline about me. But if I could forget all of this, you, however, could not have forgotten it....

Furthermore, this “little Italy”, insofar as it concerns me, is not a thing of the past. The persecution continues. Now, perhaps, the leader of the lynch mob will be *L'Espresso*—just take a look at the introductory note (*L'Espresso*, June 23, 1974) to some editorial comments on my article (*Corriere della Sera*, June 10, 1974): in which a title that I did

¹⁷ Published in *Paese Sera* under the title, “Open Letter to Italo Calvino: From Pasolini—What I Feel Nostalgic About”.

¹⁸ “*Italiotta*”, literally, “little Italy”. The Italy of scheming politicians, corruption, and petty conflicts of interest. (Spanish translator's note.)

not give my article is ridiculed, quotations taken out of context from my text are mocked, naturally horribly distorting its meaning and, finally, insinuating that I am another Plebe¹⁹: an operation that one would have thought only the goons of *Il Borghese* would have been capable of performing.

I know full well, dear Calvino, what the life of an intellectual is like. I know, because, in part, it is also the way I live. Reading books, the solitude of the study, circles of a few friends and many acquaintances, all intellectuals and bourgeois. A life of work and essentially respectable. But I, like Doctor Jekyll, have another life. Living this other life, I must break through the natural (and innocent) barriers of class. Breaking through the walls of “little Italy”, I therefore cross over into another world: the world of the peasants, the world of the sub-proletarians and the world of the workers. The order in which I list these worlds reflects their importance in my personal experience, not their objective importance. Up until only a few years ago, my own experience was limited to the sub-bourgeois world, the world of the ruled class. It was only by virtue of mere nationality, or more accurately, reasons of state, that this world formed part of the territory of “little Italy”. Beyond that pure and simple formality, that world had nothing to do with Italy. That world (to which the urban sub-proletarian cultures belonged and, precisely, up until only a few years ago, the world of the minority of the working class—who were real, true minorities, as in Russia in 1917) is a transnational world: a world that does not recognize nations. It is the remnant of a prior civilization (or of an aggregate of prior civilizations that were very similar to each other) and the (nationalist) ruling class molded this remnant in accordance with its own interests and its own political goals (for a Lucanian—I am thinking of DeMartino—the nation that was foreign to him, was first the Bourbon Kingdom, then Piedmontese Italy, then fascist Italy, and now today’s Italy: without interruption).

It is this boundless pre-national and pre-industrial peasant world that existed up until a few years ago that I am nostalgic about (that is why I spent as much time as possible in the countries of the Third World, where this world still survives, although the Third World is also entering the orbit of so-called Development).

The men of that world did not live in a *golden age*, just as they were not involved, either, except formally, in “little Italy”. They lived in what Chilanti has called the *age of bread*. That is, they were consumers of subsistence goods. And it was this, perhaps, that made their poor and precarious lives so very necessary. Meanwhile, it is clear enough that superfluous goods make life superfluous (to be extremely elementary and to thus conclude this part of my argument).

¹⁹ Armando Plebe (1927-2017): a contemporary of Pasolini’s, a university professor and former Marxist who converted to rabid anti-communism and became a leading member of the moderate faction of the MSI (Italian Social Movement, then Italy’s largest neo-fascist political party), and a proponent of a right-wing cultural resurgence. In the early 1970s he founded a journal called *La Destra* [The Right], which included Ernst Jünger and Mircea Eliade on its editorial committee. [American translator’s note.]

Whether or not I am nostalgic for that peasant world is in any event my own affair. Which by no means prevents me from exercising my critique, such as it is, on our contemporary world: to the contrary, I do so all the more lucidly the more that I have detached myself from it and the more I only stoically accept living in it.

I have said, and I will say it once again, that the acculturation of the consumerist Center has destroyed the various cultures of the Third World (I am now speaking on a world scale, and I am therefore also referring precisely to the cultures of the Third World that are very similar to Italian peasant cultures). The cultural model offered to Italians (and furthermore to all the peoples of the world) is monolithic. Conformance to this model is obtained above all in existence, in life itself: and therefore in the body and behavior. It is here that we experience the values, not yet openly expressed, of the new culture of the civilization of consumerism, that is, of this new totalitarianism, the most repressive totalitarianism that has ever existed. From the point of view of verbal language, we are witnessing the reduction of all language to communicative language, with an enormous impoverishment of expressiveness. Dialects (mother tongues!) have receded in time and in space: children are compelled to stop speaking their native dialects because they live in Turin, Milan or Germany. Where they are still spoken, they have totally lost their creative potential. No young man from the neighborhoods of Rome would be capable, for example, of understanding the jargon of the novels I wrote fifteen years ago: and—an irony of fate!—he would have to consult the glossary in the appendix of these books just like a good bourgeois citizen from northern Italy!

Naturally, my “vision” of the new Italian cultural reality is radical: it addresses this phenomenon as a global phenomenon, rather than its exceptions, the resistance it encounters, and the survivals of older cultures.

When I speak of the homogenization of the youth as a whole, so that the body, the behavior and the real, unconscious ideology (consumerist hedonism) of a young fascist makes him indistinguishable from other young people, I am referring to a general phenomenon. I am fully aware of the fact that there are young people who do not fit this description. But they are young people who belong to our own elite and are condemned to be even more unhappy than we are: and therefore they are probably better than us. I say this with reference to Tullio DeMamo (*Paese Sera*, June 21, 1974), who, after having forgotten to invite me to a conference on linguistics in Bressanone, told me I should regret having missed it: there, he said, I would have seen dozens of young people who are living refutations of my theory. Which amounts to saying that if a few dozen young people use the term “heuristic”, this means that fifty million Italians also use it.

You will say: men have always been conformists (all alike in this respect) and there have always been elites. I respond, yes, men have always been conformists and as much as possible they are all alike, but only according to their social class. And, within these class categories, according to their particular concrete cultural (regional) conditions. Today, however (and this is where the anthropological “mutation” comes into play), men are conformist and all alike in accordance with an *inter-class code* (students the same as

workers, a worker from the North the same as a worker from the South): at least potentially, in their zeal to conform.

Finally, dear Calvino, I would like to draw your attention to something. Not as a moralist, but as an analyst. In your hasty response to my article, in *Il Messaggero* (June 18, 1974), you said something that was doubly unfortunate. You said: “I am not acquainted with today’s young fascists and I hope that I never have the opportunity to become acquainted with them.” However: 1) it is true that you will never have such an opportunity; although, in a passenger compartment on a train, standing in line at a store, walking on the street, seated in a movie theater, you will necessarily find yourself among fascist youths, but you will not know they are fascists; 2) your desire to never meet a young fascist is a blasphemy, because, to the contrary, we should do everything in our power to identify them and meet them. They are not predestined and fated to be representatives of Evil: they are not born fascists. No one—when they become adolescents and become capable of making choices, in accordance with who knows what reasons and needs—congenitally chooses the stamp of the fascists. It is an awful kind of desperation and neurosis that drives a young man to make such a choice; and perhaps all it would have taken is one little different experience in his life, a casual encounter, to alter his destiny.

July 11, 1974

Further Reflections on my “Outline Sketch” of the Anthropological Revolution in Italy²⁰

We intellectuals always tend to identify “culture” with our culture: likewise, morality with our morality, and ideology with our ideology. This means: 1) that we do not use the word “culture” in its scientific sense; 2) that when we use this term we express a real, irrepressible racism towards those who live precisely in another culture. In fact, given my way of life and my studies, I have always been able to avoid succumbing to these errors. But when Moravia speaks to me of people (that is, practically the whole population of Italy) who live on a pre-moral and pre-ideological level, he shows me that he has completely fallen prey to these very same errors. The conditions of being pre-moral and pre-ideological exist only if one assumes the existence of a single historically correct morality and a single historically correct ideology: thus, our bourgeois morality and ideology, that of Moravia, or mine, that of Pasolini. To the contrary, however, pre-moral and pre-ideological conditions do not exist. There is just another culture (popular culture) or an older culture. It is with respect to these cultures that a moral and ideological choice is posed: for example, the decision to be a Marxist or the decision to be a fascist.

At the present time, this choice is essential. But it is not “everything”. This choice, as Moravia himself realizes, must not be judged on its own terms, but by its theoretical or practical results (changing the world). Otherwise, how could certain correct decisions—a

²⁰ Published in *Il Mondo*; from an interview with Pasolini conducted by Guido Vergani.

marvelously orthodox Marxism, for example—lead to horribly wrong results? I implore Moravia to consider Stalin. As for me, I have no doubts: Stalin’s “crimes” are the results of the relation between a political choice (Bolshevism) and Stalin’s cultural background (what Moravia scornfully refers to as pre-moral or pre-ideological). After all, we do not have to resort to Stalin, to his correct choice [to become a Bolshevik] and his clerical, barbarous peasant background. There are countless other examples. I, too, for example, according to Maurizio Ferrara (who, in *L’Unità*, criticized me for the same reasons as Moravia, that is, he somberly reminded me of the fundamental and definitive value of choice), made a correct choice but erroneously applied it in practice: due, so it would seem, to my cultural irrationalism, that is, the older culture in which I came of age.

Today we make millions of generalizations based on such individual cases. Millions of Italians have made choices (quite basic choices): for example, many millions of Italians have opted for Marxism, or at least in favor of more or less progressive tendencies, while millions of other Italians have opted for clerical fascism. These choices, as always happens, have become integrated into a culture. And this culture is precisely the culture of the Italian people. A culture that has in the meantime has completely changed. No, not in the ideas it expresses, not in the school, not in the values that are consciously professed. For example, a “very modern” fascist, that is, one who has gone through the mill of Italian and foreign economic expansion, still reads Evola.²¹ Italian culture has changed with respect to life, existence, and practice. This change consists in the fact that the old class culture (with its distinct divisions: the culture of the ruled, or popular class, and the culture of the ruling or bourgeois class, the culture of the elites), has been replaced by a new inter-classist culture: this culture is expressed through the very way of existence of the Italian people, by way of their new quality of life. Political choices, planted in the old cultural soil, were one thing: planting them in this new cultural soil is another thing entirely. The Marxist worker or peasant of the 1940s or 1950s, in the hypothesis of a revolutionary victory, would have changed the world in a certain way: today, according to the same hypothesis, he would change it in another way. I do not want to prophesy: but I will not conceal the fact that I am desperately pessimistic. What has manipulated and radically (anthropologically) transformed the vast masses of Italian workers and peasants is a new power that I find hard to define: but I am sure that it is the most violent and totalitarian power that has ever existed: it is changing the nature of the people, it is penetrating deep into their consciousness. Therefore, beneath the level of conscious choices, there is a forced choice, one that is “common today for all Italians”: the latter can only distort the former.

As for the other comments in *L’Espresso*, I find Facchinelli’s hard to understand. The oracle pronounces its prophecies too obscurely, in “code”. As for Colletti, I will not respond to his criticisms since he is much too laconic. I cannot debate with a person who clearly demonstrates that he wants to cut me short and to just dismiss me and my ideas. I think that I might be able to use Fortini’s brief commentary to my own advantage (“one wonders whether that ‘No’, at least in part, does not also mean a willingness to look

²¹ Julius Evola (1898-1974): one of Italy’s leading fascist intellectuals. [American translator’s note.]

beyond ‘progressive’ optimism”) and accept the ascetic invitation to keep working even on behalf of the smallest minorities; or even better, to wait for today’s “similarities” to become tomorrow’s “differences”. In fact, I am indeed working on behalf of tiny minorities and if I am working this means that I have not given up (although I detest all optimism, which is always euphemistic). It is just that Fortini’s stubborn determination to want to always be at forefront of what is called history—making it weigh on everyone else—produces in me an instinctive feeling of boredom and of being in the presence of someone who is not telling the whole truth. I will stop saying “that history no longer exists” when Fortini stops wagging his finger at me while he talks. As for Sciascia, I am grateful to him for his sincere support (which is in itself courageous considering the lynch-mob atmosphere and the horrible accusation of being another Plebe that has been directed against me by the miserable anti-fascists of *L’Espresso*): but in his discourse on the Red Brigades I can detect the influence of various notes written by Sossi: notes that, submitted to a linguistic analysis, seem to me to reflect an insincerity, a childishness, and a lack of humanity that justifies any suspicion.

It was the televised propaganda for a new type of “hedonist” life that brought about the victory of the “No” vote in the referendum. For there is nothing less idealist and less religious than the world of television. It is true that for all these years, the censorship of television has been a Vatican censorship. But the Vatican has not understood what should and what should not be censored. For example, it should have censored “Carosello”, because it is in “Carosello” that the new way of life that the Italians “must” live is violently expressed in all its omnipotent power, in its absolute nature, and in its compulsory urgency. And don’t tell me that it is a way of life in which religion also counts for something. On the other hand, the specifically religious television programs are so boring and so spiritually oppressive that the Vatican would have done well to censor all of them. The ideological bombardment of television is not explicit: it is entirely otherwise, completely indirect. Yet no “model of life” has ever been publicized so effectively as by way of television. The type of man or woman that really counts for something, that is really modern, that must be imitated and realized, is not described or praised explicitly: it is represented! The language of television is by its very nature a physical-mimetic language, the language of behavior. It is a language that is therefore made from whole cloth, without mediations, in the physical-mimetic language of real behavior. The heroes of television propaganda—young men on motorcycles, girls clutching a tube of toothpaste—proliferate by the millions as heroes who are similar in reality. Precisely because it is perfectly pragmatic, televised propaganda represents the “indifferentist”²² moment of the new hedonist ideology of consumerism: and it is therefore enormously effective.

²² “*Qualunquístico*”: referring to a political party that existed in Italy after the Second World War, “*il partito dell’uomo qualunque*” [the party of the apathetic man]. It embodied a tendency to turn away from general problems, and to egotistically concern oneself with one’s own personal affairs. It represents, as a concept, the opposite of the “Militant” (Spanish translator’s note).

If, at the level of will and consciousness, television has for all these years served the Christian Democrats and the Vatican, at the level of the involuntary and the unconscious it has served a new power, which no longer coincides ideologically with the Christian Democracy, nor does it any longer have anything to do with the Vatican.

The most impressive sight that greets you while walking through a city in the Soviet Union is the uniformity of the crowd: you cannot discern any differences among the pedestrians with respect to the way they dress, the way they walk, the way they are serious, the way they laugh, their gestures, the way they behave in general. The “system of signs” of the physical-mimetic language in a Russian city has no variants. It is perfectly identical in everyone. What, therefore, is the first proposition of this physical-mimetic language? It is the following: “Here, there are no more class differences.” And this is a marvelous thing. Despite all the mistakes and backpedaling, despite Stalin’s political crimes and acts of genocide (in which the Russian peasant world as a whole was an accomplice), the fact is that the people emerged victorious from the class struggle once and for all in 1917 and have achieved the equality of the citizenry, and this is something that confers a profound, exultant feeling of cheerfulness and faith in mankind. The people effectively conquered the highest freedom: no one gave it to them. They conquered it.

Today, in the cities of the West, as well—although I am referring above all to Italy—when you walk on their streets you are struck by the uniformity of the crowd: here, too, you do not notice any noteworthy differences among the pedestrians (especially the young people), in the way they dress, in the way they walk, in the way they are serious, in the way they laugh, in their gestures, in short, in the way they behave. It can therefore be said that, here as well, just as among the Russian crowds, the system of signs of the physical-mimetic language no longer has any variants, that it is perfectly identical in everyone. But while in Russia it is a very positive, and even exhilarating, phenomenon, in the West it is instead a negative phenomenon that plunges one into a state of mind that verges on outright disgust and despair.

The first proposition of this particular physical-mimetic language is, in effect, the following: “Power has decided that we shall all be the same.”

The anxiety of consumerism is the anxious desire to obey an unspoken order. Everyone in Italy feels the degrading anxious yearning of being equal to everyone else with respect to consumption, to being happy, to being free: because this is the order that has been unconsciously received and which one “must” obey, or else feel different. Being different has never been as great a crime as in this period of tolerance. In fact, equality has not been conquered; what we have is a “false” equality that has been conferred upon us as a gift.

One of the main characteristics of this equality of lived expression, besides the fossilization of verbal language (students speak like printed books, street kids have lost all colloquial inventiveness), is sadness: joy is always exaggerated, ostentatious, offensive. The physical sadness of which I speak is profoundly neurotic. It is based on social frustration. Now that the social model to be attained is no longer that of one's own class, but the one imposed by power, many people are no longer in any position to attain it. And this is horribly humiliating. Allow me to offer a very modest example. At one time the baker's assistant, or *cascherino*, as he is still called in Rome, was always, constantly cheerful: it was a real joy, which sparkled in his eyes. He used to walk down the street whistling and cracking jokes. His vitality was irresistible. He was dressed much more poorly than his contemporary counterpart: his trousers were patched, and even in good times his shirt was often hardly more than a tattered rag. But all of this formed part of a model that, in his village, had a value, and a meaning, and he was proud of it. In contrast to the world of wealth, he could oppose his own, equally valid world. He came to the house of the rich man, laughing *naturaliter*²³ like an anarchist, which showed that he was not impressed: even if he was rather respectful. But it was precisely the respect of a profoundly alien person. And, in short, what counts is that this person, this man, was cheerful.

Isn't happiness what really matters? Is it not for happiness that one fights for the revolution? The peasant or sub-proletarian condition was once able to express, in those persons who lived it, a certain "real" happiness. Today, this happiness—with the coming of Development—has been lost. This means that Development is by no means revolutionary, not even when it brings reform. It only generates anxiety. Today there are adults my age who are so aberrant as to think that the (almost tragic) seriousness with which our contemporary bakers hand us their package wrapped in plastic, with their long hair and moustaches, is better than the "silly" joy of the past. They think that to prefer seriousness to laughter is a virile way to face life. In fact, they are happy vampires, happy to see their innocent victims transformed into vampires, too. Seriousness and a dignified demeanor are horrendous duties that are imposed on the petty bourgeoisie; and the petty bourgeoisie are therefore happy to see the poor people become "serious and dignified", too. It never even occurs to them that this is real degradation: that the poor people are sad because they have become aware of their own social inferiority, since their values and their cultural models have been destroyed.

The communists who delude themselves (with respect to the referendum, for example) because they believe that they are beginning to reap the harvest of what they sowed, do not realize that the "participation" of the masses in these great "formal" historical decisions is in reality desired by power; the power that has precisely the need for mass consumerism and mass culture. The "participating" masses, furthermore, even if they are formally communists or progressives, are manipulated by power by way of the

²³ Latin: naturally or normally; spontaneously; inherently, by nature; by human nature. [American translator's note.]

imposition of “other” values and “other” ideologies: impositions that infiltrate everyday life, and are lived, and are therefore also adopted. So that the masses experience new values and new ideologies (clericalism, on the one side, and progressivism on the other).

Unfortunately, this “moment” of sclerosis and officialism of the Italian Communist Party is represented perfectly by Maurizio Ferrara in his polemic with me in the columns of *L'Unità*. It is true that he attains a degree of a lack of liberality that is unworthy of a leader of Italy's largest political party. Not even *Il Borghese* ever stooped so low as to cast doubt on the quality of my cultural credentials; he even mentions the names of Lombroso and Carolina Invernizio in connection with me. But this is more of an insult to the readers of *L'Unità* than to me. And it is out of respect for these readers that I will not spend any more time discussing him and his methods.

To conclude, Ferrara does not respond politically to any of the questions I posed. An absolute silence concerning my hypothesis of the defeat of the Italian Communist Party in the referendum, insofar as the predictions of the Party were pessimistic, and even more or less expressed a fear of defeat. This was a sign of an erroneous analysis of the real situation of the Italian people: extraordinarily erroneous. An absolute silence concerning the void created by the disappearance of the world of the peasants, along with both its negative and positive values. An absolute silence with respect to the new values existentially adopted by the middle classes, effectively rejecting clericalism and paleofascism. An absolute silence concerning the “scandalous” characteristics of the new fascism, which nullify the classic anti-fascism. An absolute silence concerning the party's racist relations with fascist adolescents and young adults. Ferrara's response consists: a) in the pure and simple rhetorical affirmation of the presence of the Italian Communist Party (which no one has ever questioned!); and b) in a series of inferences relating to my claims: consisting above all in treacherously accusing me of being nostalgic for things for which I feel no nostalgia at all. I do not feel nostalgic for “little Italy”: I do feel nostalgic for the immense world of the peasants and workers that existed before the onset of Development: a transnational world with respect to its culture, and international with respect to its choice of Marxism. Furthermore, Ferrara—totally unfamiliar with “semiology”, a science which he has only now come across—accuses me of culturalism and estheticism simply because I allude to themes associated with these fields. It is these gaps in Ferrara's cultural education—it would appear that he has not read a single book published since the times of Lombroso and Carolina Invernizio—that cause all the experiences that his cultural and human shortcomings prevent him from having, seem to him like esthetic experiences. He subjects me to a good old-fashioned scolding, telling me that it is not the faces, but the brains of the people that count. Well, the baker's assistant I mentioned earlier, by his physical presence alone, reveals (like millions of others like him): 1) that those “values” of the capitalist civilization of consumerism that turned him into a petty bourgeois powerless to realize those values in practical life have been deposited in his brain; 2) that, as a result, he either accepts development, or he can accept the *tout va bien*²⁴ PCI; 3) or his frustration and subsequent aggression might lead him to “accept” the revolutionary slogans of the kind disseminated by “Lotta Continua”

²⁴ French: “Everything's fine”. [American translator's note.]

and “Potere Operaio”, because he has now attained such a level of false consciousness and also vulgarity that he becomes susceptible to the message of the extremists (should that message still be disseminated by anyone).

Fascism is in a pitiful condition. The survey conducted by Bocca and Nozza, published in *Il Giorno*, is an equivocal and tedious piece of work. For among the different components that today constitute the fascist mosaic in Italy, the “only” ones that make sense are those that are manipulated by the CIA and other forces of international capitalism, whose purpose is the conquest of markets, that is, of happy, free, tolerant, perfectly hedonistic nations, not at all militaristic or Sanfedist (tendencies that are incompatible with consumerism). There might be a borderline case like Chile. In that case force makes its appearance and there is a provisional return to classic fascism. On the other hand, however, there are cases like that of Portugal, which had to stop being a severe, parsimonious, archaic nation: it had to be introduced to the wonderful world of consumerism. Thus, most likely, the United States of America has brokered a deal between Spínola and Caetano. Of the two of them, the worst “real” fascist is Spínola (I was told that he fought with a Portuguese unit allied with the SS): because I consider the capitalism of consumerism to be the worst kind of totalitarianism, compared with the totalitarianism of the old fascist power. In fact—as it turns out—the totalitarianism of the old power hardly affected the Portuguese people at all: May Day proves it. The Portuguese people have come forth in celebration of the world of Labor—after forty years in abeyance—with an absolutely intact freshness, enthusiasm, and sincerity, as if the last time they did so was just yesterday. I predict, however, that five years of “consumerist fascism” will radically change everything: the systematic bourgeoisification of the Portuguese people will commence, and there will be no room, and no spirit, for naive revolutionary hopes. Yesterday, Marco Pannella²⁵ held a press conference. Despite fifty days without food, speaking with marvelous vivacity and cheerfulness, Pannella said something that perhaps few of those present really grasped: “They are paleo-fascists and therefore they are not fascists.” It is my wish that this sentence should serve as the epigraph to this interview.

July 16, 1974

The Fascism of the Anti-fascists²⁶

Marco Pannella has been on a hunger strike for more than 70 days; he is on his last legs; the doctors are beginning to be really concerned and, finally, even alarmed. However,

²⁵ Marco Pannella was the leader of the “Partito Radicale” [Radical Party], a small, but important political party, whose main purpose is to defend civil rights (divorce, abortion, feminism, opposition to compulsory military service, etc.). (Spanish translator’s note.)

²⁶ Published in *Corriere della Sera* under the title, “Let’s Open a Debate on the Pannella Case”.

there does not seem to be the slightest objective possibility that anything new will happen that will persuade Pannella to interrupt his hunger strike, which might now prove to be fatal (I will also add that about forty of his comrades have now joined him in his hunger strike).

None of the representatives of the leading parties in the national legislature (whether from the majority party or the opposition parties) seems to be even slightly disposed to “compromise” with Pannella and his comrades. The vulgarity of political realism seems to be incapable of finding any common ground with Pannella’s candor and therefore the possibility of exorcizing and absorbing the scandal. The whole affair is drenched in a kind of theological disdain. On the one hand, Berlinguer and the Central Committee of the Italian Communist Party; on the other, the old, powerful Christian Democrats. As for the Vatican, it has been a long time now since Catholics have forgotten how to be Christians. None of this is surprising; and we shall see why. But with respect to their welcome of Pannella’s message, the “minority groups” (those which have “less power”) are also vacillating, sceptical and abjectly evasive; for example, the so-called “Catholics of the ‘No’ Vote”; and also the more liberal progressives (who intervene in support of Pannella only as “individuals”, but never as representatives of parties or groups).

Now, dear reader, you will be greatly amazed to discover the primary reasons why Pannella and several dozen other people have adopted this extreme weapon of the hunger strike, amidst such disinterest, abandonment and scorn. For no one has “informed” you, from the very beginning, and with a minimum degree of clarity and promptness, of these reasons: and certainly, in view of the situation that I have outlined, you will perhaps imagine that some scandalous outrage lies behind this story. Anyway, here they are:

1. The demand that the RAI television network concede a quarter of an hour of programming to the LID and a quarter of an hour to Don Franzoni²⁷;
2. The demand that the President of the Republic convene a public meeting with the representatives of the LID and the Radical Party, which they have been fruitlessly requesting for more than a month, without a response;
3. The demand that the Health Committee of the Chamber of Deputies should consider the Socialist Party’s proposal to pass a law legalizing abortion;
4. The demand that the owners of *Il Messaggero* should abide not by a general loyalty to the secular principles of journalism, but to secular information and in particular to the right of secular minorities to have access to information.

As you can see, these are demands for guarantees of normal democratic life. This time, the “purity” of their principles does not exclude their perfect applicability. In consideration, I repeat, of the total lack of information to which you have been relegated by the “entire” Italian press with regard to Pannella and his movement, it would not be

²⁷ Don Giovanni Franzoni (1928-2017): a radical left-wing Catholic priest and dissident theologian. He was defrocked by Pope Paul VI in 1976 after he joined the Communist Party. See the essay below entitled, “Things Divine”. [American translator’s note.]

surprising if you were to think that this Pannella is a monster. Some kind of Fumagalli,²⁸ perhaps. Someone whose demands are “in every way” and “*a priori*” unworthy of being taken into consideration. Anyway, first of all I will tell you that, according to the democratic principle that Pannella has always upheld, Fumagalli himself, whom I have mentioned *pour cause*, would have the right to be taken into consideration should he present demands of a “formal” kind like those formulated by the Radicals. Respect for the individual—for his deep configuration which a sentiment of freedom whose formality understood as essential allows us to articulate and express on a level that we might call “sacred” for a secular reason, respect for even the most degraded concrete political ideas—is for Pannella the *primum* of all theory and all political praxis. This is what is scandalous about him. A scandal that cannot be assimilated precisely because its principle, although in simple and popular terms, is sanctioned by the constitution.

This absolutely democratic political principle is brought up-to-date by Pannella by way of the ideology of nonviolence. Yet it is not so much a physical nonviolence that counts (this can be subject to debate): what matters is moral nonviolence: that is, the total, absolute, indefeasible absence of all moralism. (“We maintain that what appears to be moral to each person is moral.”) It is this form of nonviolence (which repudiates even its own moralism) that led Pannella and the Radicals to another scandal: the absolute rejection of all forms of power and its consequent condemnation (“I don’t believe in power and I repudiate even the very idea of possessing it”). The product of the absolute and almost ascetic purity of these principles, which may be defined as “metapolitical”, is an extraordinary clarity with respect to the way things and events are viewed: it is not touched by either the involuntary obscurity of prejudice or the deliberate obscurity of compromise. All is light and reason around this way of looking at things, which therefore, taking as its object concrete things and events—and the consequent judgment on them—ends up giving rise to the premise of the scandalous unacceptability of the politics of the Radicals in the eyes of comfortable and well-to-do people (“all throughout the anti-fascism of the Parri-Sofri tendency the litany of the well-to-do people of our politics has been repeated for twenty years”; “... where else do you not find fascists but in positions of power, in the government? There you have the Moros, the Fanfanis, the Rumors, the Pastores, the Gronchis, the Segnis and—why not?—the Tanassis, the Cariglias, and maybe the Saragats, and La Malfa. Against their politics, I understand that one can and one must be an anti-fascist....”)

At this point, I suppose, dear reader, the Pannella “scandal” will be clear to you; but I also suppose that at the same time you are tempted to consider the whole business as

²⁸ Carlo Fumagalli, co-founder and leader of the Movimento di Azione Rivoluzionaria (MAR) [Revolutionary Action Movement] (founded in 1962), a self-described “centrist extremist”. The MAR was a vehemently anti-communist, neo-fascist, pro-NATO group that advocated a strong, centralized Italian government, and was involved in terrorist activities during the 1960s and 1970s, especially in the region of Lombardy during the early 1970s, including bombings of the electric transmission lines of ENEL (*Ente nazionale per l'energia elettrica*), at that time a government-owned national electric power corporation. [American translator’s note.]

quixotic and verbal. That the positions of these Radical militants (nonviolence, the rejection of all forms of power, etc.), will lose their luster like pacifism, violent street fighting, etc., and that finally their objective will become mere capriciousness, which would amount in the end to self-righteousness and sanctimoniousness, if its condemnation and its proposals were not so detailed and so directly *ad personam*.

But such a view would be mistaken. Their principles, which we have called “metapolitical”, have led the Radicals to engage in a political praxis of absolute realism. And it is not because of these “scandalous” principles that the world of power—in the government and in the opposition parties—ignores, represses and excludes Pannella, to the point of transforming him, eventually, due to his love of life, into a murderer: it was rather precisely because of his realistic political praxis. For it is the Radical Party and the LID (and its leader, Marco Pannella) who are the real winners of the referendum of May 12. And this is precisely why “no one” has forgiven them.

They were the only ones to accept the challenge of the referendum and the only ones to eagerly look forward to its outcome, sure of an overwhelming victory: a prediction that was the inevitable concomitant result of an indefeasible democratic “principle” (even at the risk of defeat) and of a “realistic analysis” of the real will of the new Italian masses. It is therefore not, I repeat, an abstract democratic principle (the right of grassroots decision-making and the rejection of all paternalistic attitudes), but a realistic analysis that currently accounts for the unforgivable sin of the Radical Party and the LID.

Instead of being welcomed and congratulated by the first citizen of the Republic, in homage to the will of the Italian people, which they correctly foretold, Pannella and his comrades are treated like pariahs. Instead of appearing as guests on television programs, they are not even given a miserable fifteen minutes on the “platform of freedom”. Of course, the Vatican and Fanfani, the big losers in the referendum, will never even be able to acknowledge Pannella’s “existence”. But not even Berlinguer and the PCI, representing the other political forces who failed to understand what was at stake in the referendum, will ever be able to acknowledge his existence, either. Pannella is therefore “repealed” from the consciousness and the public life of Italy.

At this point the story ends with a question. The duration of Pannella’s hunger strike is dramatically limited in the biological sense. And nothing allows us to assume that he will abandon it. What are those men or groups in power doing who are in a position to decide his fate? How far can their cynicism, their impotence and their mean-spirited calculations go? The fact that those people have very little to lose at this time, since their only problem now is to salvage what they can and, above all, to save themselves, certainly does not militate in favor of Pannella’s fate. Reality has suddenly turned against them; the good ship Vatican, in which they looked forward to safely navigating the deep blue sea of their lives, is now seriously threatened with sinking; the Italian masses are sick of them and have become, even if still in an existential way, bearers of values that these politicians thought were trifles with which they could play and which instead have been revealed to be the real values, capable of nullifying the great values of the past and of dragging our contemporary fascists and anti-fascists down in a common disaster. Even

the least that could be expected of them, that is, a certain administrative capacity, is revealed to be a horrible illusion: an illusion that the Italians will have to clearly note, because—like the values of consumerism and prosperity—they have to live them “corporeally”.

So it is the Left that must intervene. But this is not about saving Pannella’s life. And much less is it about saving him while causing the four “guarantees” that he is seeking and the others that have since been added to be taken into consideration. It is about the very existence of Pannella, the Radical Party and the LID. And under the circumstances, the existence of Pannella, the Radical Party and the LID coincide with ideas and a willingness to take action of a historical and decisive significance. Which coincides with the acquisition of consciousness of a new reality in our country and a new quality of the life of the masses, which have now escaped from the control of not only the parties in power but also the opposition parties.

Pannella, the Radical Party and the LID have acquired this consciousness with total optimism, with vitality, with an ascetic will to persevere to the end: an optimism that is perhaps relative or at least exaggerated with reference to men, but indestructible with reference to principles (not viewed as either abstract or moralistic).

They are proposing eight new referendums (practically united into one single referendum): and they have been proposing them for years, in deliberate defiance of the referendum proposed by the clerical right wing (which resulted in the greatest democratic victory in recent Italian history). These eight referendums (repeal of the Concordat between the State and the Church, repeal of ecclesiastical annulments, repeal of the military codes, repeal of the rules against the freedom of the press and against the freedom of televised information, repeal of the fascist and para-fascist regulations of the legal code—among others the statute outlawing abortion—and finally, the suppression of public financing of political parties) express, with respect to their concrete ideas and their proposals for political struggle, the realistic vision of Pannella, the Radical Party and the LID. Challenging the old Italian political world with respect to these points and dealing it a crushing defeat, is the only way to impress a decisive political change of course on the situation into which Italy has fallen, besides being the only possible revolutionary act. But this is contrary to the numerous miserable interests of men and parties and this is what Pannella may yet pay for with his life.

In public life there are tragic moments, or worse yet, grave moments when it is necessary to find the strength to enter the fray. There is no other solution. From the epistolary style I will now make the transition here, therefore, dear reader, to the propagandistic style, for the purpose of suggesting to you that you do not commit in this circumstance what the Catholics call a sin of omission or, in any event, I call upon you get involved, vitally involved, as someone who decides to perform a “responsible” action. You can intervene decisively in the conflict, which at first sight seems insoluble, between the democratic intransigence of Pannella and the impotence of Power, by sending a telegram or a letter of “protest” to the following addresses: 1) The National Secretaries of the Parties (except,

it is understood, the MSI²⁹ and similar groups); 2) the Presidents of the Chamber of Deputies and of the Senate.

July 26, 1974

In What Sense Can We Speak of a Defeat of the PCI in the “Referendum”?³⁰

After reading Maurizio Ferrara’s “official” response to my article on Pannella, I could have cried. So it was true. Ferrara’s whole polemic in the name of the PCI against me individually was based on nothing more than the extrapolation of one sentence from my text (*Corriere della Sera*, June 10, 1974), a sentence interpreted literally and in a simplistic, childish way. The sentence was: “The victory of the ‘No’ vote is in fact a defeat. . . . But, in a certain sense, it was also a defeat for Berlinguer and the communist party.”

Now, even a child could understand the “relative” nature of this statement: and that whereas the word “defeat”, with reference to the Christian Democratic Party and the Vatican, resounds in its full, literal and objective meaning, the same word used with reference to the PCI has an infinitely more subtle and complex significance. Even a child would be able to understand what is paradoxical about the identification of the two defeats that are in reality so fundamentally different. However, the fact remains that the defeat suffered by the PCI is still a “defeat”, and this must not be said. And if someone says it, it must by no means be heard. As Pannella would say, it has to be repealed. Anyone whose overriding need is to “repeal me”—cancelling any possible reality, even figurative, of the word “defeat” used with reference to the PCI (an unenviable task assigned precisely to Maurizio Ferrara)—is *a priori* incapable of understanding anything else that I said: because, as lawyers know so well, it is necessary to mercilessly discredit the whole character of the witness in order to discredit his testimony.

This explains the incredible inability of Maurizio Ferrara to understand my arguments; an inability that is therefore not due to ignorance, disinformation, or narrow-mindedness, all of which are reasons that a malicious or exasperated reader might be tempted to consider.

Aside from questions not involving the famous bone of contention (the “defeat”), for which Ferrara uses perfectly true, but also irrelevant, arguments (the imposing and decisive presence of the PCI, etc.), precisely because I myself consider them to be so correct that any attempt to refute them would be an insult to the intelligence of the reader—everything else that I said in my “crazy” article has been subjected, in Ferrara’s interpretation, to grotesque distortion and unfair simplification. In fact, it has been

²⁹ MSI: *Movimento Sociale Italiano* [Italian Social Movement]. A neo-fascist Italian political party founded by fascist veterans in Rome in 1946. [American translator’s note.]

³⁰ Published in *Corriere della Sera* under the title, “Repeal Pasolini”.

subjected to a lynching. For you have a lynch mob mentality when you accuse someone of calling eight or nine million communists “vulgar”, when what that person is really saying is that the official policy of the Party’s leadership is “vulgar”. You have a lynch mob mentality when you attribute to someone the statement that the Christian Democratic Party and the PCI are “equal in power”, vulgarly simplifying a much more complicated and nuanced concept. You have a lynch mob mentality when you attribute to someone the statement that “Fumagalli has the right of access to TV”, when that statement (concerning “access to TV”, yes, but in the infinitely more liberal sense of “civil rights”) was contained in a speech that I quoted—another person’s speech (in this case, a speech by Pannella, in which, in any case, he was speaking ironically, in the context of principles). You have a lynch mob mentality when you simplify someone’s ideas to fit your purpose and turn them into easy targets for scorn or public ridicule: which is what Ferrara does with my ideas, which are of course not new, but are certainly dramatic, concerning the nature of fascism and anti-fascism today, compared with the vast, impenetrable, all-encompassing consumerist ideology, which is the “unconscious but real” ideology of the masses, even if its values are still only experienced existentially.

Here, perhaps, Ferrara has not understood, precisely in the intellectual sense, the problem at hand. For he did not understand the meaning of my arguments about “homogenizing acculturation” (concerning which, I spoke exclusively with reference to the young people and the “real, particular” cultures of the country). These are things that, if they are not understood, just seem like foolishness. So I am ridiculed for ideas born exclusively in the head of that same person who is trying to make a fool of me (and not just anyone, he is a man of power—and this is serious—a person who represents eight or nine million voters).

What I want Maurizio Ferrara to tell me, without doubletalk and without malicious polemics, is why the communists think that the demand for the eight referendums is “wrong”—as Ferrara laconically proclaims, as if it were a Papal Bull.

Is it true that everything I said about the “real, unconscious” ideology of consumerist hedonism with its leveling effects on the behavior and physical language of the masses—which causes conscious political choices to no longer correspond with existential decisions—and everything I said about the violent, repressive and terrorist acculturation being carried out by the centers of power and the consequent disappearance of the old, particular real cultures (along with their values)—that all of this has already been said by others and moreover (this is certainly reassuring) has also all been “denominated”? Furthermore, have these problems been addressed at international conferences of sociologists? This is the whole indictment that Ferrarotti politely submits against me (*Paese Sera*, July 15, 1974) to reduce me to silence and non-existence. Yet it is precisely the names, precisely the names that appear to Ferrarotti to be so numerous and so delightfully exhaustive, precisely the names (*melting pot!*³¹), and precisely the international locations where these names appear, that prove that the “Italian” problem has not been even remotely addressed. And it is precisely this problem that I address.

³¹ In English in the original [American translator’s note].

Because I live it. And I do not play with two decks of cards (that of life and that of sociology), for otherwise my sociological ignorance would not have that “charming candor” that Ferrarotti himself mentions.

I think that I can reasonably claim that the Italian problem has no equivalents in the rest of the capitalist world. No other country has ever possessed so many “real and unique” cultures, so many “little fatherlands”, such a wide variety of dialects: no country, I say, has then undergone such disruptive “development”. In the other big countries major “acculturations” have indeed taken place in the past: upon which the last and definitive acculturation, that of consumerism, is superimposed on the previous ones with a certain logical precedence. The United States is also culturally composite (sub-proletarians from all over the world are concentrated there), but in a vertical sense and, so to speak, molecularly: not in such a perfectly geopolitical sense as in Italy. Therefore, no one has ever spoken of the Italian problem. Or, if they have, they did not understand it. The carefree nominalism of the sociologists seems to exhaust itself within their own circles. I experience things and I invent names for them as I go along. Of course, if I try to “describe” the terrible aspect of an entire generation that has suffered all the disruptions resulting from a stupid and horrible policy of development, and I try to “describe it” in “this or that” particular young person, or “this or that” particular worker, I am not understood: because the sociologist or the professional politician does not care personally about “this or that” young person or “this or that” worker. For me, on the other hand, that is the only thing that matters.

Even some young left-wing “extremists” have also misunderstood my position (I have received letters, otherwise very precious to me, from Milan, and from Bergamo). But let’s get one thing straight. I condemned the claim of the equivalence of the opposed extremisms as early as December 13-14, 1969. And, taking on Saragat, the official inaugurator of that claim, I made my condemnation solemn enough (in the poem, “Patmos”, written exactly one day after the Milan bombings and published in *Nuovi Argumenti*, No. 16, October-December 1969). The fascists and the extremist anti-fascists are not made out to be identical in that poem. Furthermore, the few thousand young fascist extremists in Italy are in fact assets of the State: I have explicitly pointed this out on many occasions.

The most unpleasant contribution to this debate, among those which have given rise to confusion, disrupting the discussion that should have been so fruitful for everyone, is that of Giorgio Bocca. My friend has, above all, made personal insinuations, reconstructing an episode from my biography according to his whim, like a pettifogging lawyer. If a group of students, as he says in his inaccurate and unfair account, attacked me in 1968, then he should have immediately taken up his pen in my defense, since he was the very same person who wrote, at that time, with respect to Italian intellectuals, that I “was the best of them all”. How easily my friend has changed his mind! It seems that all it took was for popular opinion to turn against me. Bocca’s logic, furthermore, is based on a very suspect variety of good, pragmatic common sense. It turns out that while I was chattering away, he was rolling up his sleeves and getting to work. With a coarseness that is understandable or explicable in Ferrara, but not in him, for no reason at all Bocca

interpreted in a literal sense—perhaps due to a simplified oral report from some colleague (because it does not seem possible that he read my article)—the identification between fascists and anti-fascists (in the sense that I pointed out above) and the qualification of fascist I attributed to the new, nominally anti-fascist power. Bocca reduced all these concepts to a blasphemous target and he, too, joined the lynch mob. I therefore screech like a solitary eagle and he, in the meantime, humble and indefatigable, works. Now he is working on a “report” on fascism: a “report” that I have characterized as a tedious and erroneous piece of work. And now I shall add: not only erroneous and tedious, but plagiarized, too. In fact, in the very same issue of *Il Giorno* (July 7, 1974) in which his attack on me appeared, the second chapter of this “report” was published, of which a large part was literally copied from *Valpreda più quattro* [Valpreda Plus Four], a work by a “democratic magistrate”, with an introduction by Giuseppe Branca (published by Nuova Italia), naturally without citing his source. All zealotry always conceals something ugly: even anti-fascist zealotry.

Whereas Ferrara and Bocca “misunderstood” what I wrote—distorting it by means of a horrendous simplification—Prezzolini understood it to mean exactly the opposite of what I wrote. The scandal represented by Pannella consists in fighting in the name of minorities, not only Don Franzoni, but also Moslems, Buddhists, maybe even fascists and the next enemies *du jour* (including Prezzolini). As a result, Prezzolini challenges Pannella, with abject irony, to do effectively what Pannella is actually doing, on the basis of a supremely formal principle of democracy that Prezzolini is incapable of understanding. For he has not understood that the country where he has lived for thirty-two years is not the realm of democracy, but the realm of pragmatism. It is in the name of this pragmatism that Prezzolini (most satisfactorily as far as I am concerned: Bocca is his nemesis) unwittingly plays second fiddle to Bocca.

Finally (for now, anyway), we have the republican Adolfo Battaglia, who calls me a “buffoon” only because I am an intellectual-scholar. I do not know whether this is derived from a Scelbian³² (“infra-culture” [“*culturame*”]) source or a sociological source (Schumpeter, Kernhauser, Mannheim, Hoffer, Von Mises, DeJouvenal, Shils, Veblen, etc.): we must assume in any event that it reflects the usual Italian moralism, thanks to which the “buffoon” is automatically transformed into the “scapegoat”, thus reestablishing (unintentionally, of course) the truth.

I apologize to the reader for having dragged him through this labyrinth of “unhappy consciousness” in this fragmented discussion that should have been so comprehensive and courteous.

September 22, 1974

³² Mario Scelba: a Sicilian Christian Democratic politician who, as Minister of the Interior of Italy between 1947 and 1954, directed a wave of repression against political dissidents of both right and left. [American translator’s note.]

The Historical Speech at Castel Gandolfo³³

Perhaps some of you were surprised to see a photograph of Pope Paul VI wearing a Sioux headdress, surrounded by a group of “Redskins” in traditional garb: a picturesque little scene that is extremely embarrassing precisely to the same degree that its atmosphere seems so homely and pleasant.

I do not know what inspired Pope Paul VI to decide to don that headdress and pose for that photograph. But it is not out of character. Indeed, in the case of this photograph of Paul VI, one may speak of an attitude that is consistent with the ideology, conscious or unconscious, that guides human actions and gestures, transforming them into “destiny” or “history”. In this case, the “destiny” of Paul VI, and the “history” of the Church.

During the very same week when Paul VI posed for this photograph, concerning which, “the less said, the better” (not due to hypocrisy, but out of human respect), he delivered an address that I will not hesitate, with all due solemnity, to declare to be historic. And I am not referring to recent history, or, much less, to contemporary history. It was in fact so historic that this address by Paul VI was not even news, as they say: I have read only brief and vague summaries of it in the newspapers, relegated to the bottom of the page.

By saying that the recent address by Pope Paul VI is historic, I am referring to the whole course of the history of the Catholic Church, that is, of human history (at least in the Eurocentric and culture-centric sense). In fact, Paul VI has explicitly admitted that the Church has been left behind by the world; that the role of the Church has suddenly become uncertain and superfluous; that the Real Power no longer needs the Church and has therefore abandoned it to its own devices; that social problems are resolved in a society in which the Church no longer has any prestige; that the problem of the “poor” no longer exists, that is, the essential problem of the Church, etc., etc. I have summarized the concepts of Pope Paul VI in my own words: that is, with words that I have long been using to express these same ideas. But the meaning of Paul’s address is precisely as I have summarized it: nor are the words I have used to do so, when it comes right down to it, all that different.

To tell the truth, this is not the first time that Pope Paul VI has spoken so sincerely: but, up until now, his outbursts of sincerity have assumed eccentric, enigmatic and often (from the point of view of the Church itself) somewhat inopportune forms. They were almost *raptus* [seizures] that revealed his real state of mind, objectively coinciding with the historical situation of the Church, experienced personally in his own Head. The “historical” encyclicals of Paul VI, then, were always the fruit of a compromise between the anxieties of the Pope and Vatican diplomacy: a compromise that prevented anyone from ever understanding whether these encyclicals were a sign of progress or of regression in relation to those issued by John XXIII. A profoundly impulsive and sincere Pope like Paul VI has ended up seeming, by definition, ambiguous and insincere. Now he

³³ Published in *Corriere della Sera* under the title, “The Dilemmas of a Pope, Today”.

has suddenly allowed all his sincerity to erupt for all the world to see, with an almost scandalous clarity. How did this happen, and why?

It is not hard to answer this question: for the first time, Pope Paul VI has done what Pope John XXIII did all the time, that is, he has explained the situation of the Church by resorting to non-ecclesiastical logic, culture and problematics: indeed, a logic that is foreign to the Church; that of the secular, rationalist, and perhaps even socialist world—although distorted and anesthetized by way of sociology.

A quick glance at the Church, as seen “from the outside”, was enough for Pope Paul VI to understand its real historical situation: a historical situation that, when subsequently experienced “from within” the Church, is a tragic one.

And this is the target that has been struck so accurately, and this time sincerely, by the sincerity of Pope Paul VI: instead of taking the path of false compromise, of reasons of state, of hypocrisy, not even the kind that characterized the post-John XXIII era, Paul VI’s “sincere” words have followed the logic of reality. The admissions that followed are therefore historic admissions in the dire sense that I indicated above: these admissions, in effect, depict the end of the Church or at least the end of the traditional role of the Church that has persisted without interruption for two thousand years.

Of course—perhaps by way of illusions that cannot but be resuscitated by the Holy Year—Paul VI will find a way to return (in good faith) to insincerity. His brief address delivered at the end of this summer at Castel Gandolfo will be formally forgotten, new reassurances of its prestige and hope for the future will be erected around the Church, etc., etc. But everyone knows that the truth, once spoken, cannot be repealed; and the new historical situation from which it derives is irreversible.

Now, apart from the particular practical problems (such as the decline of the religious vocations) for whose solution the Pope appears to be incapable of offering any hypotheses, it is above all the whole desperate situation of the Church that proves his complete irrationality (that is, once again but in different way, he proves his sincerity). For the solution that he proposes is “prayer”. Which means that after analyzing the situation of the Church “from the outside” and after having intuitively grasped its tragic nature, the solution that he proposes is once again formulated “from within” the Church. Therefore, he not only interposes a historically illogical relation between the formulation of the problem and its solution: they are plainly incompatible. Apart from the fact that if the world has left the Church behind (in even more overwhelming and decisive terms than the “Referendum”), it is clear that this world, precisely, will not “pray” anymore. Therefore, the Church is reduced to “praying” by itself.

So Paul VI, after having exposed, with such dramatic and scandalous sincerity, the looming threat of the end of the Church, offers no solution or suggestion to confront this threat.

Is this perhaps because the problem has no possible solution? Perhaps because the end of the Church is now inevitable, due to the “treason” of millions and millions of the faithful (above all, peasants who have converted to secularism and consumerist hedonism) and the “decision” of power, which is now secure, precisely due to the fact that it has these masses of former believers on a short leash by way of prosperity and above all by way of the ideology imposed on them, an ideology that does not even have a name?

Maybe. But one thing is certain: that if the wrongs committed by the Church have been numerous and grave throughout its long history of power, the most serious of all would be its *passive* acceptance of its own liquidation by a power that laughs at the Gospel. From a radical, or maybe even utopian, or more properly millenarian, perspective, what the Church must do to avoid an inglorious end is therefore clear. It must *join the ranks of the opposition*. And in order to join the ranks of the opposition, it must above all else negate itself. It must join the opposition against a power that has so cynically abandoned it, deliberately, without any compunctions, reducing it to a mere relic of picturesque folklore. It must negate itself, to reconquer the faithful (or those who have a “new” need for faith) by addressing precisely the reasons why they have abandoned it.

By resuming a struggle which is, furthermore, part of its tradition (the struggle of the Papacy against the Empire), but not for the conquest of power, the Church could be the guide, majestic but not authoritarian, of all of those who reject (and I am speaking as a Marxist, precisely as a Marxist) the new consumerist power that is completely irreligious; totalitarian; violent; falsely tolerant, in fact, more repressive than any that ever existed before; corrupting; degrading (today more than ever before, Marx’s claim that capital transforms human dignity into a commodity is vindicated). It is precisely this rejection that can therefore come to symbolize the Church: returning to its origins, that is, to opposition and revolt. It must either do this, or accept a power that no longer wants it: that is, commit suicide.

I shall offer only one example, albeit seemingly a simplistic one. One of the most powerful instruments of the new power is television. Up until now, the Church has not understood this. Indeed, it has pathetically believed that television is an instrument of *its own* power. And it is in fact true that television censorship has been exercised by the Vatican, there can be no doubt about it. In fact, television has been one continuous *advertisement* for the Church. But, it is precisely a kind of advertisement that is totally different from the *advertisements* for commercial products, on the one hand, and on the other, and most importantly, the latter elaborated the new human model of the consumer.

The *advertisement* for the Church was obsolete and ineffective, purely verbal: and too explicit, too heavily explicit. A veritable disaster compared to the nonverbal *advertisement*, marvelously light, for commercial products and the ideology of consumerism, with its perfectly irreligious hedonism (who needs sacrifice, faith, asceticism, noble feelings, thrift, old fashioned customs, etc., etc.). Television was the leading force behind the victory of the “No” vote in the referendum, through the (albeit mindless) secularization of the citizenry. And that “No” vote in the referendum only gave

the vaguest indication of how much Italian society has changed precisely in the sense evoked by Pope Paul VI in his brief historic address at Castel Gandolfo.

Now, should the Church continue to accept this kind of television programming? That is, an instrument of mass culture that belongs to the new power that “no longer has any use for the Church”? Must it not, instead, violently attack it, with a Pauline fury, precisely because of its real irreligiousness, cynically gilded with a vapid clericalism?

Naturally, the Church instead announces a big televised *special* for the inauguration of the Holy Year. And of course, religious people know well that these pompous broadcasts will be big, empty displays of picturesque folklore, politically useless even for the most traditional right-wing.

I have used the example of television because it is the most spectacular and operates on the largest scale. But I could have provided a thousand other examples relating to the everyday life of millions of citizens: from the function of the priest in an agricultural world in utter disarray, to the revolt of the theologically most advanced and scandalous elites.

Ultimately, however, the dilemma today is as follows: either the Church decides to wear the traumatic mask of Pope Paul VI and becomes a picturesque “play” of tragic folklore, or it assumes the tragic sincerity of Pope Paul VI who fearfully announces its end.

October 6, 1974

New Historical Perspectives: Power Has No Use for the Church³⁴

With reference to my article on the current real situation of the Church (*Corriere della Sera*, September 22, 1974), *L'Osservatore Romano*—in an article of violent reaction—wrote, among other things: “We do not know where the author obtained so much authority, if not from certain films of an enigmatic and reprobate decadence, from his skill as a corrosive writer and from certain somewhat eccentric attitudes.”

Let us examine this old-fashioned sentence, which concentrates the whole “spirit” (in the sense of “culture”) of this clerical article. The very first thing we notice is an idea that might immediately seem odd to a normal person: that is, the idea that someone, in order to write something, must possess “authority”. I honestly cannot understand how anyone could think such a thing. I always thought, like any normal person, that what motivates a writer should be the need to write, freedom, authenticity, risk. To think that something social and official can exist that would “bestow” authority on someone is an aberrant idea, evidently originating in the disturbed mind of someone who can no longer conceive truth outside the limits of authority.

³⁴ Published in *Corriere della Sera* under the title, “The Church and Power”.

I do not have any authority to back me up: my only authority is paradoxically the authority that comes from not having any authority and not having wanted it; from having put myself in a situation of not having anything to lose and therefore of not being loyal to any pact except the one with a reader whom I consider moreover to be worthy of any inquiry no matter how scandalous it may be.

Let us suppose, however, the absurd hypothesis that there is some kind of “authority” in me: despite my own views, let us posit an authority that is objectively decreed in the cultural context and in the public life of Italy.

In that case, the Vatican’s proposition is even more serious. For it is an indictment of not only the cultural circles within which I operate as a writer, but, with regard to this point, also the hundreds of thousands, and in some cases, millions of “simple” Italians who underlie the success of my films. In short, all the critics who review my works are guilty, and all the spectators who go to see my movies are fools. All of it is “infraculture”.³⁵ It is “infraculture” because it is not clerical-fascist. In fact, when *L’Osservatore Romano* writes that a film is “of an enigmatic and reprobate ‘decadence’”, one conclusion is inescapable: the meaning of these words is tantamount to the meaning that informed the subculture that burned “decadent” books and paintings in the name of “healthy morality”. And “corrosive writing” is also an expression whose style is typical of thirty years ago: because it posits the comparison with a hypothetical health and integrity of the official culture, based on authority and on power. Finally, with the allusion to “eccentric attitudes”, we enter the territory of personal insult. I will not reply to this, however. Christ, moreover, never felt any duty to reply to the “black sheep” (or the “lost sheep”).

The history of the Church is a history of power and the crimes of power: but even worse, at least with respect to the last few centuries, it is also a history of ignorance. No one, for example, can prove that to continue to talk today about Saint Thomas, ignoring the liberal, rationalist and secular culture, first, and then the Marxist culture in politics and the Freudian culture in psychology (to restrict our examples to primary and elementary schemas), is not a sub-cultural act. The Church’s ignorance during the last two centuries has been paradigmatic, above all for Italy. It is on this ignorance that the self-absorbed and apathetic [*qualunquista*] ignorance of the Italian bourgeoisie has been modeled. It is, in fact, an ignorance whose cultural definition is: the perfect coexistence of “irrationalism”, “formalism” and “pragmatism”. For example, the *Sentences of the Sacra Rota* comprise a vast corpus of documents that demonstrate the spiritual and formal arbitrariness, on the one hand, and on the other hand the gloomy pragmatism (which verges on a kind of fanatical “behaviorism”) with which the Church views worldly affairs.

³⁵ “*Culturame*”, a pejorative term of abuse for “culture”, and therefore what may be called “infraculture” or “subculture”, because the person using this term believes certain cultural manifestations are beneath the level of what he or she calls “real culture”.
[American translator’s note.]

The attempts to bring the Church's practice up-to-date on the part of the clergy, as well as the Vatican, which were planned and sometimes actually carried out, only confirm what I have said. For these modernizing efforts concern technology and sociology. Once again real culture is avoided. Once again it is the instruments of power that appear to be meaningful and decisive.

It is this particular Vatican culture, as an absence of real culture, which probably prevented the journalist from *L'Osservatore Romano* from understanding what I wrote about the crisis of the Church. He did not understand that it was not an attack on the Church at all: it was in fact almost an act of solidarity—extremely anomalous and premature, of course—due to the fact that—finally—the Church appeared to me to be defeated: and therefore finally liberated from itself, that is, from power.

In an article in *La Stampa* (September 29, 1974), Mario Soldati speaks of the “guffaws” of a Jesuit when asked if he had a car: in these “guffaws”, Soldati senses an initial, false accent of a practical and traditional nature (“No, I don't have a car, the time when Jesuits had cars is long past”). But deep down, at bottom, in the essence of these “guffaws”, Soldati senses a sincere, exultant and irresistible happiness. The happiness of finally seeing the Church's relations with the world overturned and renewed. The happiness of defeat. The happiness of having to start all over again from the beginning. “The liberation from power.”

In Pope Paul VI's lamentations (I am referring to his historic address at the end of the summer at Castel Gandolfo), I sense the same qualities: an initial, “well-deserved”, accent of pain and disillusionment for the decline of a vast power apparatus; and a more subterranean accent of sincere and profound, that is, religious suffering, pregnant with future possibilities.

What are these future possibilities?

First of all, the radical separation of Church and State. I have always been shocked, or more precisely, deeply indignant, at the clergy's interpretation of Christ's admonition: “Give unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's”: an interpretation in which all the hypocrisy and aberration that have characterized the Church of the Counter-Reformation is concentrated. They made a saying of Christ's seem moderate, cynical and realist—which seems monstrous to me—when in fact it is obviously radical, extremist and perfectly religious. For there is no way that Christ wanted to say: “Don't get worked up about things that don't concern you, don't look for political scandals, just stick to a down-to-earth social life and the absolute of the religious life, just try to keep your head above water and keep your nose clean, etc.”. To the contrary, Christ—in absolute coherence with all his preaching—could only have wanted to say: “Carefully distinguish between Caesar and God; do not confuse them; do not apathetically make them coexist with the excuse that it is then easier to serve God: ‘do not reconcile them’: keep foremost in your minds that my ‘and’ is disjunctive, it creates two universes that do not communicate with one another, in fact, they are opposed to one another: in short, I repeat,

they are ‘irreconcilable’.” Christ, by proposing this extreme dichotomy, encourages and invites a perennial opposition to Caesar, although nonviolent (unlike that of the zealots).

The second religious novelty that I foresee for the future is the following: up until now the Church has been the Church of the world of the peasants, which took from Christianity its unique original moment with relation to all the other religions, that is, Christ. In the world of the peasants, Christ was assimilated to one of the thousands of Adonises or Persephones that existed in the rural areas: which ignored real time, that is, history. The time of the agricultural gods similar to Christ was a “sacred” or “liturgical” time from which their cyclical character was derived, the eternal return.

The time of their birth, of their actions in life, of their death, of their descent into the underworld and their resurrection, was a paradigmatic time according to which, periodically reenacted again and again, the time of life was modeled.

Christ, however, accepted a “linear” time, that is, the time of what we call history. He interrupted the circular structure of the old religions: and he spoke of an “end”, not of a “return”. But, I repeat, for millennia the world of the peasants continued to assimilate Christ to its old mythic models: it turned them into the embodiment of an axiological principle, through which meaning is conferred upon the cycle of cultures. Christ’s preaching did not have much of an impact. For centuries, only the truly religious *elites* of the ruling class understood the real meaning of Christ. But the Church, which was the official Church of the ruling class, always accepted this ambiguity: for it could not exist without the peasant masses.

Now, suddenly, the rural areas have ceased to be religious. The city, on the other hand, is starting to become religious. Christianity has changed from agricultural to urban: and a characteristic of all urban religions—and therefore of the *elites* of the ruling classes—is the (Christian) substitution of the end for the return: of soteriological mysticism for rustic *pietas*. Therefore, an urban religion, as a spiritual framework, is infinitely more capable of accepting the model of Christ than any peasant religion.

Consumerism and the proliferation of tertiary industries has destroyed the world of the peasants in Italy and is destroying it all over the world (the future of agriculture is also industrial): as a result, there will be no more priests, or, if there are, they will ideally be born in the city. But these priests “born in the city” will obviously by no means want to have anything to do with the police or the military, bureaucrats or big industrialists: for they can only be cultured men, brought up in a world that, instead of having Adonis and Persephone watching over it, is based on the great texts of modern culture. If it wants to survive as a Church, the Church therefore can only abandon power and embrace that culture—which it always hated—that is by its very nature free, anti-authoritarian, and in constant development, contradictory, collective, scandalous.

And then, finally, is it necessary for the Church to coincide with the Vatican? If—after donating the whole (old-fashioned and picturesque) stage set of the current headquarters of the Vatican to the Italian State and by giving away all the (old-fashioned and

picturesque) costume jewelry and other stage props, the capes and gowns, *flabella* and gestatorial chairs to the workers of Cinecittà—the Pope was to settle down with a clergyman, with his collaborators, in some basement or vault in Tormarancio or Tuscolano, not far from the catacombs of Saint Damian or Saint Priscilla—would the Church thereby cease to be the Church?

November 14, 1974

The Novel of the Bombings³⁶

I know.

I know the names of those responsible for what has been called a “coup d’état” (but is actually a series of “systematic coups d’état” carried out to protect the powers that be).

I know the names of those responsible for the Milan massacre of December 12, 1969.

I know the names of those responsible for the massacres in Brescia and Bologna during the early months of 1974.

I know the names of the “leadership clique” that manipulated both the old-style fascists who planned the “coups”, and the neo-fascists who were the actual perpetrators of the first massacres, as well as, finally, the “unknown” perpetrators of the most recent massacres.

I know the names of those who have managed the two different, in fact opposite stages of the tension: the first, anti-communist stage (Milan 1969) and the second anti-fascist stage (Brescia and Bologna 1974).

I know the names of the powerful figures who, with the help of the CIA (backed up by the Greek colonels and the Mafia) first created an anti-communist crusade (which failed miserably), in an attempt to plug the hole in the dam of '68, and subsequently, still with the aid and the inspiration of the CIA, assumed a new anti-fascist identity in order to remedy the disaster of the “referendum”.

I know the names of those who, between attending Holy Masses, provided and ensured political protection to the old generals (in order to maintain, in reserve, the potential organization for a coup d’état), young neo-fascists, or rather neo-nazis (in order to create a concrete anti-communist tension) and finally common criminals, who, right up to this very moment have been nameless and possibly will continue to be nameless forever (in order to create the subsequent anti-fascist tension). I know the names of the sober and important people who lurk behind comical personalities like that general of the forest rangers, who worked farcically at Città Ducale (while the Italian forests burned), or

³⁶ Published in *Corriere della Sera* under the title, “What Is This Coup D’État?”

behind the faceless gray personages who perform a purely organizational role, like general Miceli.

I know the names of the sober and important people who lurk behind the tragic youths who made the choice to carry out suicidal fascist atrocities, and who lurk behind the common criminals, Sicilian or otherwise, who offered their services as killers and assassins.

I know all of these names and I know all the facts (the attacks on institutions, and the massacres) for which they are responsible.

I know. But I don't have any evidence. I don't even have clues.

I know because I'm an intellectual, a writer, one who tries to follow everything that happens, and to imagine all that is unknown or unspoken; who connects facts that may seem disconnected, who assembles the disorganized and fragmentary pieces into an entirely coherent political picture, who restores logic where arbitrariness, folly and mystery seem to rule.

This is all part and parcel of my trade, and of the instinct of my craft. I think that it is unlikely that my "novel in progress" is wrong, that is, that it is disconnected from reality, and that its references to real persons and events may be incorrect. Furthermore, I believe that many other intellectuals and novelists know what I know as an intellectual and novelist. Because the reconstruction of the truth of what has happened in Italy after 1968 isn't that difficult.

This truth – we feel it with absolute precision – lies behind a large number of texts, including those written by journalists and politicians: that is to say, texts that are not the products of imagination or fiction, as mine must be by their very nature. The latest example: it is clear that the truth was at the gates, with all of its names, in the editorial published in the November 1, 1974 issue of *Corriere della Sera*.

Journalists and politicians probably have some evidence, or at least some clues.

Now the problem is this: journalists and politicians, while they may have some evidence and certainly some clues, are not naming any names.

Who, then, will disclose these names? Evidently those who not only have the necessary courage but, at the same time, those who have not had to make compromises with power, and, furthermore, those who don't have, by definition, anything to lose: that is to say, intellectuals.

An intellectual therefore could easily name those names in public: but they do not have either evidence or clues.

Power, and the world that, even though it does not belong to power, holds concrete relationships with power, has excluded free intellectuals – for this is simply its nature – from the possibility of gathering evidence and clues.

As for me, it could be objected that I, for example, as an intellectual and as a storyteller, could enter that explicitly political world (of power, or close to power), compromise with it, and therefore I would participate in the right to obtain, with significant probability, evidence and clues.

But to such objections I would answer that this is not possible, because it is simply loathing at the prospect of entering such a political world that identifies my potential intellectual power to speak the truth: that is, to name names.

The intellectual courage to speak the truth and the practice of politics are incompatible in Italy.

Upon the intellectual – who is profoundly and viscerally despised by the entire Italian bourgeoisie – we falsely confer this lofty and noble mandate, which is actually a mandate of servility: that of debating moral and ideological problems.

If he abides by this mandate, the intellectual is regarded as a traitor to his role: and the cries resound—“the treason of the intellectuals”—which is an alibi and a justification for the politicians and the servants of power.

But it isn't just power: there is also an opposition. In Italy this opposition is so large and so strong that it is a power in itself: I am referring, naturally, to the Italian Communist Party.

At this moment, it's certain that the presence of a great party in opposition such as the Italian Communist Party is the salvation of Italy and its wretched democratic institutions.

The Italian Communist Party is a clean country within a dirty country, an honest country within a dishonest country, an intelligent country within an idiotic country, an educated country within an ignorant country, a humanistic country within a consumerist country. In the last few years, between the Italian Communist Party—understood in a genuinely integral sense as a compact “whole” of leaders, rank and file, and voters—and the rest of Italy, a chasm has opened up: so that the Italian Communist Party has become a “country apart”, an island. And it is precisely for this reason that at the present time it can have its closest relationship ever with the corrupt, inept, degraded real power: but it is merely a diplomatic relationship, as if between two different nations.

As a matter of fact their respective morals, understood as concrete wholes, are incompatible. It is on this basis that it is possible to propose that realistic “compromise” that might save Italy from total collapse: however, this “compromise” would really be an “alliance” between two neighboring States, or between two States, one of which is embedded in the other.

But all of these positive things I have just said about the Italian Communist Party also constitute its relatively negative aspects.

The division of the country into two countries, one sinking up to its neck in degradation and degeneration, the other intact and uncompromised, cannot be a reason for peace and reconstruction.

Furthermore, in the conception that I have outlined here, I think objectively, that considers the opposition as a Country within the Country, the opposition identifies with another power: a power that, nevertheless, remains a power.

Consequently, the politicians of such an opposition can only act like men of power.

In this specific case that is of such dramatic concern to us, they also conferred upon the intellectuals a mandate that they themselves drafted. And if the intellectuals fail to fulfill the demands of this mandate—one that is purely moral and ideological—they become, to everyone's great delight, traitors.

Now, why is it that the politicians of the opposition, if they have – as they probably do – evidence or at least clues, do not produce the names of those really responsible, that is to say, the political culprits, for the absurd coups d'état and the horrendous massacres of the last few years? The answer is very simple: they do not produce these names because they make the distinction – a distinction that is rejected by the intellectual – between political truth and political practice. And therefore, naturally, they do not reveal evidence and clues to the intellectual who is not an official: they would not even dream of doing so, as one would in any case expect, in view of the objective state of affairs.

An intellectual must abide by the duty that has been assigned to him, and repeatedly perform his codified mode of intervention.

I know well that it is not the time – at this particular moment of Italian history – to publicly present a motion of no-confidence against the nation's entire political class. This would be neither diplomatic nor opportune. But these are categories of politics, not of political truth: which is what the powerless intellectual—whenever and to the extent he is capable—is obliged to serve.

Well, just because I cannot produce the names of those responsible for the attempted coups d'état and the massacres (but not in lieu of doing so), I can only level my weak and ideal accusation against the entire Italian political class.

And I do so because I believe in politics, I believe in the “formal” principles of democracy, I believe in Parliament and I believe in political parties. And naturally from my own particular viewpoint, which is that of a communist.

I am ready to withdraw my motion of no-confidence (in fact I would like nothing better) as soon as a politician – not due to political opportunism, that is, not because the moment is right to do so, but rather in order to create the preconditions for such a moment – will decide to produce the names of those responsible for the coups d'état and the massacres, concerning which he knows very well, as I do, that he must have some evidence, or at least some clues.

Probably – if the American power will allow it – perhaps by making the “diplomatic” decision to confer upon another democracy the prerogative that the American democracy granted itself with respect to Nixon – sooner or later these names will be revealed. But those that will reveal them will be people who shared power with them, as lesser culprits as opposed to greater culprits (and they may not turn out to be, as in the American case, any better). This would ultimately be the real coup d'état.

[The above English translation is based on previous English translations that were made directly from the Italian original by Aindriú Ó Domhnaill (<https://thefiendjournal.wordpress.com/2010/12/04/the-last-article-of-pier-paolo-pasolini-i-know/>) and Giovanni Tiso (<https://overland.org.au/2012/03/what-is-this-coup-detat-i-know/>) (American translator's note).]

January 25, 1975

The Ignorance of the Vatican as Paradigmatic of the Ignorance of the Italian Bourgeoisie³⁷

Donat-Cattin's position on the DC [Christian Democratic Party] seems to be a very profane anomaly: he speaks of the DC as the party of the “middle class” at a time when the middle class is merging with the working class. But the DC is not the party of the “middle class”.

The DC is an expression of (or was in the past): a) the petty bourgeoisie; and b) the world of the peasants (administered by the Vatican).

This is no dichotomy. The petty bourgeoisie and the religious world of the peasantry were, right up until quite recently, a single, unified world. The Italian petty bourgeoisie was still substantially of a peasant nature and, for their part, the peasants (as Lenin said) are petty bourgeois, or at least potentially petty bourgeois. Their morality was the same: and so was their rhetoric. Despite the wide variety of Italian “cultures”—often historically very far removed from one another—the “values” of the worlds of the petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry substantially coincide. The ambivalence of these “values” has produced a world that is both good and bad at the same time. In their concrete

³⁷ Published in *Epoca* in response to a questionnaire on the Christian Democratic Party and the intellectuals.

cultural contexts, these “values” were actually positive, or at least real; torn from their context and forced to become “national”, they turned negative: that is, rhetorical and repressive.

It was on this basis that the fascist police state was founded, and then, in an imperceptible transition, the Christian Democratic police state. For one as well as the other, although an “expression” of the petty bourgeoisie and the world of the peasants, in fact served the “bosses”, that is, big capital. These are banalities but it is better to repeat them. The Christian Democrats have always tried to pass for anti-fascists: but they have always lied (some, perhaps, inadvertently). Their electoral preponderance in the 1950s and the support of the Vatican allowed them to perpetuate, under the screen of formal democracy and verbal anti-fascism, the same old fascist politics.

But their arrogance, their corruption, and their provincial and semi-criminal despotism were suddenly, in just a few years, “exposed”, so they can no longer count on a real electoral base. Their electorate has been fractured, the Vatican has been deprived of all authority.

Thus, a party whose historical and, unfortunately, concrete power once coincided with Real Power, has suddenly had to realize (if it has indeed realized it) that its historical and concrete Power no longer coincides with Real Power. In fact, this real Power (and—this is the beautiful part—precisely due to the work of the Christian Democrats in the government!) of the clerical-fascists or the Sanfedists—wielded without interruption since the unification of Italy in the 1860s—has become what is euphemistically and almost humorously defined as “consumerist”.

All the real “values” (popular as well as bourgeois) upon which the preceding state powers were based, have therefore collapsed, dragging down with them the “false” values of those powers. The new consumerist values dictate secularism (?), tolerance (?), and the most unbridled hedonism, in such way as to render thrift, foresight, respectability, modesty and, in short, all the old “noble sentiments”, totally derisory.

All of this signifies the collapse of Christian Democratic politics—whose crisis consists simply in the need to ditch the Vatican as soon as possible, along with the old nationalist army and all the rest: but it is not by the same token the collapse of the Christian Democratic “cultural politics”. For the simple reason that there has never been a Christian Democratic “cultural politics”.

In fact, as the direct servant of the interests of the employers, that is, in its fascist capacity, the Christian Democracy has continued to promote, on a more intensely Catholic and hypocritically democratic note, the same old themes of fascist rhetoric: neo-classical academicism, officialdom, etc.

As the party of the world of the peasantry, obedient (at least formally, very formally, as we have seen) to the Vatican, the Christian Democracy has existed amidst the most appalling absence of culture, that is, in the most total and abject ignorance.

The codes of the particular peasant cultures, valid (as I have said) within their contexts, become ridiculous and “provincial” if they are imposed at the national level, and become monstrous if they are exploited by the Church, in view of the fact that their religiosity is not catholic (probably not even in the case of the impoverished region of Veneto). The cultural paradigm, in this sense, is supplied to the Christian Democracy by the Vatican. And in order to become apprised of the miserable state in which the Vatican currently finds itself, you need only read its magazines, its official daily newspapers, and its various other publications (perhaps, above all, that horrible, totally pragmatic and at the same time formalistic corpus, in the worst sense that these terms can possess, of the *Sentences of the Sacra Rota*). Even now (this is something that they should have learned by now), the version of the Italian language used by backward priests and Christian Democrats is culturally vulgar and demeaning.

Finally, as the party of the petty bourgeoisie, the Christian Democracy can only nourish a profound and irremediable contempt for culture: for the petty bourgeoisie (even in its “red” aberrations), culture is always “infraculture” [*Culturame*]. The priority is placed, in moral terms, on action. Anyone who thinks is culpable. Intellectuals, although the custodians of a few (although perhaps contradictory) truths that the petty bourgeoisie suspects are true, must be at least morally eliminated. The Christian Democratic rearguard (see a recent attack on certain intellectuals by Carlo Casalegno, the associate editor of *La Stampa*) still pursues this obscurantist policy that provided it with so much demagogic satisfaction in the past and which is so useless today, now that the anti-cultural function has been assumed by the *mass media*³⁸ (which nonetheless pretends to admire and respect culture). The epigraph to this chapter of bourgeois history was written once and for all by Goering: “When I hear the word ‘culture’ , I reach for my revolver”.³⁹

Perhaps some readers will think that what I am saying here is trivial. But anyone who is scandalized is always trivial. And, much to my regret, I am scandalized. It remains to be seen whether, like all those who are scandalized (the banality of their language proves this), I am mistaken, or whether there are special reasons that justify my reaction. But let us conclude.

In the 1950s, cultural hegemony was exercised by the PCI, which administered it in a truly anti-fascist environment and with a sincere, although already quite rhetorical, respect for the value system of the Resistance. Later, the advent of the new form of real Power (that is, a totally different kind of fascism) created a new bourgeois cultural hegemony that the Christian Democracy objectively assumed responsibility for, without really being aware of it.

³⁸ In English in the original [American translator’s note].

³⁹ Attributed to Goering but actually a mistranslated line from a play by Hanns Johst, “Schlageter” (1933): “When I hear the word culture ... I release the safety on my Browning!” [American translator’s note.]

Now, the Communist Party, in the new historical situation of the crisis of Christian Democracy, which coincides with the crisis of consumerist Power, if it really wanted to, could take control of the situation: and reestablish its own cultural hegemony once again. The authority that it derived from the Resistance during the 1950s, is today derived from the fact that it is the only part of Italy that is clean, honest, consistent, trustworthy and strong (this is so much the case that it constitutes a kind of country within a country: and in this sense, contributing, furthermore—inadvertently, it is true, in view of the fact that the “red” country is based in the North, with its capital, perhaps, in Bologna—to the further marginalization of the increasingly more degraded South).

January 19, 1975

Sexual Intercourse, Abortion, the False Tolerance of Power, and the Conformism of Progressives⁴⁰

I am a supporter of the Radical Party’s eight-point referendum, and I am prepared to join an immediate campaign in its favor. I share with the Radical Party an eagerness to see existing realities ratified, to see them formally fleshed out: that is the first principle of democracy.

I am, however, profoundly disturbed by the legalization of abortion, because I, like many others, consider it to be a legalization of homicide. In my dreams, and in my everyday life—and this is something that I have in common with all men—I live my prenatal life, my happy immersion in the maternal waters: I know that I already existed there. I will restrict myself to saying this because, with respect to abortion, I have more urgent things to say. The fact that life is sacred is obvious: it is a principle that is even stronger than any other principle of democracy, and no purpose can be served in belaboring this point.

The first thing I want to say, however, is this: with regard to abortion, this is the first and only instance in which Radicals and all the purest and most rigorous pro-abortion democrats base their arguments on *Realpolitik* and therefore resort to the “cynical” prevarications of ‘that’s the way it is’ and common sense.

While they have always asked themselves, first of all, and perhaps ideally (as is just), about what “real principles” they should defend, this time they did not.

Now, as they know very well, there is not a single case in which “real principles” coincide with the principles that most people consider to be their own personal rights. In the democratic context, of course, we struggle on behalf of the majority, that is, for civil society as a whole, but one finds that the majority, in its self-righteousness, is always wrong: because its conformism is always, by its very nature, brutally repressive.

⁴⁰ Published in *Corriere della Sera* under the title, “I Am Against Abortion”.

Why don't I think that the principles upon which the Radicals and progressives in general (in a conformist way) base their struggle for the legalization of abortion are "real"?

For a whole array of chaotic, tumultuous and emotionally charged reasons. I know, as I have already said, that the majority is already in favor, potentially, of the legalization of abortion (although in the case of a new "referendum", many will vote against it and the radical "victory" will be much less impressive). In fact, legalized abortion—on this question there is no room for doubt—would be enormously convenient for the majority. Above all, because it will make having sex—heterosexual coupling—easier; there would be practically no obstacles to engaging in it. But this freedom of sexual intercourse for the "couple" such as it is conceived by the majority—this marvelous permissiveness towards it—who has tacitly desired it, who has tacitly promulgated it, and tacitly introduced it, so that it is now an irreversible trend in people's habits? The consumerist power, the power of the new fascism. This power has seized for its own purposes the demands for freedom—let's be frank—the liberal and progressive demands for freedom, and, making them its own, has neutralized them, and changed their nature.

Today the sexual freedom of the majority is in fact a convention, an obligation, a social duty, a social anxiety, an essential feature of the consumer's quality of life. In short, the false liberalization of prosperity has created a situation that is as bad as and maybe even more unhealthy than the one that prevailed during the times of poverty. In fact, first of all, as a result of a sexual freedom "bestowed" as a gift by power, there is a real and authentic generalized neurosis. Ease of access has given rise to obsession; because it is an "induced" and imposed availability, deriving from the fact that the tolerance of power concerns only the sexual demand expressed by the conformism of the majority. It only protects the couple (not only, of course, the married couple): and the couple has therefore ended up becoming a feverish, paroxysm-stricken condition, rather than becoming a sign of freedom and happiness (as it was in the democratic hopes). Second: everything that is sexually "different" is on the other hand ignored and rejected with a violence that can only be compared to the Nazi concentration camps (no one now remembers, naturally, that people who were sexually different ended up in those camps). Of course, with a word, the new power could extend its false tolerance even to such minorities. It is not necessary to rule out the possibility that sooner or later this will be discussed openly on television. After all, the elites are much more tolerant towards sexual minorities than in the past, and truly in a sincere way (and also because it gratifies their conscience). On the other hand, however, the vast majority (the masses: fifty million Italians) have been converted to an intolerance that is more primitive, violent and sinister than any that has ever been seen in Italian history. What has taken place during the last few years, anthropologically speaking, is a vast phenomenon of renunciation: the Italian people, along with poverty, do not even want to remember their "real" tolerance: that is, they no longer want to remember the two phenomena that have been most characteristic of their entire history. The new power wants to erase that history forever. And it is these same masses (now so prone to blackmailing, beating, and lynching minorities) who, by a decision of power, are now breaking through the barriers of the old clerical-fascist conventions and are ready to accept the legalization of abortion and therefore the

abolition of every obstacle that stands in the way of the relationship of the celebrated couple.

Now, everyone, from the Radicals to Fanfani (who, this time, skillfully stealing a march on Andreotti, is laying the foundations for an extremely prudent theological renunciation, right under the nose of the Vatican), everyone, I say, when they speak of abortion, refrain from speaking about what logically must precede it, i.e., sexual intercourse.

This is an extremely significant omission. Sexual intercourse—with all the permissiveness in the world—is still taboo, that much is clear. But when we consider the Radicals, it is certainly not correct to explain this omission with reference to a taboo: it indicates instead the omission of a sincere, rigorous and complete political examination. For sexual intercourse is political. Therefore one cannot speak in a concrete political sense about abortion, without also considering sexual intercourse as political as well. One cannot see the signs of a social and political dimension in abortion (or the birth of children) without seeing the same signs as well in its immediate antecedent, or rather, “in its cause”, that is, in sexual intercourse.

Today, sexual intercourse has become, politically, something very different from what it was in the past. Today’s political context is now one of tolerance (and therefore sexual intercourse is a social obligation) while the political context of the past was repression (and therefore sexual intercourse, outside of marriage, was scandalous). This is therefore a first error of the *Realpolitik*, of the compromise with common sense, that I noted in the activities of the Radicals and the progressives in their struggle for the legalization of abortion. They isolate the problem of abortion, with its specific factual situations, and give us a distorted picture: one that suits them (in good faith, this would be crazy to dispute).

The second, more serious, error, is the following: the Radicals and other progressives who are fighting in the front ranks for the legalization of abortion—after having isolated it from sexual intercourse—situate it in a strictly contingent, and furthermore, interlocutory, problematic (in this case, the Italian problematic). They reduce it to a purely practical issue, one that must be confronted precisely with a practical attitude. But this (as they know very well) is always wrong.

The context within which this problem of abortion must be considered is much broader and extends far beyond the ideologies of the parties (which, if they were effectively embraced, would result in their own destruction: see Alfredo Todisco’s *Breviario di ecologia. Problemi attuali*. [Handbook of Ecology. Current Problems]). The context within which abortion must be understood is precisely the ecological context: it is the demographic tragedy that, on the ecological horizon, looms as the most serious threat to the survival of humanity. In this context, the question of abortion—in its ethical and legal dimensions—is transformed and viewed in a totally different light; and, from this perspective, even some kind of legalization may be justified. If the legislators did not always arrive too late, and if they were not so obscurely deaf to the imagination to remain faithful to the good common sense of their own pragmatic abstraction, they would resolve

everything by including the crime of abortion under the broader category of euthanasia, so that it would benefit from a special series of “mitigating” arguments of an ecological nature. But this would not by any means cause it to cease to be formally a crime and to appear as such before one’s conscience. And this is the principle that my Radical friends should defend, instead of plunging (with a quixotic honesty) into an extremely sensible but rather pious confusion of single mothers or feminists, who are in fact preoccupied with “another” (and more serious and worrying) problem. What is the framework, in reality, in which this new concept of the crime of euthanasia should be understood?

This one: in the past, the couple was blessed, today it is accursed. Convention and imbecile journalists still get misty-eyed over the “sweet little couple” (it is in this abominable way that they refer to it), not realizing that it is a sweet little criminal conspiracy. And the same goes for weddings: in the past they were occasions for celebration and the institution itself—so stupid and so sinister—was actually overshadowed by the reality that it was in fact a joyful and festive event. Now, however, weddings all seem like gray, hastily conducted funeral rites. The reason for the terrible things that I am saying is clear: in the past, the “species” had to struggle to survive, and therefore births “had to” exceed deaths. Today, however, the “species”, if it wants to survive, must see to it that births do not exceed deaths. Therefore, each child born in the past, being the promise of life, was a blessing; each child born today, however, is a contribution to the self-destruction of humanity, and is therefore a curse.

We have thus arrived at the paradox that what is called unnatural is natural and what is called natural is unnatural. I recall that DeMarsico (co-author of the *Codice Rocco*), in a brilliant argument in defense of one of my films, called Braibanti a “pig”, declaring that any argument to the effect that the homosexual relationship is useless to the survival of the species is inadmissible in a court of law: now, in order to be consistent, he should in fact assert the contrary: it is the heterosexual relationship that figures as a threat to the species, while the homosexual relationship represents the prospect of its preservation.

To conclude: prior to the world of pregnancy and abortion, there is the world of sexual intercourse: and it is the world of sexual intercourse that forms and conditions the world of pregnancy and abortion. Anyone who is politically concerned with the world of pregnancy and abortion and does not consider the ontological priority of the world of sexual intercourse—and therefore does not raise it as a topic of discussion—is a mean-spirited, self-absorbed [*qualunquistico*] realist. I have outlined how the world of sexual intercourse stands in Italy today, but I would like to conclude by summarizing my views.

This world of sexual intercourse includes a totally passive, and at the same time violent, majority, which considers all its institutions, whether codified or implicit, as untouchable. Its basis is still clerical-fascist, with all the usual associated clichés. The idea of the absolute privilege of normality is as natural as it is vulgar and even criminal. Everything there is preconceived and conformist and is established as a “right”: even that which contravenes this “right” (including the tragedy and implicit mystery of the sexual act) is assumed in a conformist way. Due to inertia, the guide for all this majority violence is still the Catholic Church. Even in its progressive and extremist wings (read the horrible

chapter beginning on page 323 of *The Church and Sexuality* by the enlightened progressive S. H. Pfurtner). Except that ... except that in the last decade the civilization of consumerism has intervened, that is, a new falsely tolerant power that has promoted the couple on a gigantic scale by privileging all the rights of its conformism. This power is not interested, however, in a couple that creates proles (proletarians), but a consumerist couple (petty bourgeois): *in pectore*,⁴¹ this already implies the idea of the legalization of abortion (just as it already implies the idea of the ratification of divorce).

It does not seem to me that the pro-abortion forces, in relation to the problem of abortion, have taken all of this in consideration. It seems to me, on the contrary, that they, in relation to abortion, suppress the question of sexual intercourse and therefore accept it—due to their embrace of *Realpolitik*, I repeat, in a diplomatic and therefore culpable silence—in its totally static, institutional and “natural” character.

My extremely reasonable opinion, however, is this: instead of fighting against this society that condemns abortion to repression on the plane of abortion, we must fight against this society on the plane of the cause of abortion, that is, on that of sexual intercourse. It is a question—this much is clear—of two “rearguard” struggles: but at least the struggle “on the plane of sexual intercourse” has the merit, besides being more logical and more rigorous, of harboring a larger number of potential implications.

We must fight, first of all, against the “false tolerance” of the new totalitarian power of consumerism, and distinguish ourselves from it with all the indignation it calls for; and then we have to impose the need to fight against the rearguard of this still clerical-fascist power, by fighting for a whole series of “real” liberalizations concerning precisely sexual intercourse (and therefore its consequences): contraceptives, the pill, different techniques of lovemaking, a modern morality of sexual honor, etc. It would be enough for all these ideas to be disseminated democratically by the press, and especially on television, and the problem of abortion would be substantially neutralized, even if it would still be, as it must be, wrong and therefore a problem for conscience. Is all of this utopian? Is it crazy to think that an “authority” could appear on television to teach “different” techniques of lovemaking? In any event, it is certainly not the men against whom my polemic is directed who would be frightened by this problem. As far as I know, for them what counts is the rigor of the democratic principle, not matters of fact (this is a stark reality for any political party).

Finally: many people—lacking the virile and rational capacity for understanding—will accuse my contribution of being personal, individual, and expressing a minority viewpoint. So?

January 30, 1975

⁴¹ Latin: “In the heart” or “In the breast”. [American translator’s note.]

“Sacer”⁴²

Dear Moravia, it has been many years since I called anyone a fascist (although sometimes I am sorely tempted to do so); and, secondly, I have refrained from calling anyone a Catholic. Among Italians, all have some traits that are fascist or Catholic. But to exchange mutual accusations of being fascist or Catholic—stressing these traits, which are often insignificant—would be a disagreeable and obsessive game.

You—certainly due to an inveterate, thoughtless automatism—and not without grace and amiability, by the way—have ventured to call me a “Catholic” (precisely “Catholic” and not “Christian” or “religious”). And you have called me a Catholic because you were scandalized when you caught me (so it seems to me) experiencing trauma for something that the “majority” considers—consciously or unconsciously, like Himmler—to be my life “unworthy of living”. That is, my sexual block that renders me “different”. A corollary of this block is a certain traumatic and deep-seated “sexophobia”, including the demand—also traumatic and deep-seated—of virginity or at least chastity on the part of the woman. All of this is true, maybe all too true. But it is also my private tragedy, upon which it seems to me hardly generous to base ideological insinuations. Especially when these insinuations appear to me to be mistaken.

Above all, the syllogism of “the Catholic is a sexophobe, therefore the person who is a sexophobe is a Catholic”, is syllogism that I find absurd and irrational. There is a Protestant sexophobia, an Islamic sexophobia, a Hindu sexophobia, and a sexophobia of primitive peoples. You refer to the sexophobia of Saint Paul (who—and this has never been definitively refuted even by the most respected Catholic thinkers—appears to have been a homosexual): but the sexophobia of Saint Paul is not precisely Catholic, but Jewish. By way of Saint Paul it passes over into Catholicism (if Catholicism can even be associated with Saint Paul), and that is all. Today, the counter-reformationist Catholic sexophobia is the sexophobia of all the mainstream religions. I clearly distinguish myself from it in the first place because when I was a child I never underwent a Catholic education (nor was I ever “Confirmed”); and also because my own choice, from the early days of puberty, was consciously secular; and, finally, most importantly, because I am “idealistic” by nature (not in the philosophical, but rather in the existential sense). You even accuse me of idealism. And this is a charge that I admit, because it is true. You do not know how I have always envied your lack of this noxious idealism....

Now, however, we are confronted by the fact that you can say anything about the Catholic Church except that it is idealistic. To the contrary, it is the opposite of idealistic: it is non-idealistic and, moreover, absolutely pragmatic. It is the priests who, more than anyone else, view the world as it is with a profound pessimism: there is no one more skillful and clever than them when it comes to understanding and formalizing the *status quo*. You should re-read that *magnum opus* of the most unalloyed pragmatism (in which

⁴² Published in *Corriere della Sera* under the title, “Pasolini’s Reply on Abortion”. [“Sacer”: a Latin word whose primary meaning is “sacred”—American translator’s supplemental note.]

not even God is mentioned except by way of formulas) entitled *Sentences of the Sacra Rota*. Therefore, if I am an idealist, then I am not a Catholic; and if you are a pessimist and a pragmatist, then you are a Catholic. As you see, it is too easy to turn the tables on accusations of this kind.

Returning to the general part of your article, you make fun of me because of the fact that “for some time now [my] *bête noire* has been consumerism”: this little joke of yours seems to me to be a little conformist [*qualunquistico*] in its reductiveness. I know very well that you are pragmatically inclined to accepting the *status quo*, but I, who am an idealist, am not so inclined. “Consumerism exists, so what can we do about it?”; this is what you seem to want to tell me. So let me respond: for you consumerism exists and that is all there is to it, it does not affect you, as they say, morally, while from the practical point of view it affects you as it affects everyone. Your intimate personal life is immune to its effects. For me, however, this is not the case. As a citizen, it is true that I have been affected by it just as you have, and I suffer as you have from a violence that I find offensive (and in this respect we are very much alike, we can together reflect on this in our shared fate as exiles): but as a person (as you know very well) I am infinitely more affected than you. In fact, consumerism consists of a veritable anthropological cataclysm: and I existentially experience this cataclysm that, at least for now, is pure degradation: I experience it every day, in the forms of my existence, in my body. Because my bourgeois social life ends when my working day ends, my social life in general depends totally on the way the people are. I say “people” intentionally, meaning this society as it is, the people, the masses, when they are (and perhaps only visually) in contact with me. It is from this existential, direct, concrete, dramatic, corporeal experience, in short, that all my ideological discourses are born. As for the anthropological transformation (for now it is more like degradation) of the “people”, for me consumerism is a tragedy, which is manifested as disappointment, rage, *taedium vitae*, listlessness, and, finally, as idealistic rebellion, as rejection of the *status quo*. I do not see how a friend can make fun of all of these things.

Now let us move on to abortion. You say that my suggestion that the struggle for the prevention of abortion, a struggle that I maintain should take priority, is an old one, just as “contraceptives” and the idea of different techniques of lovemaking (and perhaps chastity, too) are not new. But I do not emphasize the means, but the dissemination of knowledge of the means, and above all their moral acceptance. For us—privileged men—it is easy to accept the scientific use of contraceptives and it is even easier to morally accept all the most diverse, and perverse, techniques of lovemaking. But for the petty bourgeois and popular masses (even if they are now “consumerist”) this is not yet the case. This is why I called upon the Radicals (towards whom all my arguments have been directed, and it is precisely by viewing my arguments as part and parcel of a colloquy with them that their full meaning becomes apparent) to fight for the dissemination of knowledge of the means to engage in “non-procreative love”, in view of the fact (so I said) that procreation is today an ecological crime. If, for one year, a sincere, courageous, and stubborn propaganda campaign were to be conducted on television concerning these means, the number of unwanted pregnancies would decline decisively with respect to the problem of abortion. In fact, you say yourself that in the modern world there are two

kinds of couples: the privileged bourgeois (hedonistic) couples, who “conceive of pleasure as separate and distinct from procreation” and the ordinary working class and peasant couples who, “out of ignorance and backwardness do not have such an idea”. So I proposed as the highest priority of the progressive and Radical struggle precisely this: to attempt to abolish—by way of the means that the country has the democratic right to use—this class distinction.

In short, I repeat, the struggle against procreation must take place in the domain of sexual intercourse, not in the domain of pregnancy. With respect to abortion, I have paradoxically suggested that this crime should be included under the category of the crime of euthanasia, inventing for the purpose of my argument a series of mitigating factors of an ecological nature. Paradoxically, in fact, my position on this point—although with all the implications and complexities that are typical of a lone intellectual and not of a group—finally coincides with that of the communists. I could subscribe word for word to what Adriana Seroni wrote in *Epoca* (January 25, 1975). We must first of all try to prevent abortions, and if they do occur, we must make them legally possible only in certain “responsibly evaluated” cases (and therefore avoiding, I may add, a hysterical and terroristic campaign for their complete legalization, which sanctions something that is wrong as being not a crime).

Whereas, with respect to the question of divorce in the “referendum” I totally disagreed with the communists (who feared it), and predicted the ensuing victory, and whereas I disagreed with the communists concerning the “eight point referendum” proposed by the Radicals, for which I also predicted victory (which would thus ratify a *fait accompli*), I agree with the communists on abortion. Here, human life is on the scales. And I do not say this because human life is sacred. It once was: and its sacredness was sincerely felt in the anthropological world of the poor, because each and every birth was a promise of the continuity of the species. Now, it is no longer sacred, but rather a curse (etymologically, *sacer* comprehends both meanings), because each new birth constitutes a threat to the survival of humanity. Therefore, when I say that “human life is on the scales”, I am speaking of *this* human life—*this* single, concrete human life—which at *this* moment is found within the belly of *this* mother.

And you have no response to this. Is it popular to be on the side of the pro-abortion forces in an uncritical and extremist way? Is there no need to provide explanations? Can you calmly ignore pangs of personal conscience in relation to the decision to bring or not to bring into the world someone who definitely wants to come here (even if afterwards he is little more than nothing)? Is it necessary to create at any price the “unconditional” precedent for genocide only because the *status quo* imposes it? All right, you are a cynic (like Diogenes, like Menippus ... and like Hobbes), you do not believe in anything, the life of the fetus is romanticism, having pangs of conscience concerning this problem is idealist foolishness.... But these are not good reasons.

January 25, 1975

“Thalassa”⁴³

Dear Editor:

I am sending you, via a separate mailing, with a dedication that is the sign of sincere friendship—although in this particular case it is not unconnected with polyvalences and extensive allusive vibrations—Ferenczi’s *Thalassa*. It is not a sacred text. It is true, however, that Marcuse, Barthes, Jacobson and Lacan, for example, love it. It is a book on the “origins” of psychoanalysis, one cannot but love it. Read it. Ask some of your colleagues to read it, too. There is no need to be embarrassed: not having read it is no big deal.

I am writing in reference to an article that appeared in *Paese Sera* on January 21, 1975: “The Ashes of Solzhenitsyn”, which would appear to refer to my ashes, too: it would seem that some people definitely want to incinerate me, if one also takes into account the article by Eco that appeared in *Il Manifesto* on that very same day, “The Ashes of Malthus”; the latter also refers, by way a third person, to my own ashes. I am here to attempt to rise again, precisely from the ashes. The ashes that, as everyone knows, are the remnants of a fire at the stake where ideas are generally burned. In this regard, I would like to suggest that one of the most difficult struggles that leftists will have to confront is the battle against that series of paragraphs of the Codice Rocco (concerning which I wrote, here, in *Paese Sera*, about fifteen years ago, for the first time, certain “extremist” sentences that at the time were hardly even noticed) which legislate on “crimes of opinion”.

Do you believe that what makes us so outraged against these articles of our Code is the “punishment” that is set forth there? Those famous months of house arrest that we risk every day? I don’t think so. What matters is the guilty verdict. The publicly announced guilty verdict. Being singled out before public opinion as “guilty” of having ideas that are contrary to the community. Your colleague Nello Ponente did nothing less than pronounce this same guilty verdict against me: he accused me in front of a “community”—the “community” of left-wing intellectuals and workers—and he accused me of a “crime of opinion”.

My opinion, in this particular case, is that I consider “abortion” to be wrong. But not morally; this cannot even be discussed. Morally, I do not condemn any woman who resorts to abortion, or any man who agrees with her. I do not consider, nor have I ever considered, this to be a moral question, but rather a legal question.

The moral question concerns only the “actors”: it is a question that concerns the woman who has an abortion, the people who help her to do so, the people who advocate the right to abortion, and one’s own conscience. And I certainly do not want to venture into that

⁴³ Published in *Paese Sera* under the title, “A Letter from Pasolini: ‘Opinions’ on Abortion”. [“Thalassa” is the ancient Greek goddess of the sea—American translator’s supplemental note.]

question here. If in practical terms I have done so, I have always chosen, naturally, the lesser evil, that is, abortion. That is, I am implicated in wrongdoing. In life, in praxis—morality is not practice—there is no alternative. But thinking of life, and its inevitable pragmatic development, what counts is reason: that one must never contradict oneself or sell out. Reason sanctions principles, not facts, although one can only start from the facts. What I called attention to in my article in *Corriere* is a certain kind of “practicality” in my Radical friends, a “practicality” that is external to their “democratic rigor”, which was always so vividly rational and rationally extremist.

There is no good practical reason that justifies the suppression of a human being, even in the first stages of his evolution. I know of no other phenomenon of existence that displays such a frenzied, total, essential will to life as the fetus. Its yearning to realize its own potential, furiously drawing upon the history of the human species, has something irresistible and therefore absolute and joyful about it. Even if an idiot is born.

This is my “opinion”: one must understand it is my personal opinion. Just as all “opinions” are said to be. Have I perhaps endangered the PCI, left-wing culture, or the working class struggle with my “opinion”? Have I fallen prey to “deviationism”? Am I a traitor to the people? In any event, Nello Ponente’s verdict is more or less to this effect. It is of course true that the text of his guilty verdict is completely lacking in that bureaucratic lucidity evinced in the verdicts of the State’s judiciary. It is quite a bit more lively, and also definitely more confused.

Our Nello Ponente is completely ignorant of psychoanalysis and displays a virile disregard for it. He has certainly not read either Freud or Ferenczi, or those other particularly contemptible representatives of the “infraculture” [*culturame*] to which I am honored to belong. Nello Ponente (like, it would seem, Giorgio Manganelli) has never dreamed of being submerged in the Ocean: and this is undoubtedly sufficient to destroy decades of psychoanalytic research on this question.

As a result, he confounds the memory of the prenatal waters with “mamma-ism”, that is, with the “fixation” on a period of life in which the child, now born, remains attached to the mother. Nello Ponente, always with a haughty virility, scorns (as always, just like Giorgio Manganelli) the “mamas”. For my part, I see no reasons, except conformist ones, to be ashamed of having a strong feeling of love for my mother, or, let’s say, for my “mamma”. This feeling will last for my whole life, because it was subsequently confirmed by the esteem that I always had for the sweetness and intelligence of that woman who is my mother. I have persistently abided by this love. Such persistence in other times might have led to the concentration camps, and in any event is still stigmatized with infamy. Nello Ponente, with the same delicacy with which he tells the people that the place for Freud, Ferenczi and all of psychoanalysis is the flames, holds me up to the contempt of the people as a “mamma-ist”. Naturally, his contempt for “infraculture”⁴⁴ has prevented Nello Ponente from reading the entirety of the long series of poems that I have written since 1942 and dedicated to my mother. I challenge him to

⁴⁴ “*Culturame*” [American translator’s note].

prove that these are the poems of a “mamma-ist”, to use his vulgar, conformist, degrading term, the sort of term used by an interchangeable, self-righteous man with a profound desire to belong to the herd.

In this regard, I would like to publicly declare that I am not now, nor have I ever been, nor will I ever be, a “fellow traveler” of a man who is so ignorant and so proud of his ignorance. His interchangeable character, in effect, based on conformism and self-righteousness, can only be a sign of “continuity”, the “continuity” of the Italian petty bourgeoisie and its miserable consciousness (its rejection of culture, its anxious desire for normality, its dyed in the wool apathy [*qualunquismo*], its propensity to join witch-hunts). It is not by chance that this Neapolitan, with respect to the text in question, is reduced to playing the role of a man of power facing the “accused”, as if he were a Bottai or a cardinal.

Conformism is always deplorable, but the conformism of someone who is on the side of reason (that is, for me, “left-wing conformism”) is particularly painful to behold. Of course, I know that my article “against abortion” is incomplete and passionate. A friend of mine, Laura Betti, brought it to my attention that it is physiologically unfair to women. She is right. Alberto Moravia told me that my arguments are ultimately Pauline: that is, that I, like Saint Paul, have an unconscious aspiration to impose chastity on women. He is also right. I have put more emphasis on the child than on the mother, as if, with respect to this issue, we were dealing with an enemy mother. I cannot just dismiss her, and privilege her offspring. Like Cardinal Florit, who, justly speaking precisely of massacre of the innocents (the fetuses), ignores the massacre of other innocents (women as second-class citizens). But just as my occasional ideological agreement with Nello Ponente may be considered to be purely “accidental”, I also consider my agreement on the question of abortion with Cardinal Florit to be equally “accidental”. For I deny that anyone can legitimately speak of attacks on innocent fetuses, who has not also publicly and explicitly spoken of other massacres, of Jews, for example, and even more importantly, who has not also spoken out publicly and explicitly about the cultural and human massacres of the new power (which, however, a cardinal cannot fail to endorse, uninterruptedly, along with the old power).

Finally, as for my opinion, only I can convince myself that it is wrong. I cannot help but be pleased at this point to stand alongside men with whom (despite the centrifugal, heretical, deviationist force that corresponds precisely to my status as an intellectual) I agree, and if it can be legitimately said, I fight. I wait to be rationally convinced and not by means of arguments composed of low blows against me personally or impugning the “correctness” my ideology.

February 1975
Dogs⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Unpublished.

In a letter to *Corriere*, the theologian Don Giovanni Giavini inquires as to the veracity of my claim (in an article also published in *Corriere*, on January 30, 1975) that Saint Paul was a homosexual and that, among well-informed Catholics, there has been no controversy concerning this question. (Moreover, Don Giovanni Giavini is not scandalized, either: and it should also be noted that the homosexuality of Saint Augustine is presently accepted, and indeed has always been acknowledged, since it is Saint Augustine himself who confessed that it was so.) Concerning Saint Paul, who was probably not consciously aware of his sexual peculiarity (which, once he repressed it, created in him precisely that pathological state of mind that is universally recognized, and which in turn he confesses in his “Epistles”), the intervention of psychoanalysis was required: to interpret the symptoms, and to venture a diagnosis. See, from an “insubordinate” Catholic source, Émile Gillibert, *Saint Paul ou le colosse aux pieds d’argile*, Éditions Métanoia, 1974; while, from a “compliant” Catholic source, I will quote the following passage: “If, in his youth, he frequented the arena, these clandestine escapades that constituted a sin against the law—concessions to his fascination with the forbidden fruit—are to be situated along with the ones that one may read between the lines in the pathetic text of the ‘Epistle to the Romans’, in which some psychoanalysts, from the perspective of their ‘art’, even sought to discern, relating them with other indications contained in the Epistles, a tendency towards pederasty....” (Jean Colson, *Paul, Apostle and Martyr*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1971.)

In the article that *Corriere* entitled “I Am Against Abortion”—which I would have given the better title, “I Am Against a Triumphant Struggle for the Legalization of Abortion”—I could not resist the temptation to indulge in a brief and schematic digression on ecology. It is in this digression that one may find my observation on so-called “unnatural love” (not necessarily homosexual love, however), and there I took advantage of the opportunity to take some minor vengeance on DeMarsico, for having called Braibanti a “pig” for having condemned homosexual love insofar as, not being useful for procreation, it would be prejudicial to the survival of the species. The context in which this minor act of vengeance took place was, however, strictly functional, since DeMarsico is one of the most authoritative editors of the Codice Rocco, that is, the fascist code.

Of course, DeMarsico would never have even imagined that the voices of the whole pack of enlightened and progressive individuals would be raised in his defense.

Natalia Ginzburg, recovering from her natural state of torpor, evidently heard one of her friends exclaim that I suggested unnatural love as a remedy for the problem of abortion: as if I suggested the use of peanut oil to resolve the problem of the economic crisis or the use of Esperanto to resolve the language problem. Alright, Natalia is being candid. Nonetheless, no candor can justify a lack of information. For it is true that if Natalia has taken me for the kind of person who believes in the solution of peanut oil or Esperanto, this means that I, in the twenty years of our friendship, was not only incapable of earning her respect, but even of making her understand that I am not some crazy poet or an idiotic dilettante: but she could at least read the articles in question. Because in that case, she

would simply have realized that she agrees with me, at least formally, that is, that she is against the rhetorical forms of the struggle for the legalization of abortion and therefore, in this case she is, like me, on the side of the Communists instead of the Radicals.

In her candid contribution to the debate Natalia commits a significant linguistic mistake (she is a writer and therefore this point is applicable to her without qualifications). She uses, with respect to homosexual relations, the adjective “squalid”, that is, the same adjective that is always, systematically, automatically, despicably used in the newspaper articles of the entire Italian press, and in this respect she is totally DeMarsican.

This trivial, and therefore vulgar, anti-homosexual spitefulness on the part of Natalia seems to me to be a serious testimony against the purity of her candor. But that is not all. Natalia was awakened from her slumber (concerning the sincerity of her dreams I have no doubts: but sincerity is not enough) by the persuasive words of Franco Rodano (*Paese Sera*: January 28, 1975), which filled her with enthusiasm. So much so that she then felt compelled to write, concerning this article by Rodano (at first, I almost instinctively wrote “Father Rodano”), an article full of embarrassing praise: praise of his honesty, his integrity, his understanding, etc. Now, in his article, Rodano calls me “clerical”. That is, he violates the code of minimum respect between civilized persons. To accuse someone of being “clerical” is one of those instances of pure name-calling that can be endlessly paid back in the same coin. Rodano’s good-natured, sympathetic language, not without the necessary severity, is, in effect, profoundly ecclesiastical: his way of writing is, linguistically, a veritable sermon. Italians—(and therefore Natalia) I call upon you to pay attention to your language!⁴⁶ The fact that I am therefore “clerical” seems to have been exhaustively proven for Rodano by the fact that I am Venetian. And where is that honesty of Rodano that is so highly praised by Natalia? Moralists are always misinformed. Why should Rodano make the effort to inform himself just a little? I was born in Bologna, in red Bologna, and most importantly, it was in red Bologna that I spent my adolescence and my youth, that is, during the years when I came of age. There I became an anti-fascist after reading a poem by Rimbaud at the age of sixteen. There I wrote my first poems, in the Friulian dialect (which was not permitted under fascism). I said *Friulian*, my dear Natalia. And Veneto and Friuli have nothing in common. Absolutely nothing. I spent a month every summer in the Friulian village where my mother was born, during my summer vacations (when my family’s means allowed). And in fact, I did not know how to speak Friulian. I memorized it word for word while I composed my first poems. I learned how to speak it later, when, in 1943, I had to “hide out” in Casarsa. That is where I experienced the real existence of those who spoke the language, that is, the life of the peasants, then the Resistance, and finally the political struggles of the day laborers against the big landowners. In Friuli, therefore, I had my first experience of the peasant and catholic world that has nothing to do with the Venetian world (today in Friuli there is no black [fascist] network, nor is such a thing even conceivable there), and then I became, with the day laborers, a communist. In Friuli I read Gramsci and Marx. So much for my “Venetian clericalism”.

⁴⁶ A parody of Mussolini’s speeches, which he customarily began with the rhetorical formula: “*Italiani!*” (Spanish translator’s note.)

Then, at almost the same time, and in perfect accord, rushing to the defense of DeMarsico, Umberto Eco appeared on the scene (*Il Manifesto*, February 2, 1975) along with L' (*Il Messaggero*, January 21, 1975). Umberto Eco is an intelligent and cultured left-wing intellectual whom I have always respected and even loved: L' is a miserable editorialist, who has raged against me for years, ever since *Il Messaggero* was clerical-fascist. The texts written by Eco and L' are perfectly identical, with regard to both content and style. What follows is a brief comparative analysis.

Eco: "But the thesis stripped down to its bare (pelvic) bones is very clear. It is not abortion that we should be discussing, but sexual intercourse; which, due to fascist-consumerist oppression and repression, is always imposed as sexual intercourse between man and woman.... The argument is presented as a defense of the rights of 'sexually different' minorities, and no one can fail to see the opportunity to confer upon every minority, including sexual minorities, the right to their favorite practices...."

L': "... and therefore normal love (Jesus, what vulgarity!) procreates and, if it procreates, it must accept the consequences. Also, according to Pasolini, normal relations, which is to say non-'mixed' relations, should be encouraged.... He invokes respect and tolerance for 'sexual minorities'. This is a legitimate demand. We endorse it."

Eco: "But Pasolini does not offer any other reasons, besides the fact that it would appear to be useful for ecological purposes, to counsel homosexual relations ... in that case, however, even if only for a small minority of inveterate heterosexuals, the problem of conception would still exist."

L': "But why not also have a certain amount of compassion for the 'normals' who will almost certainly be the 'minority' of the future?"

Eco: "Pasolini ... offers us a glimpse of the repressive policy of infringing on the rights of a future minority, once the new majority has triumphed...."

L': "Do you understand? When you take a woman to bed, apart from all your other problems, you also have to watch out for Pasolini's curses...."

Eco: "Such things were never even imagined by Huxley, by Orwell, or even by Hitler, not even by Fanfani...."

I have "compared" sentences involving a certain degree of syntactical complexity: if I were to have "compared" the isolated "jests", the similarities between the texts of the articles in *Il Manifesto* and *Il Messaggero* would be even more impressive.

So, what have our two accomplices of DeMarsico done?

First: they have drawn the same inferences that we have seen in Natalia: that is, they have imputed erroneous intentions (but they did so like wolves in sheep's clothing) to my text,

therefore attributing to me an argument that only a “madman” or an “idiotic dilettante” would employ.

Second: they isolated the “state of mind”, horribly afflicted with suffering, that might have played a role in my view on abortion (recall that abortion is wrong, although practice counsels that it should be decriminalized): and, instead of expressing their solidarity with this “state of mind”, they made it the target of malicious jokes.

Third: they have pretended to have an understanding, a purely verbal one, of sexual minorities: in fact, with the idea of conceding a ghetto to these minorities where they can indulge in their practices (with whom?), but who are forbidden from publicly expressing an opinion that is even vaguely influenced by this “state of mind” that is inevitably born to undergo the experience of being a minority. The “point of view” must necessarily be majoritarian, even sentimentally. They condemn witch hunts, not for the “practice” itself, but for the sentiment and the quality of life that are born from such attitudes.

Fourth: they have unleashed a witch hunt—as always, terrifying for the poor witches—resorting, instead of to the corporal punishment which they no longer have at their disposal, to pure vulgarity.

Among others, who for reasons of space and of contempt I will refrain from mentioning, Giorgio Bocca has also made a contribution in defense of DeMarsico (*L'Espresso*: February 9, 1975). This was hardly unexpected. In his fiercely intolerant view, sexuality is a virgin zone of our conscience and our knowledge. Bocca's puritanism is well-known. So in this domain he can only resort to the usual reassuring clichés. This causes his mode of expression to take on barbaric features—like our “squalid” Natalia—leading him to use terms like “*maitres a penser*” and “*sprint*”: his linguistic vulgarity is a direct result of his bad conscience, which is in turn the result of his resort to clichés. Furthermore, the allusions to the groups or clans to which I belong are explicitly in bad taste. These arguments are typical of the editorials of a provincial daily newspaper, in their tendency towards a punitive moralism. They naturally lack any evidence, whether of a practical or more profound nature (the biggest disappointments in this polemic have come precisely from my few friends). Bocca has not thought for even a second about what he was going to say: he impetuously and intrepidly made the decision to say those things that are most universally recognized to be obvious. There can be no doubt, for example, that by claiming that “in Italy one speaks Italian”, he has uttered an obvious, common truth, supported by the majority, sacred and indisputable. But if Bocca—with that way he has of being precisely resolved upon declaring once and for all the sacred truth—says, “In Italy one speaks Italian”, to a Friulian or an Altoatesino,⁴⁷ we can only expect that the Friulian or Altoatesino will be justified in telling him to “drop dead”. The fact is that in Italy people speak Italian and German, Italian and Friulian. Whoever does not know this and will not acknowledge it in every moment of his life, does not know what a

⁴⁷ A native of the Alto-Adige region of northern Italy near the Austrian border, also known as South Tyrol, which is home to a significant population of ethnically German Italian citizens. [American translator's note.]

democratic relation is, or a human relation, or any other kind. So when Bocca asserts that, “Most Italians consider the embrace between a man and a woman to be the natural way of making love”, besides saying a ridiculous truth, he resorts precisely to the same offensive principle upon which the notion of the “common sense of modesty” of the fascist code of Rocco and DeMarsico is based.

March 10, 1975 **Heart⁴⁸**

The reader will have to forgive me, but I want to once again return to the problem of abortion, or, more precisely, to the problems to which the debate over abortion has given rise. In fact, the problems that really matter are the problems associated with sexual intercourse, not those associated with abortion.

Abortion contains within itself something that in any event unleashes “dark forces” within us that are even prior to sexual intercourse itself: it is our eros in its boundless nature that is called into question—or upon which the debate is imposed. As far as I am concerned, and as I have clearly stated—abortion obscurely evokes the offensive nature with which sexual intercourse is generally associated. Such an offensive nature makes sexual intercourse so ontological that it nullifies it. A woman seems to find herself pregnant as if she had consumed a glass of water. This glass of water is, precisely, the most simple thing in world for those who have it: but for those who are all alone in the middle of the desert, this glass of water is everything and they cannot help but be offended by those who consider it to be nothing.

The ardent defenders of abortion (that is, almost all the “enlightened” intellectuals and feminists) speak of abortion as if it were a female tragedy, one in which the woman is alone with her terrible problem, almost as if at that point the world has abandoned her. I understand. But I would add that when the woman was in bed she was not alone. Furthermore, I ask myself how can the ardent defenders of abortion reject with such ostentatious disdain the elevating ethical rhetoric of “motherhood” while at the same time totally uncritically accepting the apocalyptic rhetoric of abortion.

For the male, abortion has assumed a symbolic meaning of liberation: to be an unconditional supporter of the right to abortion seems to him to be a badge of enlightenment, progress, open-mindedness, of defiance. It is, in short, a very beautiful and rewarding toy. This explains why there is so much hatred for those who remind him that an unwanted pregnancy can be, if not always wrong, then at least culpable. For if praxis justly counsels that we should decriminalize it, abortion does not therefore cease to be wrong in the light of conscience. There is no anti-conformism that justifies it: and anyone whose sole claim to be anti-conformist is the fact that they are fanatical advocates of abortion are oppressed and irritated when they are reminded of this fact. And then they

⁴⁸ Published in *Corriere della Sera* under the title, “Don’t Be Afraid To Have a Heart”.

resort to the most archaic methods to free themselves from the enemy that deprives them of the pleasure of feeling unprejudiced and of being members of the avant-garde. These archaic methods are of course the infamous methods of the “witch hunt”: fomenting a lynch mob mentality, publishing lists of the proscribed, and subjecting their enemies to public contempt.

The “witch hunt” is typical of intolerant cultures, that is, clerical-fascist cultures. In a repressive context, the objective of the “witch hunt” (against those who are “different”) is above all to strip the enemy of his humanity, something that then renders effective his exclusion from all possible pity or fraternity: and, generally, in practice, this is the prelude to his physical elimination (Himmler, the *Lager*).

But I have repeatedly said that today’s Italian society is no longer clerical-fascist: it is consumerist and permissive. The fact that a campaign of persecution with archaic, clerical-fascist characteristics could be unleashed in it, would therefore contradict my claim. But this is only an apparent contradiction. In fact: first, the authors of this childish, vulgar, contemptible campaign against the “sexually different” are almost all elderly men, who came of age in the days before the era of consumerism and its self-styled permissiveness; second—as I have said again and again—this consumerism is furthermore nothing but a new form of totalitarianism, insofar as it is all-embracing and alienating to the uttermost limit of anthropological degradation or genocide (Marx)—and therefore its permissiveness is false: it is the disguise assumed by the worst repression ever exercised by any power over the masses of citizens.

In fact (this is a quip spoken by one of the characters in my next film, based on the Marquis de Sade and set in the Saló Republic): “In a society where everything is forbidden, you can do anything: in a society where some things are permitted, you can only do those things.”

What things are permitted by our permissive society? It allows the proliferation of the heterosexual couple. This is no small achievement and it is a good thing. But it is necessary to see how this really takes place. Meanwhile, it takes place as a function of consumerist hedonism (to use the “frank” terms that are now hardly more than abbreviations): which accentuates the social moment of sexual intercourse to its most extreme limit. In addition, an obligation is imposed on us: he who does not have a girlfriend is not a modern man, just like the man who does not drink Petrus or Cynar. It also imposes a neurosis-generating precocity. Little boys and girls, hardly at the age of puberty—within the obligate space of the permissiveness that transforms normality into paroxysm—have their sexual experiences that eliminate all tension from the domain of sexuality, and from other domains all possibility of sublimation. One could say that whereas repressive societies (as a ridiculous fascist slogan proclaimed) needed soldiers, and also saints and artists, permissive society only needs consumers. However, beyond “those things” that permissive society permits, everything else is relegated—to the humiliation of progressive ideas and the struggle from below—to the hell of the non-permitted, of the taboo that gives rise to ridicule and hatred. You can continue to speak of the “different” with the same brutality of the clerical-fascist era: it is just that, alas, this

brutality has increased due to the increasing permissiveness with respect to normal sexual intercourse.

I have already had an occasion to say that, in compensation for the presence of an elite of tolerant people (people who also thereby gratify their own democratic conscience), there are in Italy fifty million intolerant people who are ready to join a lynch mob. This is something that never happened before in Italian history. Today, however, I will add that those elites of tolerant people have clearly shown that their tolerance is merely verbal; that in reality they would be completely satisfied by the idea of a ghetto where the “different” could be segregated (so they can make love to whom?), where they can be viewed as if they were “freaks” at a circus, with respect to whom every vulgar joke is legitimate. See the case of Maria Schneider, concerning whom the whole Italian press has behaved in the most filthy and disreputable, and openly fascist, manner.

But there is another series of considerations—which are even closer to my heart—that have arisen from my bitter meditations over the last few weeks.

I said that being unconditionally in favor of abortion guarantees the person who subscribes to such a view a badge of rationality, enlightenment, modernity, etc. It guarantees, with regard to this particular question, a “superior” lack of feelings: something that fills pseudo-progressive (not, by the way, serious communists or Radicals) intellectuals (let us call them that) with satisfaction. People like Dino Origlia, to give an example.

The claim to this “superior” lack of feelings, with respect to abortion, has been made in a shameless, hysterical and irresponsible manner by most of my opponents. Just one contribution in this sense to the debate was civil and truly rational: this was the contribution of Italo Calvino (*Corriere della Sera*: February 2, 1975). And it is his contribution that I would like to discuss.

Like me, Calvino came of age and, at this point one can say, spent his entire life under traditionally clerical-fascist regimes.

When we were teenagers, there was fascism: then the first Christian Democratic government, which was the literal continuation of fascism. It was therefore right for us to react the way we did. As a result it was right for us to resort to reason to desecrate all the shit that the clerical-fascists had made sacred. As a result it was right to be secular, enlightened, and progressive, regardless of the regime in power.

Now, Calvino—although obliquely and with the respect required by civil disagreement—accuses me of a certain “irrational” sentimentalism and a certain tendency, also “irrational”, to attribute an unjustified sacredness to life.

In the context of a one-on-one debate restricted to the question of abortion, I would like to respond to Calvino by saying that I have never spoken of life in general, but I have always spoken only of this life, of this mother, of this belly, of this unborn child. I have

avoided all generalizations (and if I have used the adjective “sacred” concerning life, it is obviously in the context of a quotation, and not without irony). But this is beside the point. The problem is much more extensive and involves a whole way of conceiving one’s own way of being an intellectual: it consists above all in the duty to always subject one’s own function to debate, especially where it seems most debatable: that is, the assumptions of enlightenment, secularity, and rationalism.

Due to inertia, due to laziness, due to ignorance—due to the inevitable duty to be consistent—many intellectuals like me and Calvino risk being left behind by a real history that rapidly ages them, turning them into waxwork dummies of themselves.

For power is no longer clerical-fascist, it is no longer repressive. We can no longer use the arguments—to which we were accustomed and almost emotionally attached—that we so often employed against the clerical-fascist power, against the repressive power.

The new consumerist, permissive power has availed itself precisely of our intellectual conquests as secular, enlightened and rational people, in order to construct its own framework of false secularism, false enlightenment, and false rationality. It has availed itself of our desecrations in order to rid itself of a past that, with all its atrocious and idiotic sacralizations, is no longer of any use to it.

On the other hand, however, this new power has raised to the highest possible level its only possible kind of sacredness: the sacredness of consumption as a ritual and, naturally, of commodities as fetishes. Nothing stands in the way of all of this. The new power no longer has any interest, or need, to disguise itself with Religions, ideals or things of that sort, that is, the kinds of things that Marx had unmasked.

Like cattle being fattened for slaughter, Italians have rapidly absorbed the new irreligious and anti-sentimental ideology of power: such is the power of attraction and of conviction of the new way of life that power promises, and such is also the power of the communications media (especially television) which are at the disposal of power. Like cattle being fattened for slaughter, Italians have accepted the new nameless sacredness, the sacredness of commodities and their consumption.

In this context, our old arguments of a secular, enlightened, and rationalist nature, are not only useless, but, in fact, play into the hands of power. To say that life is not sacred, and that sentimentality is stupid, is to do a big favor for the industrialists. And, besides, it is like bringing coals to Newcastle. The new Italians no longer have any use for sacredness, they are all pragmatically, if not yet consciously, ultra-modern; and as for sentimentality, they are rapidly ridding themselves of it.

What is it that makes it possible to carry out—in practice, in acts, in execution—political massacres after they have been planned? It is terribly obvious: the absence of a sense of the sacredness of the lives of other persons and the extinction of all feelings in oneself. What is it that makes possible the atrocities characteristic of that phenomenon—in this sense, overwhelmingly important and decisive—that is the new criminality? This,

too, is terribly obvious: it is the ability to consider the lives of other persons to be worthless and to consider one's own heart as nothing but a muscle (as one of the intellectuals who has brought the most coals to Newcastle says, gazing with equanimity, commiseration and scorn from the center of "history" at unfortunates like me who wander hopelessly through life). And finally, I would like to say that if, from among the silent majority, an archaic form of fascism should be reborn, this could happen only as a result of the scandalous choice that this silent majority will have made (and in fact is already making) between the sacredness of life and sentimentality, on the one hand, and capital and private property on the other: a choice in favor of the latter horn of this dilemma. Unlike Calvino, I therefore think that—without losing faith in our humanistic and rational intellectual tradition—we must no longer be afraid—as was the correct attitude in the past—of not casting enough discredit on the sacred, or of having a heart.

February 10, 1975

The Article on the Fireflies⁴⁹

“The distinction between objective fascism and nominal fascism originated with the newspaper, *Il Politecnico*, that is, during the period immediately following the war....” This is how Franco Fortini introduces an article on fascism (*L'Europeo*, December 26, 1974): an article that, as they say, I subscribe to in its totality. I cannot, however, subscribe to its tendentious introduction. For the distinction between “fascisms” made by *Il Politecnico* is neither pertinent nor relevant for our times. It might have been valid about ten years ago: when the Christian Democratic regime was still the pure and simple continuation of the fascist regime.

But ten years ago, “something” happened. “Something” that did not exist and was not foreseeable in the times of *Il Politecnico*, or even a year before it happened (or even while it was happening).

The real confrontation between “fascisms” cannot therefore be a “chronological” confrontation between fascist fascism and Christian Democratic fascism, but rather between fascist fascism and a radically, totally, unpredictably new fascism that was born from that “thing” that happened about ten years ago.

Because I am a writer, and I write polemically, or at least debate with other writers, you will allow me to provide a definition of a literary-poetic nature of that phenomenon that took place in Italy about ten years ago. It will help simplify and abbreviate our discussion (and probably also help to make it more understandable).

During the early 1960s, due to air pollution and, especially in the countryside, water pollution (of the rivers and the lakes), the fireflies began to disappear. The phenomenon was explosive and riveting. After a few years, the fireflies were gone. (They are now a

⁴⁹ Published in *Corriere della Sera* under the title, “The Vacuum of Power in Italy”.

heartrending memory of the past: and an old man who remembers them, cannot recognize himself as a young man in the young people of our time, and therefore can no longer experience the beautiful feelings of his lost past.)

I will therefore call that “thing” that happened about ten years ago the “disappearance of the fireflies”.

The Christian Democratic regime has passed through two absolutely distinct phases, which not only cannot be compared with each other in order to establish a certain kind of continuity, but which have become historically incompatible.

The first phase of this regime (as the Radicals have always correctly insisted on calling it) is the one that began at the end of the war and ended with the disappearance of the fireflies; the second phase began with the disappearance of the fireflies and is still with us today. Let us take a closer look at each of these phases.

Before the disappearance of the fireflies. The continuity between fascist fascism and Christian Democratic fascism is total and absolute. In this sense, I agree with what the article in *Il Politecno* said: an aborted purge of fascists, the continuity of the fascist statutes, police violence, contempt for the Constitution. And I also maintain that, concerning this question, it rested on a retrospective historical consciousness. The democracy that the Christian Democratic fascists opposed to the fascist dictatorship was a blatantly formal democracy.

It was based on an absolute majority obtained by way of the votes of considerable numbers of middle class elements and enormous masses of peasants who were under the influence of the Vatican. This Vatican influence was possible only because it was based on a totally repressive regime. In that world, the “values” that counted were the same as under fascism: Church, fatherland, family, obedience, discipline, order, thrift, morality. These “values” (as was also the case under the fascist regime) were also “real”: they belonged to the particular, concrete cultures that constituted an archaically agrarian and paleo-industrial Italy. When they were promoted to the status of national “values”, however, they could only forfeit all their reality, and become atrocious, stupid, and repressive State-directed conformism: the conformism of the fascist and Christian Democratic power. The provincialism, rural backwardness and ignorance of the elites and, on a different level, of the masses, were also the same during fascism as they were during the first phase of the Christian Democratic regime. Vatican pragmatism and formalism were paradigmatic of this ignorance.

All of this is clear and unequivocal today, although at that time foolish hopes were nourished by the intellectuals and the opposition. It was hoped that all of this was not entirely true and that formal democracy would finally really mean something.

Now, before moving on to the second phase, I must devote a few lines to the turning point of the transition itself.

While the fireflies were disappearing. In this period the distinction between fascism and fascism posited in *Il Politecno* was still valid. For neither the vast nation that was taking shape within the country—that is, the working class and peasant masses organized in the PCI—nor the most advanced and critical intellectuals, noticed that “the fireflies were disappearing”. They were well-enough informed by sociology (which at that time had induced a crisis in the Marxist method of analysis): but this information was not yet based on experience, but on formal concepts. No one could have expected what the immediate future would have in store for them: nor could they have ascertained that what was then called “prosperity”, which allegedly went hand in hand with the “development” that was then seriously underway in Italy for the first time, would be identical with the “genocide” that Marx spoke of in his *Manifesto*.

After the disappearance of the fireflies. The nationalized and therefore falsified “values” of the old agrarian and paleo-capitalist world were suddenly mortally undermined. Church, fatherland, family, obedience, order, thrift, and morality no longer mattered. Nor were their fake versions of any use. They survived in marginalized clerical-fascism (although the MSI basically repudiated them). To replace them, there were the “values” of a new type of civilization, totally “different” from the peasant and paleo-industrial civilization of the past. Other countries had already undergone the same experience. But in Italy it displayed a unique character, because it was the first real “unification” that our country had ever really experienced, while in the other countries it was superimposed, with a certain logic, on a prior monarchist unification and the subsequent unification of the bourgeois industrial revolution. Italy’s traumatic experience of the clash between its former pluralist “archaism” and the new industrial uniformity may have only one precedent: Germany just prior to Hitler’s seizure of power. There, too, the different particular cultures and values were destroyed by the violent homogenization of industrialization: resulting in the formation of those vast, amorphous masses, who were no longer either of the old pattern (peasants, artisans) nor yet of the modern type (bourgeois), and who constituted the savage, aberrant, imponderable rank and file of the Nazi shock troops.

In Italy, something similar is happening: and with even more violence, because the industrialization of the 1970s constitutes a decisive “mutation” even compared to the German phase of industrialization of half a century ago. We are no longer just facing “new times”, as everyone knows today, but a new epoch of human history: of that human history whose duration is measured in millennia. It would have been impossible for Italians to react in a worse way than they did to this historical trauma. Within a few years (especially in the central and southern parts of the country) they have become a degenerate, ridiculous, monstrous and criminal population. All you need to do is take a walk down the street to understand this. Naturally, however, in order to understand the changes that people undergo, you must love them. I loved the Italian people: whether outside of the milieus of power (or rather, in desperate opposition to them), or outside of the populist and humanitarian milieus. It was a real love, rooted in my very way of existence. I have therefore seen, “with my own eyes”, the coercive ways of the power of consumerism transform and distort the consciousness of the Italian people, to the point of irreversible degradation. This is something that never happened under the regime of

fascist fascism, a period during which conduct was completely dissociated from consciousness. In vain did the “totalitarian” power repeatedly insist on the observation of its dictates regarding conduct: consciousness was not touched by them. The fascist “models” were nothing but masks that one could put on and take off. When fascist fascism fell, everything was just as it was before. The same thing happened in Portugal: after forty years of fascism, the Portuguese people celebrated May Day as if they had just celebrated it the year before.

It is therefore ridiculous for Fortini to backdate the distinction between fascist fascism and fascism to the immediate post-war period: the distinction between fascist fascism and the fascism of this second phase of Christian Democratic power not only has no equivalent in our history, but it has no equivalent in the entire history of the world.

At any rate, I am not writing this article to engage in a polemic dispute over this point, although it is very close to my heart. I am writing this article for a very different reason. And this reason is as follows:

All my readers will have certainly noticed the change undergone by the powerful Christian Democrats: in a few months, they have turned into funeral masks. Yes, of course: they are still flashing their radiant smiles, of an incredible sincerity. In their eyes the true, blessed light of good humor sparkles. When it is not the congenial light of scheming and mischief. Which the voters found as pleasing, it would seem, as real joy. Furthermore, our powerful men persist undaunted in their incomprehensible ramblings: in which the *flatus vocis* of their usual stereotypical promises floats.

In reality, they are just masks. I am sure that behind these masks you will not even find a pile of bones and ashes: you will find nothing; you will find the void.

The explanation is simple: today in Italy there is a dramatic vacuum of power. But this is precisely the point: not a legislative or executive vacuum of power, not a vacuum of the power of leadership, or, finally, a political vacuum of power in any of the traditional senses of the term. But a vacuum of power in itself.

How did we arrive at this vacuum of power? Or, more precisely, how did we ever get such statesmen?

Again, the explanation is simple: the Christian Democratic men of power have passed from the “phase of the fireflies” to the “phase of the disappearance of the fireflies” without noticing it. In a way that is almost criminal, their irresponsibility with respect to this point has been absolute: they did not even have the slightest suspicion that the power that they held and exercised was not merely undergoing a “normal” evolution, but was changing radically with respect to its very nature.

They deluded themselves that everything would remain substantially the same in their regime: that, for example, they could always count on the Vatican: without noticing that the power that they still held and exercised no longer had anything to do with the Vatican

as a center of a backward, impoverished, rural way of life. They deluded themselves that they could always count on a nationalist army (like their fascist predecessors): and they did not see that the power that they still held and wielded, was now being maneuvered to create new, transnational armies that are more or less a technocratic police force. And the same thing could be said of the family which had been continually compelled since the times of fascism to be thrifty, to be devoted to morality: now, the power of consumerism is imposing radical changes on the family, to the point where divorce is accepted, and now, potentially, everything else, without any limits (or at least up to the limits consented to by the permissiveness of the new power, which is worse than totalitarian insofar as it is violently totalizing).

The Christian Democratic men of power have endured all of this while believing that they were in the driver's seat with respect to these changes. They did not notice that this was "something else": incompatible not only with them but with a whole form of civilization. As always (see Gramsci) it was only in their way of speaking that they gave some evidence of having noticed these symptoms. In the transitional phase—that is, "during the disappearance of the fireflies"—the Christian Democratic men of power almost all at once changed their way of expressing themselves, adopting a completely new language (which was moreover incomprehensible, as if it were Latin), especially Aldo Moro—that is (through an enigmatic correlation), the man who seems to be the least implicated of all in the horrible things that have been going on in Italy since 1969—in an attempt, so far formally successful, to hold onto power by any means.

I said "formally successful" because, I repeat, in reality the powerful Christian Democrats are covering up, with their robotic maneuvers and their smiles, a vacuum. The real power operates without them and they only have useless machinery in their hands that only makes them visible as so many miserable men in suits.

In any event, history abhors a "vacuum": it can only be an absurd and abstract predicate. For it is likely that this "vacuum" I am talking about is now being filled, by way of a crisis and of a reorganization that cannot but convulse the entire nation. An indication of this, for example, is the "morbid" expectation of a *coup d'état*. Almost as if it were merely a matter of "replacing" the group of men who have governed us so atrociously during the last thirty years, and led Italy to economic, ecological, urban and anthropological disaster. In reality, the false replacement of these "blockheads" by other "blockheads" (perhaps not less but actually more morbidly carnivalesque), implemented by way of the artificial reinforcement of the old apparatus of fascist power, would not do any good (and it is clear that, in such a case, the "troops" would then be, by their very constitution, Nazis). For more than ten years now the real power has been served by these "blockheads" without their being aware of what was really happening: during this time something may have already filled the "vacuum" (also dispelling the prospect of the participation in the government of the vast communist nation that has been born from the disintegration of Italy: because it is not a matter of "governing" at all). We have abstract and basically apocalyptic images of this "real" power: we cannot imagine what "forms" it will assume if it directly replaces its servants with a simple "modernization" of

techniques. In any event, as for me (if the reader is at all interested), the situation is clear: even if it is a multinational, I would give all of Montedison⁵⁰ for a single firefly.

February 18, 1975 The Italian Nixons⁵¹

I watched a few minutes of the televised meeting of the executive council of the powerful Christian Democrats who have governed us for almost thirty years. From the mouths of these old men, all obsessively the same, not a single word emerged that has any relation with what we know and experience. They were like people who have lived in quarantine for thirty years, inhabiting a concentration camp-style world: there was something dead even in their own authority, the sensation of which, however, is still exuded from their bodies. Fanfani's appeal to the *ancien régime*, reeking of unscrupulous bombast, was so insincere that it bordered on delirium; the young people described by Moro were phantoms of a kind that could only be imagined from the bottom of a snake pit; Andreotti's silence was dissolved in an azure smile of terribly insecure and rather timid, yet unscrupulous cunning....

Precisely Andreotti. And it is his response that I must answer in turn. Not without hesitation, of course. What I am afraid of is that he will drag me into his swamp, with the skill that comes naturally to power. Therefore, if I respond to him in his gray swamp, I am playing his game.

If I do not respond, however, I am not playing my game.

Just what does Andreotti's skill consist of (if he indeed possesses one)? In having answered an article that I did not write. For it would never even occur to me to write anything about bad government or misrule. There are hundreds of journalists and politicians, much more well-informed than I am, who have been writing for thirty years precisely about Christian Democratic bad government and misrule. Andreotti, according to the hypothesis that I am formulating here, has *pretended* to include me among those who write about Christian Democratic bad government and misrule, and as a result has written a phony defense of his profession. In this "game of fictions" I could only lose my way.

I would like, however, to set aside—at least for now—this extremely reliable hypothesis of a "game of fictions" in which Andreotti would, not without courtesy, bog me down: I want to accept the letter he wrote in response, I want to believe in his sincerity. I want to believe that even if I was to speak with him face-to-face—and with the hypothetical assurance of his good faith—he would give me the same response that he publicly gave me in *Corriere della Sera*.

⁵⁰ A major Italian industrial and financial conglomerate [American translator's note].

⁵¹ Published in *Corriere della Sera* under the title, "The Irreplaceable Italian Nixons".

In this case *he did not pretend that he did not understand* what I wrote with respect to the Christian Democracy: he *really did not understand* what I wrote.

In what, then, honestly, does his defense of the Christian Democracy consist (which, in this sense, I never dreamed of attacking)? It consists precisely in a long, predictable and diligently compiled list of the merits of the Christian Democracy. This list is not without, technically speaking, a certain liturgical *allure*.⁵² everyone knows that all religions have a weakness for lists, whose models are the commandments, the litany, and the rosary. This speaks in a way in favor of Andreotti, because it unequivocally demonstrates—like all linguistic proofs—that his Catholic good faith, instilled in him from his childhood, has something sincere about it.

Anyway, with respect to our topic, Andreotti's list of the merits of the Christian Democracy takes the form, essentially and ineluctably, of a list of the Works of the Regime. I do not say this in order to engage in a polemic (which is implied, it is understood, by the fact that I have sincerely wanted to accept the sincerity of Andreotti's response), but to call attention to a phenomenon that is objectively common to all the Works of the Regime, and that is the following: the Works of the Regime are not Works of the Regime. They are only Works that the Regime was incapable of leaving undone. It carried them out, naturally, as badly as possible (and in this respect the Christian Democracy is indistinguishable from the other Regimes), but, I repeat, it could not refrain from attempting to implement them. Any government in Italy towards the end of the 1930s would have drained the Pontine Marshes: the Fascist Regime listed this project, as any government would have done, among its own Works. Of all the Works that Andreotti liturgically lists as the meritorious Works of the Christian Democratic Regime, the same thing could be said: the Christian Democratic Regime could not have refrained from attempting to carry them out. And, I repeat, it did a bad job. But bad government or misrule is not my concern. Only if I was concerned with the question of bad government or misrule would I have pointed out that Andreotti's list omits any references to hospitals or schools (he refers to the "student population", making it an appeal to principles: that is, as if the Italians were improved in Italian schools instead of being made worse).

I will select two of the most relevant Works enumerated by Andreotti, that is, residential construction ("home ownership among Italians has increased fifty percent") and the demographic exodus of large masses of people from the rural areas to the cities ("millions of peasants have obtained jobs in industry or are self-employed").

Andreotti views these two phenomena from a strictly pragmatic, factual, material, almost classificatory point of view. They are presented in his list as coldly deprived of any meaning beyond their mere existence (or their contemporaneity). A pure administrative nominalism. Andreotti is not concerned, as if it were none of his business, with the human, cultural, or political effects of these phenomena. It seems that he has never even heard of the anthropological degradation that results from "development without

⁵² In English in the original [American translator's note].

progress”, which characterizes Italian “development” with its residential construction and its urban growth. Apart from the fact that the houses built in Italy during the thirty years of Christian Democratic rule are a disgrace, and that the living conditions which the emigrants to the North or to Germany are forced to endure are atrocious. (But I am not a person who is concerned with bad government or misrule.) Therefore, in order not to remain mired in a game that in reality I do not accept, I will merely offer the following observations about these two phenomena that I have selected as examples:

With respect to residential construction and the rural exodus, one can distinguish with particular precision and pertinence—even statistically, I believe—the two “phases of the fireflies” that I spoke about in the article I *really* wrote.

For, during the “phase when fireflies existed” (the 1950s), the residential construction that the Christian Democracy was responsible for was the result of a series of memorable construction scandals and the subsequent normal and traditional class struggle that forced it to build new housing, regardless of its original intentions. And the same can be said of its agrarian policies. The Christian Democracy was itself originally responsible for real estate speculation and the police opening fire on demonstrators.

During the “phase of the disappearance of the fireflies” (the 1960s and 1970s) the situation was utterly transformed: that “interruption” supervened that I have not hesitated to call, and I have no qualms about calling it now, epochal: the transition from one human age to another, due to the advent of consumerism and its mass hedonism, an event that has constituted, especially in Italy, a veritable anthropological revolution. In this “phase”, the Christian Democracy was not driven to undertake public Works (except relatively, at the beginning) by the working class under the leadership of the PCI: it was, to the contrary, the employers, with their uncontrollable “economic expansion”, who initiated these Works. This “economic expansion” has built—precisely under the government of a stupefied Christian Democracy—millions of houses and has absorbed millions of peasants from the rural areas.

Christian Democracy had nothing to do with this, either. Not only did it have nothing to do with it, but (it would seem) it was not even aware of what was happening. It did not notice that it had become, almost overnight, nothing more than an obsolete instrument of formal power, by means of which a new, real power has destroyed a country. Andreotti naturally does not use more than two words to reply to me on the question of the Church. But the Church is precisely one of those values that the new, real power has destroyed, perpetrating a real, definitive genocide of priests that is just one element within the context of a much more extensive and dramatic genocide of the peasantry.

I do not want to defend the Church and its values, which have been pragmatically nullified by “development”. But Andreotti certainly cannot accuse me of not being aware of the problem. For it is he who is laughing at the fireflies, not I.

But, having performed my somber duty, the moment has arrived for me to return to the first hypothesis that I formulated above: the very entertaining hypothesis that Andreotti

pretended not to understand me, and therefore responded to me in a way that obscured and buried the meaning of the whole debate. The fact that this hypothesis has a serious likelihood of being correct can be proven by the fact that Andreotti—towards the end of his article—at the most rhetorically delicate moment, the one that precedes the formal conclusion of his argument, makes a vague reference to the fate of Nixon.

The diplomatic meaning of this obscure allusion is in any event clear, however: here in Italy, my dear friends, you cannot do what America did with Nixon, that is, get rid of a man who was held responsible for serious violations of the democratic pact: here in Italy, the powerful Christian Democrats are irreplaceable.

There is an almost satanic challenge in this obscure allusion of Andreotti's, whose meaning is all-too-clear. The powerful Christian Democrats are comparable to (indeed, they are compared to) Nixon: and this implies....

Not only—Andreotti seems to say—are Nixon's successors pursuing the same policies that Nixon pursued and therefore continue to support, at least with respect to Italy, the same measures; not only, here in Italy, is there no mediocrity named Ford who is eventually prepared to replace our Nixons (everyone knows what kind of thing a political career in Italy has become, and how the sleazy provincial lawyers and deputies who served ten years ago compare to their possible successors today), not only that, but our Nixons are infinitely more powerful than the American Nixon: they have discovered, so it would seem, precisely a way to make themselves irreplaceable.

The link that effectively unites Andreotti's allusion to his equally significant omission is perfectly logical. What I am saying is that—while he mentions the criminality, both the ordinary and the political varieties, which, seemingly having fallen from the sky, characterizes contemporary Italian life—Andreotti has refrained from speaking of the “strategy of tension” and the massacres in his article.

Thus, the men who make the decisions in Italian politics—and when it comes right down to it, in our lives—first of all: know nothing, or *pretend to know nothing*, about what has radically changed about the “power” they serve, while practically holding it or managing it; and secondly: they know nothing, or *pretend to know nothing*, about the only respect in which this power displays any “continuity”, that is, the series of massacres. This is scandalous. And I am scandalized: at the risk of also being uncharitable and conformist (as is always the case with someone who is scandalized, and who therefore becomes a spokesman for a common and majority sentiment, not lacking in the quality of civic apathy [*qualunquismo*]). It is clear, however, that as long the powerful Christian Democrats remain silent about the traumatic transformation of the world that has taken place right before their eyes, all dialogue with them is impossible.

And it is equally clear that as long as the powerful Christian Democrats remain silent about the only thing that, amidst all these ongoing changes, displays any continuity, i.e., the crimes of the State, not only is any dialogue with them impossible, but their remaining at the helm of the country is unacceptable. After all, which is more scandalous:

the provocative obstinacy of the powerful in remaining in power, or the apolitical passivity of the country in accepting their very physical presence (“when power has dared to transgress every limit, you cannot change it, you have to accept it as it is”; from an editorial in *Corriere della Sera*, February 9, 1975).

Documents and Appendices

Sandro Penna: “A Little Fever”⁵³

What a wonderful country Italy was during and immediately after the fascist period! Life was as we had known it when we were children, and for twenty or thirty years nothing changed: I am not talking about values—which is a word that is too high and mighty and ideological for what I want to say in simple words—but appearances seemed to be endowed with the gift of eternal life. You could passionately believe in revolt or in revolution, but in any event that marvelous way of life would not change. At that time you could feel like a hero of change and of innovation, because to give you strength and courage there was the certainty that cities and men, in their profound and beautiful aspect, would never change: only their economic and cultural conditions could be justly improved, but they were nothing compared to the preexisting truth that marvelously and immutably regulated the gesture, the gaze, the attitude of the body of a man or a boy. The big avenues extended to the city limits, lined with houses, cottages, or two or three storey apartment buildings painted in “terrible dear colors” in the more densely populated parts of the countryside: and immediately after the last stops on the trolley and the bus lines, you start to see fields of wheat, the canals with their rows of poplars or elders, or the useless and marvelous thickets of locust trees and blackberry bushes. The countryside was still intact, with its green fields, with the summits of its ancient hills, and here and there, its small rivers. The people wore homespun, rough clothing (it didn’t matter that their pants were patched, it was enough that they were clean and ironed);⁵⁴ the boys were kept separate from the adults, and experienced around their elders what might almost be described as a sense of shame for their brazen, nascent virility, although they were so very modest and dignified, with their baggy pants with such big pockets; and the boys, obeying the tacit rule that they were to be seen, not heard, stayed quietly apart, but in their silence there was an intensity and a humble will to life (they wanted nothing but to take their fathers’ places, and waited patiently), with such splendor in their eyes, such purity in their whole being, such grace in their sensuality, that they constituted a world within a world for anyone who could discern it. It is true that the women were unjustly kept on the margins of life, and not only when they were young. But they were kept apart, unjustly, the women, too, like the boys and the poor. It was their grace and their humble will to cling to an ancient and noble ideal, which made them return to the world, as protagonists. For what else were they were waiting, those somewhat crude, but honest

⁵³ Sandro Penna, *Un pò di febbre*, Editore Garzanti, 1973.

⁵⁴ Taken from the obviously oral testimony of Nineto Davoli.

and kind boys, other than the moment when they would love a woman? Their wait lasted as long as adolescence—despite an occasional exception that constituted a marvelous sin—but they knew how to wait with manly patience: and when their time came, they were mature, and they became young lovers or husbands with all the luminous strength of a long chastity, filled with the faithful friendship of their companions.

Through those cities that were still intact, with precise borders that ended in the countryside, they wandered about in groups, on foot, or in trains: nothing was waiting for them, and they were prepared, and thus remained pure. Their natural sensuality, which remained miraculously healthy despite the repression, made them simply ready for any adventure, without losing even a little of their rectitude or their innocence. Even thieves and criminals had a wonderful quality: they were never vulgar. They were like prisoners of their inspiration to break the law and accepted their fate as bandits, knowing, in a shallow way or with the old fashioned feeling of guilt, that they were not right to go against a society of which they directly knew only the goodness and the honesty of their fathers and mothers: power, with its evil, which justified them, was so codified and remote that it had no real weight in their lives.

Now that everything is foul and shot through with a monstrous feeling of guilt—and the ugly, pale, neurotic boys have broken through the isolation to which they were condemned by the jealousy of their fathers, erupting as stupid, presumptuous and sneering fools in the world that they have taken over, compelling the adults to remain silent or to emulate them—a scandalous regret has been born; mourning for the fascist Italy destroyed by the war. The criminals in power—both in Rome as well as in the cities of the major peasant provinces—were not part of life: the past that determined life (and which was not, by the way, their stupid archeological past) did not determine in them anything but their inevitable figures as criminals destined to hold power in the old, impoverished villages.

In Sandro Penna's book, *A Little Fever*, this Italy is evoked. The trauma is vast. It is impossible not to be emotionally moved by this book. Reading these pages an emotion seizes us that makes us tremble. And it also gives rise to a certain desire to abandon this world with these memories. For it is not so much a transitional era in which we live, as a tragedy. What upsets us is not the difficulty to adapt to a new era, but an irremediable pain similar to that which mothers would feel when saying goodbye to their emigrant children, knowing that they will never see them again. Reality casts an intolerable glance of victory over us: the verdict is that the world we loved has been torn from us forever. In Penna's book that world still appears in all its stability and eternity, when it was "the" world, and nothing would have led us to suspect that it would ever change. Penna lived it avidly and totally. He understood that it was wonderful. Nothing distracts him from the marvelous adventure that is repeated every day: waking up, leaving the house, taking a tram at random, walking towards where the people live, crowded and noisy in the squares, dispersed and busy in their everyday tasks in the distant suburban areas near the countryside; or with the sun that protects all with its silent light, or under a sublime and impalpable spring rain; or with the first gentle breeze, exultant and dark from a slow nightfall; and finally finding—that this apparition never fails—a boy who is beloved

immediately due to the innocent disposition of his heart, for his habit for obedience and a non-servile respect, by his liberty that is due to his grace: by his integrity.

It seems that Penna's hopes were never betrayed by these encounters that gave everyday existence, already exultant, the miraculous joy of revelation, or of repetition.

In the pages of these short stories—written with a narrative skill that has no reason to envy Bassani's *The Smell of Hay* or Parise's *Silabario*—and I say this because Penna as a narrator is a surprise and a breath of fresh air—is contained the whole reality of that way of life, in which joy, promised and fulfilled, is converted into an obsessive form. So much so that it is hard to speak of *A Little Fever* as a book; it is a piece of time retrieved, it is something material. An extremely fine material made of city places with asphalt and grass, little whitewashed houses, modestly furnished, the bodies of the boys with their modest clothes, their eyes shining with purity and innocent complicity. And how sublime is Penna's complete and total disinterest concerning what happens beyond this existence among the people. Nothing was more anti-fascist than Penna's exaltation of Italy under fascism, seen as a place of unspeakable beauty and goodness. Penna ignored the stupidity and the ferocity of fascism: he did not even consider its existence. A worse insult could not—innocently—be invented against it. Penna is cruel; he has no mercy for anything that is not minimally invested with the grace of reality, let alone for things that are foreign to or contrary to that grace. His condemnation—unspoken—is absolute, implacable, without appeal.

In its restriction of motives and problems, in the minimum space that it grants them, this book is in reality filled with an immense feeling, overflowing with life. Its joy is so great as to be painful; a boundless pain that it can hardly contain is a presentiment of losing that joy. This limitless feeling also allows us to glimpse in this poet—who (perhaps along with Bertolucci) is really the greatest living Italian poet—the poet that he was not: a poet beyond the limits that he imposed on himself with a moving and pure rigor. A poet who can lose his delicious and desperate humor, lacerate the limits of the form, expand into the cosmos, rave (see pages 88, 89 and 90). The reader must pardon me if my language takes on this tone, and I do not go into more critical details regarding the merits of this book, analyzing it in the literary style. This book is beyond literature, it is something else, I repeat, instead of a book (or a single book). It is not that I want to argue against literature. Indeed, I consider it a great invention and a great way for man to occupy himself. And Penna, for his part, is a great man of letters. But I prefer to leave my diagnosis in suspense over the emotion that this book has given me with the simple means of an almost obvious poetics (adjectives introduced where nouns would ordinarily be expected, some inversions, exclusion of prosaic words, accepted only in certain cases, due to the sudden need for realism or expressionism): it leaves the reader completely overwhelmed with the burning ardor of tears, although it is never sentimental, not even once.

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Don Lorenzo Milani: *Letters to His Mother*⁵⁵ (Or, a better title: *Letters from a Catholic Priest to his Jewish Mother*)

I instinctively read Don Lorenzo Milani's *Letters to His Mother* as I would have read an epistolary novel, that is, I did not read it for its documentary qualities, or even, for that matter, as a minor work of non-fiction. And since I have not used the *Letters* to understand the *Pastoral Experience*, I did not use the *Pastoral Experience*, or his other works, to understand the *Letters*. I filled in the gaps and the long interruptions between one letter and the next as if it were a novel. I performed my own reconstructions and established connections; I made assumptions and I assayed interpretations, exactly as I would have done with a work of the imagination, in its relations with autobiographical reality and culture.

There is something unpleasant and almost unctuous in the person who says "I" when writing these letters to his own mother. Naturally despite his own intentions, and despite his good and sweet filial qualities. The entire first part is nothing but a "factual" and sentimental history of his choosing his vocation as a priest, the time he spent in the seminary and his ordination in Florence, right in the middle of the war. Of course, the decision made by the novice to ignore the war and fascism was a narrow-minded and conformist position to take. A tragedy had befallen the Italian nation, frightening and hopeless; and the young Lorenzo, within the walls of the seminary, is the very picture of seraphic good humor. He humbly and spiritually reflects on the shortages of food and clothing, on the discomforts of life in common, on his misfortunes as a sensitive person trapped by a hard and humiliating commitment (somewhat similar to the barracks), on the weaknesses of his colleagues and superiors, on his own naive pleasure in participating in the great liturgical solemnities (all kinds of Masses sung, ecclesiastical and clerical things that would disgust a secular person): but above all he spiritually reflects on his own vocation and on his own ineluctable decision to become a priest. Up until this point, not a serious, solid, tragic word. Everything is viewed through the screen of *humor* (I repeat, humor of a sentimental and somewhat feminine nature; linguistically polished and precise, although incredibly influenced by childhood reading, such as *Pinocchio* or even *Gian Burrasca*⁵⁶). But if, when he speaks of his own vocation and of his own dedication to God and the Church, the predominant tone is that of modesty, understatement and light-hearted jests (characteristics that would also be typical of the petty bourgeois pontificate of John XXIII), when he speaks of the temporal authorities, on the other hand—the Bishop of Florence, for example—and in declaring his own decision to abide by the most total obedience and submission to them, the young Don Milani is then capable of writing exclusively in a serious and committed tone.

⁵⁵ Edited by Alice Milani Comparetti, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1973.

⁵⁶ *Il Giornalino di Gian Burrasca* [The Illustrated Book of Gian Burrasca]: a popular Italian children's book written by Luigi Bertelli, first published in installments in a children's magazine between 1906 and 1908 and then published as a book in 1912. [American translator's note.]

His zeal for conformity is therefore equal to his modesty. He is just as intoxicated by his self-declared impulse to serve as a champion of authority (and he is not ashamed of it) as he is (unspokenly) joyful to serve God. This was the same irresponsible hooliganism that caused so many young people, even intelligent ones, to brutalize themselves in the degradation of fascist loyalty: a kind of upside-down rebellion, no less provocative than real rebellion: and it also postulates self-denial, an abnegation of a naturally masochistic and self-punishing nature. The thrill of serving Power was gratifying. And the subjects of this atrocious operation were often very sensitive young intellectuals. Thus, Don Milani completed his apprenticeship. And he vulgarized with a somewhat dulcet style (for the use of an intelligent mother with whom he shares all kinds of wonderful secrets) even the most dramatic or noble themes: “When one freely grants oneself one’s freedom one is more free than someone who is forced to be free.” This is the gist. But they are mere words, because they are based on an appeal to principle or on a merely subjective fact: freedom felt as a constraint is a contradiction in terms. The fact is that at that moment of degradation (the early 1940s) the temptation was that of the suicide: and the terror was so profound and collective as to suggest solutions that would of course be impossible to analyze in accordance with the usual methods of psychology and psychoanalysis. This sensation of something wrong and indefinably unpleasant in the character of Don Milani is constantly manifested throughout the whole book, right up until the end. He would naturally outgrow the first conformist and childishly triumphalist (and therefore also emotionally moving) phase of his novitiate. Something (which he does not mention in his letters and this change is merely presented as a “fact”) happens. Don Milani becomes Don Milani, and his relation with Authority is completely transformed. But even in the period of his maturity that certain reek of the priest—which can be perhaps explained only by a particular lack of familiarity with the profound, almost more of a subterranean unconscious than the unconscious, and therefore of a more serious and unspeakable fault than any other fault—continues to emanate from the figure of Don Milani. I am thinking, for example, of his relation of deliberate and declared cynicism with respect to death: he describes to his mother three or four cases of violent death: and the way he does so is always repellent (contrary to his own intentions) due to the naturalness (probably feigned) with which he shows how he wants to serenely accept the corporeal atrocity of death (the possible, uncertain, spectral revelation of a certain “form” of his libido). And I am also thinking of his pragmatic madness: outside his close relationship with his mother based on small loans, little financial contributions, shoes, clothing, food, useful objects, etc., what is surprising is his organizational fury that knows no pause and that gradually becomes all-absorbing. And, most importantly, this organizational fury is most valuable to Don Milani the more restricted it is, the more it takes place within a domain that can be personally dominated “at first hand”. So much so, that his ideal would of course really be Barbiana, the parish lost in the Appenines—made up of no more than a hundred souls scattered here and there among the desolate and depressing slopes of those mountains—that, while he was assigned to it as a punishment, for him it was actually the greatest gift that he could have received.

Finally, his organizational obsession would be effectively exercised in the confines that he had always viscerally preferred: that of a seminary-prison, that of a kibbutz.

In fact, the real title of this book should have been: *Letters from a Catholic Priest to His Jewish Mother*. Socially, culturally, psychologically, this is the crux of the matter.

That “something” that happened and which radically changed the spirit and the conduct of the impoverished enthusiast novice Don Lorenzo Milani, bringing him from obedience to disobedience, from a mystical vocation to an organizational vocation, is explained by his Jewish culture. He is a distorted version of Saint Paul. His incident on the road to Damascus did not occur in his late forties, when he converted and decided to become a priest; it happened many years later, long after he had converted and was already a priest, during his pastoral assignment: and his real conversion was his rediscovery of the secular, bourgeois world that he had abandoned as if in a dream and, consequently, the moral need for organization. In Saint Paul, too—precisely as a former Pharisee and therefore indelibly a Pharisee for his whole life—this need arose gradually, until it came to the fore (like the mystical *raptus* that, however, left things the way they were): Saint Paul was above all else a great codifier and a great organizer. And this was how he—alas—founded the Church.

As a Pharisee (a sensitive Pharisee full of tears and doubts, incapable of any form of the exercise of power, inaccessible to the temptations of Reasons of State), Don Milani also integrated his mysticism with pragmatism: until the gradual historical prevalence of the latter; Don Milani, too, wanted to be, and was above all capable of being, an organizer. It is true that his “organization” was contrary to that of Saint Paul, that is, it tended to criticize and challenge the ecclesiastical organization. But this is not to say that, if history had continued as one might have predicted during the 1950s and early 1960s, that even organizational achievements of a secular, bourgeois-socialist type, like Don Milani’s, would not also have been capable of being reintegrated in the great Pauline organization, and reabsorbed, the way the Papacy of John XXIII, with his rediscovery of a century of liberal and socialist history, was reabsorbed.

But it was not to be. Barbiana was an extreme case. It was the last case of prehistoric life in relation to the second industrial revolution and the consequent class struggle (in which a modern priest could insert himself). Now, most likely, there are still places like Barbiana, but they have totally lost their meaning: and they are worth something only as ruins. It took only a few years. If Don Milani had not died one of those horrible deaths that he had always taken so casually, almost contemptuously, and with a little too much evangelical joy, he would now look back on his marvelous organization work as a futile spasm, an anachronism.

However, although in Don Milani a badly-concealed moralism persisted based on a completely nominal open-mindedness (the “Letters to a Schoolteacher”, written by him and his boys, are of a sexual puritanism worthy of the most chaste Pauline publications); although his desperate organizational work inspired by secular and progressive ideals was soon impoverished and rendered obsolete, due to the problems that it entailed (the goal was a peasant sub-proletariat in a pre-industrial historical stage); although his own vocation as a priest gives us the disturbing impression that he was an unconscious traitor to the Jewish part of him, at a time when anti-Semitic persecution was being unleashed in

the most ferocious way—Don Milani imposes himself (also by way of these letters) as a fraternal character in our world; a desperate and consolatory figure.

Why? Because the spirit that he always exercised, with relation to men and society, at every moment, was a critical spirit. Within the limits that were permitted to him, keep in mind; in the restricted field within which he could effectively operate and which was reduced, in practice, to his relation to the central power of the Church. In this relation his critical spirit is implacable and exemplary. So much so as to redeem in him every possible sign of evil—whether due to an excess of passion or to barrenness—and to transform him, finally, in spite of everything, into likeable man. The pettiness of ecclesiastical power in its dealings with him is now an undeniable, objective fact. Anticipating 1968 (even to the point of sowing the world with twenty or thirty trade unionists and left-wing Catholics who were a little too good and too courageous), he pursued to its conclusion the only revolutionary action of those years: he did it with a certain ingenuousness and a certain presumptuousness, but with an essentially ascetic purity, which conferred upon his time on this Earth a value that is probably greater than that of Pope John himself, who, although always making light of it, was nonetheless a man of power.

(Published in *Tempo*, July 8, 1973.)

For the Rusconi Publishing House⁵⁷

It is not my intention to condemn any author who agrees to work with Rusconi. Not only because I think, for example, that working for television is much worse, but rather that, as a matter of principle, I do not approve of condemning anyone for formal reasons. That is what young people do, whose extremism is simple and blindly cruel. As for the Rusconi operation, I think that it is very advanced (from the point of view of capitalist development), and this was achieved completely within the framework of the most total intellectual cynicism (the presupposition for a neo-hedonistic philosophy, which supplants EVERYTHING: Church, nation, family, morality); yet it still fights on the old battlefield insofar as the objective situation warrants (for Italy and for Chile) rearguard actions (which call for traditional forms of fascism). This being the case, the struggle against Rusconi, Monti and the CIA—allies in the founding of a vast cultural Right Wing—in the context of a battle against classic fascism, seems anachronistic, paltry and even a little ridiculous to me. The time has come instead for the traditional Italian Left and the working class to urgently confront the problem of being victorious where “*guachisme*”⁵⁸ has failed: and to fight the enemy where he is and not in the positions that he has abandoned in the wake of his advance.

⁵⁷ I sent this little note to Giuseppe Catalano, in response to a survey that was intended to be published in *L'Espresso* (September 23, 1973). It was published, verbatim, except for one stupid “*excerptum*”. This made all the subsequent misunderstandings inevitable.

⁵⁸ In French in the original: “Leftism”.

Andrea Valcarenghi: *Underground: With Clenched Fists*⁵⁹

In order to avoid expressing themselves by way of a discourse that was not strictly political, the young people of '68 and the next few years were judged by their physical presence, their conduct and their actions. That is, they were judged by way of their nonverbal language.

The code of the “language of physical presence” (hair, clothing, facial expressions, etc.) is an uncertain code: it cannot serve as the basis for objective interpretations.

The code of the “language” of behavior is less uncertain: but the latter has given us, with respect to the young people, exclusively negative information: they “do not” behave like their bourgeois parents, who are referred to in a Manichaeian way with the simple pronoun, “they”; and that is all. But at the very moment when the language of their conduct was on the verge of offering some positive indications—therefore finally presenting itself as an “alternative”—it was removed from any possible stable interpretation, by way of that new kind of ambiguity that consists in mockery or derision (often—but by choice—irresponsibly delinquent).

Both the “language of physical presence” and the “language of behavior” (whose reality as “symbolic systems” was revealed and concretized by way of the consciousness that was transmitted to young people by way of audiovisual communications, the cinema and television) afford us, above all, information of a psychological or moral nature. Only secondarily is their meaning also political.

The “language of action”, finally, gives us, on the other hand, information of a directly political nature (psychology and ethics remain in the background). All the more so as, in this case, the action of the young people has been, predominantly, exclusively political.

What I have said about the young people and their “language of action” is today generally acknowledged by everyone. The most unfavorable public opinion has pronounced its condemnation in a vulgar manner and has already forgotten everything (preserving only an unpleasant memory, along with the hatred whose origin lies in fear). The most favorable opinion—that of the intellectuals, their leaders and the more intelligent groups of the young people themselves—has not yet pronounced its verdict directly. The adulation for the young people on the one hand, and the submission induced by their terroristic attitudes, have prevented the intellectuals from sincerely proclaiming their views with the necessary critical freedom.

As I said, to give real information about themselves—both political as well as sociological and psychological—the young people also have their “verbal” political

⁵⁹ *Underground: a pugno chiuso*, Arcana Editrice, 1973.

language—whether oral or written. This language—examined in its aspect as verbal language—has revealed two apparently opposed and irreconcilable characteristics: on the one hand, a rhetorical canon characterized by hyperbole and oversimplification (they say, “assassin” when they mean, “someone who is indirectly responsible for an assassination”): something that the judges of our courts—ignorant of all non-forensic linguistic subtlety—could not even have vaguely imagined); on the other hand, technical jargon.

This technical jargon has been taken not so much from the texts of Marxism (which are scientific, not technical), but from the texts of sociology. Sociology is a bourgeois science. Its models are Anglo-Saxon and French. For that matter, the rhetoric based on “oversimplified hyperbole” also has exquisitely bourgeois characteristics. Take, for example, the language of (fascist) futurism.

The language of *Lotta Continua* and (at a much lower level) that of *Potere Operaio* is a mixture of paradoxical and scandalous “writing” reminiscent of the works of Marinetti⁶⁰ and Anglo-American sociological “writing”. Besides their intention to write in a “popular” way, these journals adopt (at least I hope that they do so cynically, insofar as cynicism, understood as realistic, is the worse characteristic of so-called “revisionism”), the spoken style of television and the most banal newspaper journalism (including that of *Il Borghese*, when not simply that of the local Parish bulletins of the Church).

But the masses of young people, whose army was mysteriously recruited in 1968 and then just as mysteriously demobilized, have remained without any explanation, precisely because they have not “spoken”.

The first document that has “spoken” that is of any importance as far as I know, has only recently been published, and is a kind of memoir or diary of Andrea Valcarengi (one of the founders of *Re Nudo* [The Naked King]): it is a book, that is, a “written” document, but in fact it is an almost perfectly faithful transcription of “oral” language. In short, Andrea Valcarengi has “spoken”. We can therefore judge him.

Ingenuously, he makes no effort at all to avoid being judged. It is true that he belongs to and continues to operate within what, in an appendix of the book, his more educated contemporary Carlo Silvestro calls a “season of irreverence”. But Valcarengi was and still is irreverent as a matter of principle: he is not substantially capable of intentionally playing a trick with his flight into ambiguity through irreverence. He stands naked, like his king, right before us. He narrates his accounts of his actions, which can be described as hooliganism, and are therefore ambiguous (I am not, in this case, necessarily imputing any pejorative connotations to either the term “hooliganism”, or the term “ambiguous”), with an elemental force that is “straight from the heart”.

His own Marinettian hooliganism—of a coarseness that is typical of juvenile psychology in the era of technology and neo-capitalist prosperity—appear to Valcarengi as a kind of *epos* that is so totally “self-ghettoized”—according to the incredible expression of

⁶⁰ Marinetti: the famous Italian “futurist” (Note of the Spanish translator).

Goffredo Fofi in another text in the appendix of the book—that it no longer has any connections with any other surrounding reality.

Since 1966, Valcarengi has lived in a kind of amusing nightmare, so self-sufficient and so closed-off, that it can be presented as a totality. He was a “rebel” in the pure state: he belonged to every kind of rebellion and to none of them at all. His enthusiasm for the “struggle against the system” knew no limits. He embraced everything that came along, student movements or the “beat” community, “Lotta Continua” or “Provos”, as long as they had long hair and revolutionary slogans and, above all, poked fun at the system in a big way. Che Guevara and the pacifists, Notarnicola and Pannella, Stalinists and anti-Stalinists, all coexisted peacefully together: what was important was that everything must be a cliché.

Now Valcarengi has written his memoirs about those memorable years. Naturally, he never concerned himself with the problem of how it should be written: he wrote, as I said, just as he spoke. Nor did it ever occur to him that the fact of writing causes a distancing and therefore a fixation of the material: no, he dauntlessly writes as if his material was not behind him in the past, but *hic et nunc*,⁶¹ flowing and limitless as it was in 1966 or 1968 or 1969. Now, in 1973, the purpose of his revolutionary activity seems to be the liberation of free time and advocating the use of drugs: therefore, no respite in the struggle.

Valcarengi’s “oral” language, which is reflected, as if it was recorded, in his “written” language, is a kind of jargon. The specialization served by Valcarengi’s existence is thus irrefutably demonstrated. This jargon is composed of a base of “vivid” language, which is otherwise very impoverished, reminiscent of the speech of the Milanese petty bourgeoisie (not the language of the common people!), whose origins lie in the early 1960s: this local jargon is mixed with a lowest-common-denominator version of “leftist” political language transformed into “small talk”, that is, a series of clichés, commonplaces, and banal observations.

From the very beginning, reading Valcarengi’s book is an intolerable experience. The descriptions of its “cast” are horrifying due to the poverty and the vulgarity of their language. On Pablo Melchiorre Gerbino: “A Sicilian beatnik who emigrated in the distant past to Sweden, married a Swedish blonde....”; on Vittorio DiRusso: “He is the charismatic ‘leader’ of the Milanese longhairs....”; on Giorgio Cavalli, alias Ombra [Shadow]: “He gradually transformed himself from a student into a prominent ‘beatnik’....”

And as for Pinky (“One of the most beautiful figures of the Italian ‘beat’ experience”): “Many people still recall the time when he danced like King Kong among the cars in Montecitorio while a dozen cops tried to catch him....” On Angelo Quattrocchi: “He has the charm of a scorpion, in the sense of the sign of the zodiac.... An opportunist and megalomaniac, he is also very amiable. The high point was when he ran in the 1970

⁶¹ Latin: “here and now” [American translator’s note].

elections on the 'Hippie Party' ticket, *mamma mia!*" On Emanuele Criscione: "Nervous and always pissed off..."; on Adriano Sofri: "I never knew him personally, but taking into account his fame I will try to say some bullshit about him, too. For example, he is a genius for carrying out analysis. The greatest European theoretician, someone who is capable of getting to the bottom of problems. However, he also seems to have gotten to the bottom when it comes to bullshit..."; on Gianni Emilio Simonetti: "A painter and a curious ultra-left intellectual..."; on Furio Colombo: "... in short, a little like Eco...."

Valcarengi goes on like this until he exceeds all imaginable limits, to the point of delirium. His report, which is like that of the humble servant who speaks and thereby mutilates the language of his adored bosses, or his *Illustrated Book of Gian Burrasca*, or, again, his language that is reminiscent of the Missionary Fathers Newsletter (a level that is completely attained in the pages of his journal, *Re Nudo*), has something excessive and irrepressible about it. You read it almost in a state of *raptus*, not believing your eyes: but its reiteration of clichés is so implacable and is of such intensity as to make this book a *unicum* in the history of Italian writing. Certainly, no one could have ever imagined that in a total of two hundred pages, a book could sink to the level of letters from the readers of some cheap popular romance novel, organized according to a logical nexus. Perfectly uncritical with respect to the narrowness of his own microcosm, Valcarengi stops at nothing: and in effect he knows nothing. He does not know, for example, one essential thing: that making a joke of everything, and reducing everything to a gag, as he does with respect to even the most tragic and difficult events, is precisely the chief distinguishing characteristic of the petty bourgeois linguistic relation to reality. He should cut his hair, dress up in some moderate beat clothing, spend some time with assimilated young people his own age, or better yet, with people a little older than him, or people his parents' age: all he will hear from them is small talk and jokes. The first rule of their behavior is not to say anything serious about anything, to reduce everything to the raw material of humor; and, *a fortiori*, to do so in a vulgar manner.

This book, by virtue of its language, therefore reveals a shocking cultural poverty. It is formally the product of the purest subculture. Our Valcarengi has not only never "thought" about the nature of the petty bourgeoisie against whom he rebels, but he has never even really "thought" about the nature of protest itself. All his opinions are kneejerk opinions, they glide effortlessly on a reality stripped of all resistance. And to think that, in this impoverished and degenerate book, there is a lofty and elevating, and almost solemn, moment: "I remember Pinelli in 1967, when I attended a meeting at the Ghisolfa bridge with the 'provos'. As we were leaving the meeting he said to me: 'These guys should read, or else in a couple of years, when fashions change, we'll never see them again'."

As an example (who, finally speaking, has revealed himself) of this fashion, Valcarengi, along with the characteristics of his own culture, also reveals the characteristics of his own psychology. He, like an old-fashioned Italian, is a very good soul. He is a puppy who, having accidentally broken free from his leash, strays all over the world (or at least between Milan and Rome), eager to have fun with his new masters. His substantial humility renders his theatrical hooliganism absolutely mechanical. His rebellion is purely

imitative. And this is the point: he is too good to really be capable of mockery. He makes jokes, he laughs, he smiles, but he is absolutely incapable of mockery. If he does engage in it, he does so organizationally, collectively. He is a good son, and he loves his abolished parents very much, he is obedient and loyal (he often recalls his real family, with ill-concealed affection). Perhaps due to this goodness and simplicity of his (the shocking vulgarity of his language is social, not personal), he earned the respect and the friendship of Marco Pannella, who wrote the introduction for this book.

Marco Pannella's ten page introduction is, finally, the text of a political manifesto of radicalism. It is a landmark event in the Italian culture of our time. It cannot be ignored. The definitions provided in this introduction concerning revolutionaries, nonviolence, power, the traditional left and the new left ("enough of this left that is big only at funerals, commemorative occasions, protests, celebrations; all this stuff is too 'black'"), fascism and, above all, in a sublime way, anti-fascism ("besides, who are these fascists against whom you have mobilized for twenty years ... in sacred unions, in a bleak and cheerless army of salvation?" ... "so where are these fascists if not in power, in the government? There you have the Moros, the Fanfanis, the Rumors, the Colombos, the Pastores, the Gronchis, the Segnis and—why not?—the Tanassis, the Cariglias, and maybe even the Saragats and the Malfas"; "under the anti-fascist banner, a tragic diversionary operation is taking place": "in the entire history of our anti-fascism, I don't know which is the greater disaster; whether it is the restoration ... of a violent, anti-secular culture ... in the name of which the enemy can be killed or exorcized like the devil...; or the indirect, immense practical service that you are performing for today's state and its bosses, by attributing to their hit-men ... the power ... of real anti-fascism..."; "fascism is something more grave, more serious and more important ... with which it is not rare that we have a very intimate relation").

My parenthetical transcription, or intervention, of the above remarks, which by chance were included in the book I have critically reviewed, now inevitably forces me to conclude with an exhortation to the reader not to miss these pages of Pannella, which are the only ones up until now in Italy that define, from the inside, a period of violent contestation, and that delineate the possibility of more of the same.

(Published in *Tempo*, November 4, 1973.)

Experiences of an Investigation of Drug Addiction among Young People in Italy, by Luigi Cancrini⁶²

Up until only a few years ago, the poorest of the poor, the most impoverished of the impoverished, were pure models of behavior of the society of poverty: and they were all the more pure precisely the more impoverished they were. These poor people were then called sub-proletarians. They were the bearers of the values of the old particular cultures

⁶² Mondadori Editore, 1973.

(generally regional cultures). They were “speakers”, by definition, of local languages that only they knew in their hearts, which they were in a position to recreate, by way of a continuous regeneration (without infractions) of the code. Their lives developed within these cultures that, according to the bourgeois viewpoint, were vast ghettos (the bad bourgeoisie thought this situation was natural, the good bourgeoisie found this situation troubling). In reality, anyone who lived in these “reservations” was poor, but absolutely free. What conditioned him was his poverty, that is, something within him, which formed part of his world, which was continuous with his past and presumably also with his future.

He could not see the limitations that another culture imposed on him for the simple reason that he knew nothing of any other culture (he perceived it only as something foreign, incompatible with his own culture). Because he did not work in the major industries or the large scale private or public businesses (these poor people were peasants or day laborers; or small-scale artisans, or shopkeepers), they had not even attained the “proletarian” condition of the bourgeoisie and its spirit. Unlike the workers, the sub-proletarians were perfectly preserved from the effects of bourgeois history, until, precisely, two or three years ago. So, up until two or three years ago, the figure of the “misfit” immediately knew his place in society: this figure was imprinted by an ancient social order, inevitable and human like nature. The “poorest of the poor”—the orphans, the abandoned children, the children of separated parents—all those who were “stigmatized” from their birth or since childhood—were marginalized by a society that itself was marginal (and was, furthermore, immense), and there they did their best to adapt to quite precise models. They became bandits or criminals. Or simply impoverished wretches. Or, even more simply, they managed to become, after sowing their wild oats, poor people “like everyone else”.

Today: emigration, like a flash flood, has ripped through the dikes that enclosed the population of the poor in their old reservations. Through those shattered levees, torrents of poor young people surged forth to populate other worlds: proletarian or bourgeois worlds. A new type of “misfit” was created who had no models of his own that he could imitate, and thus find in them a kind of consecrated equilibrium. At the same time, an uncontrollable expansion from the center towards the periphery also took place: the old infrastructures (trains, trolleys, bicycles, streetcars, mail) were swept away, replaced by more rapid means (the personal automobile, and especially television). The spirit of the ruling class—now that the walls that once divided the city of the rich from the city of the poor were destroyed (whether from within or from without)—is propagated. These developments, within a few years, or even a few months, have reduced the old particular cultures to ruins, relegated dialects to the status of fossils, to mere speech without spirit (jargon and expressiveness have deteriorated so definitively until they have entirely disappeared: the code can no longer be recreated by those who no longer consider it to be “their own true” means of communication). The poor therefore suddenly found themselves without their own culture, without their own language, without their own freedom: in short, without their own models whose realization represented the reality of life on this Earth.

Other “misfits” have been created—besides those who have emigrated—among those who have remained. The “poorest of the poor”—orphans, children of broken families, etc.—coming from such an intolerable existence, who in the past would have become, so to speak, the creatively popular “models of the models”, now become “models of the models” of a crisis in which the poorest people—the subproletariat no longer fulfills this function—enter into contact with bourgeois culture (actually, bourgeois subculture).

What are those kids doing who were once considered, without too much tragedy, “misfits”? They are doing everything that they think the children of the rich, the students, are doing. It is these students who are offered to them as models to imitate. And since these “poorest of the poor” young people are effectively vagabonds and homeless, they very naturally gravitate, obviously, to the life of protest and therefore assume—obliged by necessity—attitudes that rapidly become inauthentic. Long hair, rage, drugs. It is these young people who mix all these things together: and yet again, the targets of the racist hatred of upright citizens, are precisely these young people.

Contemporaneous with the emergence of these new human types of the sub-proletariat, new human types also emerged among the bourgeoisie. That is, relatively new. In fact, they adhere to some quite familiar patterns: missionaries, utopians, anarchists, certain kinds of revolutionaries, etc. What is new about them is their behavior and language: and, above all, objectively, what they feel they must do.

An encounter between a group of sub-proletarian “misfit” youths—neurotic, incapable of happiness, devoured by drug addiction engaged in as a form of behavior, aphasic or else imitators of alien languages—and a group of bourgeois youths in violent rebellion against their own class—also neurotic, also incapable of happiness, and, if not aphasic or miserably imitative, users of all forms of language as if they learned them from memory, capable of technically speaking any language—would be the theme of a great book.

It is against this background that I could not resist reading the report summarizing an investigation by a team of researchers led by Luigi Cancrini on drug addiction among young people in Italy.

Guido, Giorgio, Franco, Lucio, Filippo, Roberto, Marcello, Vincenzo, Gianni, Mario, Furio, Pietro, Nicoletta, Piero, Alberto, Maria, on one side: on the other, Grazia Cancrini, Maurizio, Giuseppe Costi, Andrea Dotti, Silvana Ferraguti, Gianni Fioravanti, Grace Fischer, Marisa Malagoli Togliatti, Remo Marcone, Silvana Popazzi, Maura Ricci, Pierluigi Scapicchio, attended a meeting, coming from the different shores of two different, irreconcilable worlds. Overflowing with good will (above all, undoubtedly, the latter) they sought to engage in dialogue, and met to collectively debate the problems that were existential for the former, cultural for the latter.

The result was this “investigation” (as its authors define it). The “misfit” kids recounted their experiences, implicitly asking for help, while the young bourgeois intellectuals listened to them and tried to give them a hand. If this investigation was a novel, we would not know what kind of ending to give it. Presumably a tragic one. It is not enough to

think that the “misfits”—even in the most serious cases—can be saved, to save them. Save them for what? The young bourgeois benefactors (who would never, by the way, want to define themselves in that way) will undoubtedly have tasted the awful bitterness of disillusionment and of the futility of their advice. The “misfits” will have continued on their road, and will now still be living the miserable life of the cultural gutter, in the nights of a city that has become irremediably ugly, empty and violent.

Two of them have since died in tragic circumstances. The “Investigation” tells us of one of them, with laconic stoicism. Of the other, Eros Alesi, we found out about his fate from an anthology published a few months ago by Mondadori, which included a few of his bad poems.

With an anonymous language like a technical report, the coordinator of the investigation, Cancrini, immediately announces the limits, goals and characteristics of the book. He also announces its methodology. All in accordance with the tradition of Anglo-American “scientific” books—in this case, sociological or anthropological books. The introductions of the latter, however, are more full of *humor*, indeed, of good humor, along with declarations of modesty (due to their authors’ confidence), while Cancrini’s introduction is serious, dry, caustic, cold to the point of pallor, and therefore arrogant (undoubtedly due to the author’s extreme lack of confidence). From his dedication of the book “To the Vietnamese People” to his acknowledgement that the project was financed in part by the Agnelli Foundation of Turin, to his considerations on the modalities of the investigation, Cancrini seems to want to disguise his exasperation behind an unexpressive linguistic blandness, all facts and information.

The fact that the book should then, instead, be tendentious, passionate, seething with anger to the point of vindictiveness, is therefore not at all surprising. Yet its authors stubbornly continue to strive to present it as a scientific and therefore impartial investigation. Tables, statistics, lists, and data are there to prove it. The young drug addicts interviewed by Cancrini and his team, according to the rules of a self-constituted meeting (the “commune” of Piazza Bologna), tend to present themselves as obscure existential presences, in a concreteness enunciated but never represented and, at the same time, as mythical presences: their actions and their words—by virtue of the scientific detachment with which they are communicated by Cancrini and his team—acquire a kind of detachment that is precisely reverent as if their interlocutors, after having met them in the flesh, then fell victim to a return to that class-based dissociation by which “they were prevented from really knowing them”.

Yet, whether due to the quality of their “existential presence” or due to the quality of the “mythical presence” of the young people who were the subjects of the investigation, the quality of “objects of an investigation” is the one that ends up predominating. All of this creates an unpleasant confusion. As real persons, Guido, Giorgio, Franco, Lucio, Filippo, etc., are reduced to pure *flatus vocis*: as characters of myth they belong to rhetoric. As “objects” of a medical or sociological investigation, they could be valid only if they are treated as either real persons or as characters of myth. Why? Precisely because this book is not a scientific investigation in the classical sense of the term (that is, objective but

“within the system”): it is a partial investigation, one that wants to show the errors of objectivity (which can allow one, in the shadow of power, to treat human beings like data).

A “left-wing” investigation, whose purposes include engaging in polemical dispute with the typical investigation techniques of the “system”, cannot adopt the linguistic habits and, most importantly, the methodologies of the latter. A novel by Dario Bellezza that would speak of these Guidos, Franchis, Lucios, Filippos, etc., would be infinitely more valid, even sociologically, than this sociological report. Cancrini and his team are naturally on the side of the “delinquent youth” against society, which first created them, and now condemns them. But their sympathy is of an *a priori* and indiscriminate kind. It is therefore one-sided. For example: they seem to unconditionally approve of the attitude of the bourgeois models of youth—which these pathetic petty bourgeois and sub-proletarians are supposed to imitate—in all their manifestations. If the dominant signs of this behavior are “irony and contempt”, it does not seem to me to be right, in any case, that it should be approved or justified without qualifications: it should be submitted to critical judgment, like any other phenomenon. Irony and contempt, for example, whether that of a student who objects to society with a certain degree of political maturity, or that of his impoverished imitators, are sentiments that are entirely merited by the society they condemn. Only the real children of this society are capable of nourishing irony and contempt, sentiments that end up turning against those who experience them. As for the drug addiction of the “objects of investigation”, this too, is accepted in an *a priori* and indiscriminate way: it is at first merely taken as a datum, not subject to any prejudice. And this is correct. But what judgment is contrasted to the judgment of the “system”? One cannot pass over this point in silence and thus present drug addiction as perfectly ontological. It is probably hard to define, especially as “behavior” (because it is here that a moral judgment intervenes, consciously or unconsciously). And perhaps Cancrini and his team have not dared to address such an enormous problem. They have expressed their opposition, however—with a fashionable, although non-verbal, extremism—to the “therapies” of the “system”: and it is with respect to this point that they should feel the obligation to offer, after having condemned these therapies, at least the hypothesis of another therapy as an alternative.

What the State does with misfits is horrible. But what should be done with them instead? The “system” has not just fallen from the sky, it is an expression of men: and men are, despite themselves, realists. The declaration of “refractory” with respect to some particularly “delinquent” kids is indeed realistic. These juvenile delinquents generally have, precisely because of their “degenerate” peculiarity, very strong and original personalities. They possess a refined mechanism of emotive and mental reactions. There is something demonic in their intelligence, just as there is in that of a politician, an intellectual or a scientist. No politician, intellectual or scientist would ever want to renounce even the least of the characteristics that make him what he is. He would consider himself refractory to any other way of life: indeed, he would consider this refractory quality to be his most sacred right. So, too, does a criminal, a thief, a drug addict—when they have gone beyond a certain limit—feel this desperate right of theirs to remain, regardless of the cost to themselves and regardless of the circumstances, faithful

to themselves. Therefore, to declare that someone is refractory is to sanction a fact and define a form of freedom. That this happens in the squalid realm of power is awful: but with power it is necessary to establish an intelligent relation (also, and especially, in open struggle) and not to just blame it for everything and anything, seeking, moreover, to transform this operation into something more meritorious just because it is more extremist.

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Giovanni Comisso: *The Two Companions*⁶³

Giovanni Comisso wrote *The Two Companions* in 1934, that is, during the period when (apart from Moravia and a few earlier narrative works) no one wrote novels. The last cases were the Jewish-German Italian, Italo Svevo (*Una burla riuscita* [A Perfect Hoax] was published in 1928), and Federigo Tozzi (*Gli egoisti* [The Egoists], published in 1923).

Those were times of artistic and *elzeviro*⁶⁴ prose, self-righteously abhorred since then, and perhaps on the verge of being rediscovered today. Among the artistic prose writers, or *elzevirists*, Comisso was certainly the greatest: greater than Cardarelli, greater than Cecchi. This is well-known among “those in the know”. Nonetheless, the critical impotence of that period,⁶⁵ which also extended into the subsequent period and ultimately prevailed right up until our time, has caused the real, definitive work of Comisso, or at least this novel, *The Two Companions* (which I, for example, as a critic writing for *La Domenica del Corriere*, am reading now for the first time, a victim precisely of the bias or the inertia of my professional colleagues) to be omitted from the history of Italian literature, so that it has been ignored.

Everyone knows how Comisso writes. Impressionistically, by way of mimesis with my object, I will speak of an electrical shock that, originating in Comisso’s “body”, finds a transformative organ that turns it into writing. This writing, due to this transformation, remains corporeal, physical; and at the same time it has something mechanical, or convulsive, about it: as if it took shape through magical means. It has the inconsistency typical of a hand that is clumsy in literary matters that, almost spelling it out word for word, acts as a bridge: and at the same time it has the resistance of an absolute object made with inexhaustible materials. Comisso’s hand is, I repeat, quite rough when it comes to literature (it seems that he only just recently learned writing and literary writing

⁶³ *I Due Compagni*, Editore Longanesi, 1973.

⁶⁴ *Elzeviro*: an allusion to the Elzeviers, famous 16th century Dutch engravers, and in this context is a good characterization of the precious nature of “artistic prose”, a literary current that formed around the journal, *La Ronda*, and was active in Italy towards the end of the 1920s, and which included Comisso among its most outstanding practitioners.

⁶⁵ I exclude Gianfranco Contini, although he, too, was implicated in this trend.

at the same time, triumphantly and aggressively breaking free of an atavistic illiteracy); yet that same hand has the delicacy of the master craftsman (despite a feverish impatience due to excessive confidence): the white, delicate hand of an old gentleman, which is ill-suited to his childish or military frenzy. Like a recent arrival on this Earth from the places that babies come from, Comisso has devoured the gift of life, without asking any questions: for him it was one endless, voracious feast, without true joy, but instead full of exaltation. His reason and his common sense were mimetic: he was completely irrational and lacking in common sense (he had the good sense of a peasant). The land upon which he descended in order to be born was Italy: but the latter was neither a nation nor a State, it had no government, it had no classes. It was simply a place that was distinguished from other places.

The people had jobs and professions that made sense only in their concrete actuality; and as for their problems, they felt only those that were technical and real, as suspended in the chaos of everyone's life (which in 1934 was essentially comprehended in an ancient order). The question of wealth and poverty was a personal matter. It was one of many possible fates. To acknowledge this fate and to describe it were acts that were too vital and festive to be considered in their theoretical and political aspects. Painting or literature? Ontologies. A painter or a writer had no origin as such. Painters or writers are discovered in life, by predestination, happiness, luck. Their doubts are technical: the theoretical ones are purely mimetic. And, besides, everyone knows that they will be immediately overcome: the expressive privilege can have its ups and downs, but it cannot be seriously questioned. Failure is contemplated: but it is due to external circumstances: it becomes tragedy, but it immediately acquires the external, public aspect of tragedy. To know this tragedy does not imply suffering: one takes note of it, that is all, not exactly with virility or stoicism, but with a kind of impenetrable humanity, which reduces the evil of others to a series of data about it, which may border on outright gossip. In Comisso's selfishness there is room for both the purest *pietas* and the most scatterbrained indifference. War? It is like in children's books: Italy goes to war against Germany, the two armies clash on beautiful plains, on shining mountains. Bombs and grenades explode, like mysterious fireworks, the little toy soldiers fall as in the silent "*westerns*": behind all of this is the grandeur of the childhood fantasy, with its emotion that can never be desecrated. Marco Sberga and Giulio Drigo are two young painters who live in the privileged place of Comisso's Virgilian and down-to-earth Italy, Treviso. Of all the things that could be known, they know only each other (and not very well: they address one another using the second person formal pronoun, and will continue to do so until the end of the book): besides, they naturally also know painting, and each of them also knows a girl. Then comes the war and, without a word, they are snatched away from painting and love (as well as from their youthful companionship), and engulfed by a new fate. "Germany" and "Italy" go to war, and the pictures of the two youths, "the concrete pictures", "those", are stored in attics.

Following the technique of the "alternating montage", Comisso—or whoever it is that through him and by means of him tells the tale—recounts two different fates: one, rich and lucky (and less gifted), brilliantly passes through the baptism of fire and the experience of the war, comes home, marries his girlfriend whom he hardly knows (who

will then be revealed to be different from the angel that she seemed to be, and her characteristics—bourgeois insofar as she is hostile and sublimely indifferent to art—will ruthlessly emerge); the other, poorer (the illegitimate son of a housemaid), but more gifted, will end up being taken prisoner, and on his repatriation will be surprised to discover that his bride has run off with an officer, and immediately afterwards he will see his mother become a procurer for officers. At this point, his mind falters. He once again paints, with a vengeance. He finds his old friend “bourgeoisified”, so that he, the “accursed” poet, clashes with a merely “vital” poet in the Venetian countryside. Finally, he is committed to an insane asylum. The richness of the two intertwined plots—although Comisso’s impatience limits them and constantly reduces them to their essentials—is that of a stream of consciousness novel, of an abridged *A Farewell to Arms*, concentrated in a little book of two hundred pages. But the “novelesque” inventions, always of an extreme purity, come in endless succession, as in great novels. The writer’s anxious desire for an ending becomes the reader’s anxious desire for an ending, as the reader is absorbed by the events and coincidences. But what Comisso wants to bring about is not the end of the novel: he wants to exhaust the theme that set him writing with such an intense happiness that it becomes aggressive. What he wants to explain to the reader is the privilege of the artist, which, furthermore, the reader knows. Therefore, Comisso, rather than explaining a human condition—with its vocation and its dedication—wants to reiterate it. In all of this there is a kind of dishonesty that would be somewhat vulgar if it were not perfectly candid. But Comisso was always afraid of not having what it takes to be a real, universally recognized writer, even in the most conventional terms. Perhaps his marginality terrified him. Hence, perhaps, that arrogant and aggressive air that renders his prose so absolute: pure objectivity. The light-hearted conventionality that runs through the novel, in this sense, gives its pages a classic lightness and precision. There is not even one comma out of place.

The first brilliant narrative device employed in *The Two Companions* is the following: it speaks of two painters, and then views the world (nature) through their eyes. Comisso is never exaggerated in his descriptions nor does he exaggerate in this book. But every time there is a description (always beautiful) in this book, it is furthermore perfectly justified as a function of the story, indeed it is more necessary than any information about the facts, because it is precisely the painting that is the most important fact of all.

Comisso executes his descriptions with the care that painters exercised when they painted, whether in 1914-1918—the era during which the events narrated in the book take place—or in 1934—when the book was written. Rapid impressions almost like a watercolor, or like oil paintings patiently executed, brush-stroke after brush-stroke, all the landscapes of *The Two Companions* are of a breathtaking beauty. They are simply seen through the eyes of the two young artists. Best of all is the mountain landscape, with its vertiginous greens, distant white houses and radiant light, which one of the protagonists beheld during a military operation, while unwittingly occupying an enemy position on the far side of a towering ridge. It is an intoxicating apparition. Moreover, this state of intoxication is communicated by Comisso throughout the entire book. He was drunk on the liquor of life that he imbibed with a madness that was equivalent to moderation. The

second brilliant idea of the book was that of making the two personalities, in reality, into the two aspects of a single personality, divided in the classic style by an internal conflict.

The record would seem to indicate that Comisso himself (combined with Arturo Martini) was the basis for the character of Giulio Drigo, while the painter Gino Rossi (who in fact died in an insane asylum) was the basis for the character of Marco Sberga. But it would also be possible to argue that Giulio Drigo as well as Marco Sberga are the author himself, Comisso, dissociated by the dilemma of an artistic choice of a different mode of existence in relation to the real. In this sense, today, *The Two Companions* is of an exhilarating modernity. Giulio Drigo pursues the “real”, while Marco Sberga, without knowing why, is against the “real”, although at first he paints landscapes and figures that are similar to real landscapes and figures. Only at the end, released from captivity, half-crazy, in the small room where his mother, the procurer, allows him to live, does he sketch some abstract drawings on some packing paper. It was the time of the “classic” avant-garde, the high point of post-cubism, futurism, and formalism. Like all the avant-gardes, Marco Sberga is also terroristic (with the heroic sweetness of those years): and Giulio Drigo is in fact terrified of him. His love (equally heroic) for the “real” is shaken to its roots, and put in check. The struggle unfolds in such delicate and therefore profound narrative terms, that there is no doubt that the place where this struggle is occurring is Comisso’s own soul. His own choice, however, was already made: the “real”. He had to pass through the terrible ordeal of doubt and anxiety, and he had to emerge from that trial a wounded man, yes, but ultimately victorious. The other “Comisso” ended up in an insane asylum! The real Comisso, the one that was destined to concrete life and work, knew well that the arguments that prove the nullity and the illusion of the “real” are also themselves “real”, a poor philosophy like any other: that is, empty and disappointing, compared to intimacy with the great, warm body of existence.

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Development and Progress⁶⁶

There are two words that frequently appear in our articles: in fact, they are the key words of our articles. These two words are “development” and “progress”. Are they synonymous? Or, if they are not synonymous, do they indicate two different aspects of the same phenomenon? Or do they indicate two distinct phenomena that nonetheless necessarily comprise a single whole? Or, once again, do they indicate two phenomena that are only partially analogous and synchronous? Finally, do they indicate two phenomena that are “opposed” to one another, which only apparently coincide and comprise a single whole? It is absolutely necessary to clarify the meaning of these words and their relation, if we want to understand them in a discussion that bears very closely upon our everyday, material life.

⁶⁶ Published here for the first time.

Let's see: presently, the word "development" has a network of references that belong to an undoubtedly "right-wing" context.

For who wants "development"? That is, who wants it, not in the abstract or ideal sense, but concretely and for reasons of immediate economic interest? The answer is obvious: those who want "development" in this sense are those who produce; that is, the industrialists. And because "development" in Italy is *this* development, it is in this case precisely the industrialists who produce superfluous goods. Technology (the application of science) has created the possibility of a practically unlimited industrialization whose characteristics are today concretely transnational. The consumers of superfluous goods, for their part, are irrationally and unconsciously in agreement in wanting "development" (*this* "development"). For them, it means social advancement and liberation, with the consequent repudiation of the cultural values that had previously provided the models of "poor people", "workers", "savers", "soldiers", or the "faithful". The "masses" are therefore in favor of "development": but this ideology is only lived existentially, and existentially it is the bearer of the new values of consumerism. This does not mean that this choice is decisive, triumphalist and whole-hearted.

On the other hand, however, who wants progress? Those who have immediate interests that can be satisfied precisely by way of "progress" are the ones who want it: the workers, the peasants, and the left-wing intellectuals want "progress". Those who work for a living, and therefore those who are exploited, want it. When I say they "want it", I am saying this in its authentic and total sense (there might also be some "producer" who wants progress, above all else, and perhaps sincerely: but this case is the exception to the rule). "Progress" is therefore an ideal (social and political) notion: wherever "development" is a pragmatic and economic fact.

It is this dissociation of "development" and "progress" that requires "synchrony", in view of the fact that true progress is inconceivable (so it would seem) without the economic conditions necessary for its attainment.

What was the watchword that Lenin promulgated almost immediately after the victory of the revolution? He called for the immediate and large-scale "development" of an under-developed country. Soviets plus electricity.... Once the great class struggle for "progress" was victorious, it was still necessary to win another war, perhaps not so spectacular but certainly no less majestic: the struggle for "development". I would like to add, however—not without some hesitation—that this is not an obligatory condition for applying revolutionary Marxism and bringing about a communist society. Industry and total industrialization were invented by neither Marx nor Lenin: the bourgeoisie invented it. Industrializing a communist country of peasants entails entering into competition with the already industrialized bourgeois countries. And this is, in fact, just what Stalin did. And besides, he had no choice.

The result: the right wants "development" (for the simple reason that that is what it is doing anyway); the left wants "progress".

Should the left, however, emerge victorious in the struggle for power, in this case the left, too—in order to be capable of making real social and political progress—would want “development”. A kind of “development”, however, whose character has been formed and established in the context of bourgeois industrialization.

However, here in Italy the situation is historically different. No revolution has been victorious. Here, the left that wants “progress” and therefore “development”, must accept precisely *this* kind of “development”: the development of bourgeois economic and technological expansion.

Is this a contradiction? Is it a choice that poses a problem for consciousness? Probably. But at least it is a problem that is clearly posed: that is, without ever confusing, even for an instant, the idea of “progress” with the reality of *this* kind of “development”. With respect to the Left’s base (we are referring to its electoral base, and therefore millions of citizens), the situation is as follows: a worker lives the Marxist ideology *in his consciousness* and as a result, among his other values, he lives the idea of “progress” *in his consciousness*; meanwhile, at the same time, he lives the ideology of consumerism *in his existence*, and as a result, *a fortiori*, the values of “development”. The worker is therefore dissociated. But he is not the only one.

Even the classical bourgeois power is also presently completely dissociated: for us Italians, this classical bourgeois power (that is, practically, a fascist power) is the Christian Democracy.

At this point I would like, however, to abandon the terminology that I (an artist!) am using in a somewhat imprecise manner and descend to a real-life example. The dissociation that today divides the old clerical-fascist power into two parts can be represented by two contrary and irreconcilable symbols: “Jesus” (in this case, the Jesus of the Vatican) on the one hand, and the “blue jeans Jesus” on the other. Two forms of power come face to face: here, the great horde of priests, soldiers, self-righteous types and hired assassins; there, the “industrialist” producers of superfluous goods, and the vast masses of consumers, secular and, perhaps mindlessly, irreligious. Between the “Jesus” of the Vatican and the “Jesus” of the blue jeans, a struggle is underway. In the Vatican—once this product and its manifestos made their appearance—there was much lamentation. Such lamentation was at one time ordinarily followed by the action of the secular arm that would then proceed to eliminate the enemies that the Church might not even have explicitly identified, having limited its activity to lamentation. On this occasion, however, its lamentation has not given rise to anything at all. The *longa manus* remained inexplicably inert. Italy has been covered with billboards depicting derrieres packed into Jesus blue jeans with the caption, “who loves me, follows me”. The Jesus of the Vatican has lost.

Now, the clerical-fascist Christian Democratic power is torn between these two “Jesuses”: the old form of power and the new reality of power....

Ignazio Buttitta: *I am a Poet*⁶⁷

For a long time now I have been repeatedly saying that I feel a great deal of nostalgia for poverty, mine and that of others, and that we are mistaken in believing that poverty is an evil: reactionary claims that I nevertheless know that I am making from a yet undefined, and certainly not at all easy to define, position on the extreme left. When I grieve to find myself surrounded by people whom I no longer recognize—unhappy, neurotic, aphasic, obtuse and arrogant young people with the tens of thousands of lira that prosperity has unexpectedly stuffed into their pockets—then I behold the advent of obligatory austerity or poverty; as a government policy, I consider this austerity to be plainly unconstitutional and it just infuriates me to think that it should be an expression of “solidarity” with the Holy Year. But, as a “premonitory sign” of the return of real poverty, it can only gladden my heart. I say *poverty*, not *misery*. I am ready for any personal sacrifice, of course. In compensation, it would be enough for me to see the people smile the way they used to; the age-old respect for others that was respect for oneself; the pride in being what one’s own “impoverished” culture taught one to be. Then, perhaps, we can start all over again.... I’m talking nonsense, I know. Of course, these economic restrictions that give the impression of establishing a standard of living that will from now on be that of our whole future, can only mean one thing: that it was perhaps an all-too-lucid prophecy of desperation to think that the history of humanity is the history of total industrialization and of prosperity, that is, a “different history” in which both the way of existence of the people and the reason of Marxism no longer made any sense. Perhaps the culmination of this aberrant history—although we dare not hope for such an outcome—has already been reached and now we are now on its downhill side, as it goes into decline. Men will perhaps have to once again experience their past, after having artificially left it behind and forgotten it in a kind of fever of frenzied unconsciousness. Of course (as I read in Piovene), the recovery of this past will for a very long time be stillborn: an unhappy mixture of new conveniences and old miseries. But even this confused and chaotic world, this “downgrading” would be welcome, too. Anything would be better than the kind of life that society is dizzyingly winning for itself. Suddenly, in this situation, after almost thirty years, I started writing in the Friulian dialect again. Maybe I will not continue to do so. The few verses that I have written will perhaps remain *unicum*. It is, however, a symptom of an irreversible phenomenon. I did not own an automobile when I wrote in dialect (first in Friulian, then in Roman). I did not have a penny to my name and I got around on a bicycle. And this was when I was around thirty years old, and even when I was older. It was not just a case of youthful poverty. And in the whole world of poverty that surrounded me, dialects seemed to be destined not to disappear except in such a distant future as to seem to be a meaningless abstraction. It seemed that the Italianization of Italy would have to be based on a broad base of input from the bottom, from dialects and popular speech (rather than on the replacement of the experimental literary language with the experimental language of business, which is what actually happened). Among the other tragedies that we have lived through (and for me, personally, palpably) over the last few years, there is also the tragedy of the loss of the dialect, as one of the most

⁶⁷ Editore Feltrinelli, 1973.

grievous moments of the loss of reality (which in Italy has always been particular, eccentric, concrete: never centralist; never associated with “power”).

This nullification of dialects, together with the nullification of the particular cultures that the dialects expressed—a nullification resulting from the acculturation of the new power of consumer society, the most centralizing and therefore the most essentially fascist power known to history—is the explicit theme of a book of poetry written by a poet who writes in dialect, entitled precisely *Lingua e dialettu* (the poet is Ignazio Buttitta, the dialect is Sicilian). The people are always essentially free and rich; they can be put in chains, despoiled, gagged, but they are essentially free; they can lose their jobs, their passports, their kitchen tables, but they are essentially rich. Why? Because those who possess their own culture and express themselves through that culture are free and rich, even if what it expresses (in relation to the class that rules it) is unfreedom and misery. Culture and economic conditions coincide perfectly. The culture of an impoverished population (agrarian, feudal, vernacular) realistically “knows” only its own economic condition, and through it articulates this knowledge, poorly, but in accordance with the infinite complexity of existence. Only when something foreign insinuates itself into this economic condition (which is what is now almost constantly happening, due to the possibility of a continuous confrontation with a totally different economic condition) does this culture then enter into crisis. It is upon this crisis that, in the world of the peasants, the “accession to class consciousness” is historically based (over which, furthermore, the specter of regression always looms). The crisis is therefore a crisis of judgment of one’s own way of life, a fading away of the faith in one’s own values, *that can even lead to the renunciation of those values* (something that took place precisely in Sicily over the last few years due to the mass emigration of young people to Germany and northern Italy). Symbolic of this brutal and not at all revolutionary “deviation” of the native cultural tradition is the annihilation and humiliation of dialects, which, even when they remain intact—statistically speaking, as reckoned by the number of people who speak a dialect—no longer comprise ways of existence and values. Every day a string is plucked from the guitar of dialect. Dialects are still overflowing with wealth that they cannot, however, spend, with jewels that cannot be given as gifts. Those who speak them are like birds that sing in a cage. Dialect is like a mother’s breast that everyone suckled, but now they spit on it (renunciation!). What cannot be stolen (yet) is the body, with its vocal cords, voice, pronunciation, mimicry—which is still the same as always. It is, however, a pure and simple survival. Although still in possession of that mysterious organ “with glittering eyes” that is the body, “we are poor orphans all the same”.

This poem, so perfectly tragic, has an equivalent in another poem entitled, “U rancuri” [Resentment]. Here, too, the conclusion (expressively perfect) leaves no room for hope. The vernacular and popular poet (in the Gramscian sense) harvests the sentiments of the poor, their “rage”, their fury, their explosions of hatred: he becomes, in short, their interpreter and intermediary, but he, the poet, is a bourgeois. A bourgeois who enjoys his privileged condition; who wants peace in his own home in order to forget the war in the homes of others; who is a dog of the same breed as the enemies of the people. He needs nothing, he wants for nothing; only a halo for saying the rosary at night, and there is no one to bring him some wire so he can hang himself from a lamppost.

Before this perfect and sadistically lucid conclusion “with no way out”, however, the whole body of the poem is based on reticence as a rhetorical figure that says what it denies. What does Buttitta deny repeatedly, indeed, anaphorically? He denies being himself, the poet, who feels rage, hatred, anger, awareness of injustice in his confrontation with the class in power. All these feelings are experienced by the people, for whom the poet is not the interpreter. All along, however, Buttitta only affirms the contrary. Why? Because the dominant feature of his book is that of a people deduced from a great inaugural model (and to which he refers). This model is ambiguous, but only outwardly. It is explicitly the model of the years of the Russian revolution, in its two figurative themes: formalism and socialist realism. The synthetic features with which Buttitta sketches the figure of the people are those of a supremely formalist “propaganda poster”, while his meter approximates to the structure of the oral diction of the flag-draped podium, expressing the analytic features of a figure of the people that is that of the paintings of socialist realism. This is why the poet—rather than asking to be executed as a bourgeois—actually preaches to himself the character that he preaches to the people. In fact, Buttitta cannot be oblivious to the fact that the people, and especially the Sicilian people (concerning whom he by no means denies their capacity for rebellion and rage), never resembled the image that the historical communist parties have had of them. This image *served* those parties for their political tactics, and, secondly, it *served* the poets to sing the praises of those tactics. The poet who wrote *Lingua e dialettu* cannot help but be aware of all of this. And yet, by describing the people the way he has—that is, conventionally, and almost falsely—Buttitta has, in fact, not been insincere at all. Such a view of the people, based, with as much passion as clarity, on the communist mannerism of the turn of the century, forms part of the real, that is, formal, inspiration of Buttitta. He has always been in the orbit of communist officialdom: and there is nothing that feeds with more vitality a mannerist inspiration than an officialdom that is not yet in power and, in certain respects, is still almost in the resistance and operating secretly. Neruda (quoted by Sciascia, who wrote the preface for Buttitta’s book) is the *exemplum* of such a poetic operation. But while Neruda is a bad poet, this humble man from Bagheria, sentimental, outgoing, naive, and—according to the schema of popular poetry of the “bad seed”—tormented by a lack of maternal love that made him an orphan and obsessed—is what is called a good poet. The rhetorical figure of the people that, in “gattusian”⁶⁸ flame, with his poetry always full of clenched fists and waving flags, becomes perfectly real if one views it (as the poet who wrote *Lingua e dialettu* must have seen) as anachronistic. That is, as belonging to that world in which one speaks in dialect, and no longer with embarrassment, where one wants the revolution, now forgotten, where a grace (and a violence) rule, now renounced.

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⁶⁸ A reference to Renato Gattuso (1912-1987), a Sicilian expressionist painter, anti-fascist and member of the Communist Party, known for his political art, much admired by Pasolini. [American translator’s note.]

Jewish-German

When I wrote about Giovanni Comisso's *The Two Companions* (in an article published here, in *Tempo*, in December of 1973), I commenced by expressing my amazement at Comisso's precociously mature narrative style, at a time (1934) when there was hardly any recent narrative tradition to speak of in Italy. There were only, a few years before, the "Judeo-German" Italo Svevo, and Federico Tozzi. Comisso's wonderful novel—I went on to say—was based on a childish idea of history, in which "Germany" and "Italy" went to war against each other as in a children's illustrated book, in which the boys who fought and died did so as if it were a cosmic game, risking their lives with the same nonchalance as the heroes of a "silent western".

In another article (on Sandro Penna's *A Little Fever*, also published here in *Tempo*, on June 10, 1973), I said that, under fascism, Italy, in its misery and in its "popular culture", remained intact. Fascism had in fact obtained the active collaboration of, and corrupted, a few hundred thousand Italians, while the other forty million—the poor and middle class petty bourgeoisie and the common people—were not even "touched" by fascism, because fascist repression was then repression of an archaic type, one that imposed gestures and actions, demanding submission, but it was not in any position to transform, except superficially, the old human models. It is true that my opinion is very simple, as one may see. Less simple, perhaps, is the fact that I had the courage to say that the people of Italy of that time were better than they are now. The canon of judgment for this gradation of values is obviously my own, that is, one of a man of my age, in a position to make comparisons. A young person might not be able to understand me unless he or she possessed an exceptional intelligence and was therefore capable of deducing, from what remained of the old way of existence, its totality: the "cultural world" within which the Italian people expressed themselves physically and existentially.

Such a feat could only be accomplished with great difficulty, however, for even a small dose of the conventionalism of "sixty-eight" or of communist orthodoxy would prevent a young person from understanding that the way of life of the Italians of that time was not reprehensible or undignified because they were not revolutionaries or because they simply remained passive. There are whole epochs, and sometimes millennia, of human history in which the people have been like that. But the dignity of man is not thereby diminished. There are no "sub-human" men. Men always find a way to "fulfill" their humanity. And I am not saying this under the influence of any kind of spiritualism, but under the influence of a concrete reasoning, although one based on feeling. It is abstract, inhuman and stupid, furthermore, to blithely condemn whole periods of human history in which the "people" responded to repression with resignation. The spiritual aspect of such people that was potentially revolutionary always found a way to express itself in one way or another: perhaps just by way of resignation and, above all, by *treating the culture of the ruling class as totally alien*. At a time when, under fascism, the people were still mechanically obeying certain orders imposed by "armed force", they were actually completely (physically and existentially) alien to the culture of power, although in an unconscious way, and reaffirmed their own dignity.

However, fascism is not possible today, except in the case of a violent, regressive process (which means that what happened in Reggio Calabria would have to happen all over the country): but as long as power immobilizes and shackles the “masses” by way of the hedonist ideology that fosters the illusion that anything can be acquired (and, in fact, with respect to superfluous goods, it has been able to go a long way towards fulfilling this promise), it no longer needs either churches or fascism. It has made them obsolete almost overnight. And this same process has also made anti-fascism obsolete. Most anti-fascists are today implicated in the new power which, by endorsing everything and everyone, is also a fascist power, in the sense that it ineluctably imposes its models. But enough of that. Such assertions on my part have only given rise to the proliferation of unpleasant misunderstandings: the sclerotic enlightenment and the comfortable anti-fascism of the 1950s have prevented some of my more confused critics, probably led astray by a racist attitude towards me (during my whole life I have felt a looming expectation of betrayal), from understanding what I was trying to say. They certainly could not think, like Sachiko, for whom it had been far too long since she had engaged in an intimate and risky discourse with Yukiko, that their relationship had proceeded in accordance with the rules of habit. It is tiresome to resort again and again to this “intimate and risky” discourse because every time I do, I take it for granted that it will be good enough and will not need to be repeated. A “man without qualities” has made himself the spokesman for a whole series of suspicious attitudes towards me: he spoke, and he reached out his little fetus hand to pick up and throw the first stone of the lynching. To the great happiness of *Il Borghese* and *L'Espresso*, that is, of those for whom “culture” is considered to be “infraculture” [*culturame*].

The fact that I called Italo Svevo “Judeo-German”, it should be pointed out, undoubtedly has “critical” implications with respect to an evaluation of Italian culture: which is contrasted, by way of this expression of high esteem,⁶⁹ to an infinitely more advanced, mature, rich culture, and, above all—given the background that is more French than Italian of a person like Svevo who lived on the margins of the Hapsburg empire—a culture possessed precisely of a great narrative tradition.

Cultured People and Popular Culture⁷⁰

Obviously, it could not have been otherwise and therefore, there is no cause for complaint: but it is truly a pity that DeMartino, instead of studying the popular culture of Lucania, did not study the popular culture of Naples. After all, no ethnologist or anthropologist has ever studied popular urban cultures with the same precision and scientific rigor used to study popular peasant cultures. It is inconceivable that a study like

⁶⁹ Which some imbecile thought was an insult.

⁷⁰ Salvatore DiGiacomo, *Lettere a Elisa 1906-1911* [Letters to Elisa, 1906-1911], edited by Enzo Siciliano, Editore Garzanti, 1973; Abele DeBlasio, *La camorra a Napoli*, 4 vol. [The Neapolitan Camorra], Delfin, 1973.

the one devoted by Levi-Strauss to a handful of small indigenous tribes—isolated and pure—would be applied to the people of Naples, for example. The impurity of the “structures” of the popular culture of Naples would surely discourage a structuralist, who, obviously, has no love for history with all its confusion. Once he has identified the “structures” of a society in its perfect state, he has slaked his thirst for the re-ordering of the knowable. The “structures” of the popular culture of Naples cannot be reduced to any such perfection. A small population isolated for millennia or centuries in its codes, even now lives, in the understanding of ethnologists, *in illo tempore*: it has no stratifications; the conventionalization, which is furthermore extremely rigid, of its social relations has only one stratum: the possibility of infringing against them is both inconceivable and totally unexpected. In its expressive manifestations—songs, dances, rituals, etc.—innovations do not imply an evolution of the *inventum*. In popular urban cultures, however, the history of the dominant culture has violently intervened, imposing and depositing its values: the typical “ahistoricity” of the popular culture, which is essentially “prone to crystallization”, was thus forced to undergo incessant changes: to which, systematically, it has had to apply the characteristics of “crystallization”.

Historical innovations are perceived in the world of urban popular culture (and, ever since the 19th century, even by the popular culture of the peasantry) only on the condition that they are immediately translated into its own, non-dialectical traditional terms. It is only in the last few years that both the extremely complex urban popular cultures, as well as the peasant popular cultures—which were still quite pure, precisely like the small tribes studied by ethnologists—have been radically undermined by the new type of culture of power. Emigration to the industrial cities and above all consumerism with its imposition of new human models have instituted a *completely* new relation with the old popular cultures, and therefore within the revolutionary capitalistic world.

Two years ago, at a flea market in Porta Portese, a Neapolitan vendor sold some “old papers” to a cultured buyer. The street vendors who go to Porta Portese are still a part, as much as possible, of the old popular culture: in their minds, the connection of thoughts, judgments, evaluations and social relations obey rules that the bourgeoisie only knows in their written form and the cultural contingency imposed by their class, at least since the end of the 17th century, and with particular reference to the last few decades. In any event, the relation between the Neapolitan street vendor of Porta Portese and the cultured buyer is absolutely typical: it is effectively the commercial transaction involving goods of equivocal provenance. The Neapolitan scoundrel will be utterly certain of having “cheated” the “gullible” buyer who is interested in “old papers”; and the buyer will be satisfied with both his exceptional acquisition as well as the fact that he had conducted himself honestly with that Neapolitan “stereotype”. The “old papers” turned out to be a packet of love letters between Salvatore DiGiacomo and Elisa Avigliano, his future wife. Enzo Siciliano, who came to possess this voluminous manuscript, has published it—with a meticulous introduction, in which he alternates between the philological theme (a little impersonal) and a real interest, not at all made less personal by DiGiacomo’s *eros*, producing an uneven and almost strident impression, despite its soft elegance. The number of things we do not know is immense, practically unlimited. With respect to this we usually refer to a small quantity of knowledge and information that we think of as our

culture. For example, I have read the volumes of DiGiacomo's poetry, and therefore I thought I knew it. In fact, it was a convenient knowledge, basically disrespectful and biased. These letters of an engagement that lasted twenty years erupted like a flash flood in my convenient knowledge of DiGiacomo. True, they did not modify my ultimate, final and synthetic judgment of his poetry. But it transformed it into "something else". The class encounter depicted by the anecdote of the discovery at Porta Portese of the old letters from DiGiacomo to Elisa in fact lies at the origin of all DiGiacomo's poetry.

In fact, the letters reveal a terribly petty bourgeois DiGiacomo, in the best and the worst senses of the term. The Italian language that is used in these letters excludes, one might say teleologically, any and all dialect. It is the language of privilege, so assimilated as to be innocent and oblivious. And it is also the language of an old-fashioned psychology, which places the anxieties of a petty bourgeois narcissist at the center of the universe, without room for anything else. Its background is that of a bourgeois, cultured Naples (libraries, cafés, theaters, publishers, the gulf seen with the "alien" eyes of someone who does not speak the local language). There is also that strong exotic flavor that distinguishes Neapolitan bourgeois culture from Italian bourgeois culture: its historical internationalism, its direct relations with France and Germany, etc. One need only read the few, exquisite passages chosen from DiGiacomo's poetry by Siciliano for his preface, to read his poetry in a new light. The real "underlying structure" of his poetry is the relation between the bourgeois DiGiacomo and Neapolitan popular culture, strained from its highest layer, the only layer where the apparently love-struck class encounter was possible. DiGiacomo's ingenuousness and purity are stupendously mimetic: but mimetic of an invented model.

In reality, his entire popular world is stylized, or at least viewed solely in the highest layer in which DiGiacomo could have known it, and in which the culture of the ruling class is *in the process* of entrusting its values to the culture of the ruled class and the latter is *in the process* of making them its own. The transubstantiation had not yet taken place. As a result, in DiGiacomo there is no description of Neapolitan "underdevelopment" or its "primitive" culture. This description does exist, on the other hand, at least in part, in Ferdinando Russo, a poet of more uneven talents, but no less great than DiGiacomo. Ferdinando Russo performed a descent into the underworld (the underworld of "underdevelopment") that DiGiacomo did not think it advisable to undertake. The two poets are complementary, and, in fact, the work of Abele DeBlasio (*La camorra di Napoli*, in four volumes: *Costumi dei camorristi*, *Il paese della camorra*, *La malavita a Napoli*, *Tatuaggio* [The Neapolitan Camorra: Customs of the Camorristi; The Country of the Camorra; The Criminal Underworld in Naples; Tattoo]) is dedicated to both of them.

Abele DeBlasio carried out his research precisely during the same years when DiGiacomo and Russo were writing their poetry; his method of investigation followed in the footsteps of Lombroso, and his *Lucernae* were other "realist" [*veristi*] anthropologists, as they were called, all of whom are today completely forgotten. His vulgarity was therefore extreme. His relation with the Neapolitan "plebs" was that of the writers of "histories of the homeland" who are to be found in every Italian province: so

that even when confronting the most awful things, Abele DeBlasio is not lacking a curious impulse of benevolence and pride: when it comes right down to it, it is the glories of folklore that he is examining. Among the impoverished Neapolitans, he behaves like an entomologist who humorously speaks of the ways and customs of insects: he anthropomorphizes them. On the other hand, there is a recurrent motif in his book that consists of comparing Neapolitan popular culture with the primitive culture of exotic peoples. And, beyond any value-based principles, this starting point is substantially correct. *His fretus*,⁷¹ with great modesty and engaging skill, Abele DeBlasio accumulates in his books—although with many repetitions—a precious storehouse of news and information. And it is hell. At least for a progressive milieu. The “standard of living” of several hundred thousand men, women and children, is almost inconceivable for the human mind.

The turning point came when Naples was evacuated by the Spaniards and the Bourbons. The characteristics of the popular culture—“different” with respect to bourgeois culture—which was more or less developed—and, almost with an obsessively “alien” ideological consciousness vis-à-vis the popular culture—were at that moment codified by the “code of honor” of the Camorra. It was a very rigid code. It was also a written code, at least in relation to the specifically Camorrist “fishing fleet” (the “*fieni*”). It was the absolute naturalness with which the Neapolitans lived this code that made them foreign to the official constituted powers and to anyone who in any way belonged to those powers. It was a “real” world within a world that, with respect to it, was “unreal”: even if the latter in fact represented the logical course of history. The reversal of perspective of the Neapolitan who sees the world from within his own *real but ahistorical* world is a barrier erected against history. If this was not so, the popular Neapolitan world would not have so much vitality and so much prestige as to present itself even as a such an awful alternative: even today, when the alternative is monopolized by proletarian “class consciousness” (which detests the sub-proletarians and therefore, in a bourgeois fashion, the “popular cultures” towards which it has not expressed a decent policy). Compared to the times of De Blasio, not much has changed. You need only visit Naples. (Or, even better, read the very beautiful documentary work about Naples written a few years ago by Antonietta Macciocchi.) Jargon, tattoos, code of silence, mimicry, the underworld of crime, and the whole system of relations with power, have all remained unaltered. Even the revolutionary era of consumerism—which has disrupted and transformed the roots of the relations between the central culture of power and the popular cultures—has done nothing but “isolate” the Neapolitan popular world even more.

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The Church, Penises and Vaginas⁷²

⁷¹ Latin: “relying” [American translator’s note].

⁷² *20 Sentences of the Sacra Rota*, edited by Stelio Raiteri, with a preface by Giorgio Zampa, Giorgio Borletti Editore, 1974.

The Church cannot help but be reactionary; the Church cannot but be part of Power; the Church can only accept the authoritarian and formal rules of coexistence; the Church can only approve of the hierarchical society in which the ruling classes guarantee order; the Church can only detest any form of thought that is even timidly free; the Church can only be opposed to any anti-repressive innovation (which does not mean that it cannot accept forms of tolerance programmed from above: non-ideologically practiced, in fact, for centuries, in accordance with the dictates of a “Charity” that is dissociated—I repeat, non-ideologically—from Faith); the Church can only act completely outside the teachings of the Gospel; the Church can only make practical decisions with reference only formally to the name of God and sometimes even forgetting to do this; the Church can only verbally impose Hope, because its experience of human affairs prevents it from nourishing any kind of hope; the Church can only consider its concordat with fascism (to return to current affairs) to be eternally valid and paradigmatic. All of these things are made clear in some twenty “typical” sentences of the *Sacra Rota*, selected from the 55 volumes of the *Sacrae Romanae Rotae Decisiones*, published by the Libreria Poliglotta Vaticana between 1912 and 1972.

It was certainly not necessary to read that anthology to know the things that I briefly listed above. However, the concrete evidence—in this case the involuntary “vivacity” of these documents—merely reinforces old convictions that were maintained by inertia. As for their literary quality, these “sentences” exhibit notable objective elements of interest (as the author of the preface of the anthology, Giorgio Zampa, observes). They contain violently objective allusions—that is, violently objective with reference to the common matrix of the sentences—to a whole series of situations taken from novels: Balzac (“Emilio Raulier decided to associate with Giuseppe Zwingesteiln, but he did not have enough capital to do so...”, “If Father Planchut were to give me the money...”); Bernanos, or Piovene (“Frida ... was orphaned when she was still a little girl and was sent by her grandfather, who became her foster-father, to the convent school N.N., where she remained until she was fifteen years old...”); Sologub (“Being very wealthy, and having recently come of age, her grandfather received many requests for her hand in marriage, some of them from old and noble families...”); Pushkin (“Amazed, the peasants admired from afar the nocturnal pomp of the wedding celebrated in the private chapel of the estate between Maria and the second lieutenant Michael, around midnight on June 8, 1919...”); Pirandello, Brancati and Sciascia (“Fascinated by the presence of Giovanni, a young man of twenty-eight, Catholic and piously educated, Renata, who was eight years younger than him and educated according to liberal habits and principles, fell in love with him...”, “Therefore she proposed to marry him to satisfy her own lust, nor could she do otherwise, since she was, at least from the formal point of view, a practicing Catholic”).

I confess that it was as a novelist that I read this book, or maybe also as a director. Its casuistry is such that it cannot be considered to be an everyday dish. I am, moreover, scandalized (in such professional reading matter) by what the Church reveals itself to be by way of this book. For the first time, it reveals itself to be both formally and completely separated from the teachings of the Gospel. There is not one page, not even one line, or

even one word, in the whole book, that refers, even by way of a rhetorical or edifying quotation, to the Gospel. In this book Christ is a dead letter. He is referred to as God, of course: but only by way of a formula (“having only God before his eyes, invoking the name of Christ”), or little more, but always with a lifeless liturgical solemnity that can by no means distinguish these “sentences” from a Pharaonic or Islamic sacerdotal text. The reference is simply to an authority and therefore nominal. God never enters into the inner reasoning that leads the “Auditors” to annul or confirm a marriage and therefore in the judgment pronounced on the question of the man and the woman who seek a “divorce” and of the crowd of witnesses and relatives who are a part of their social and family life. What the judges have in their hands is the code; very well. This can be justified by the fact that the code is specific and specialized. In the meantime, however, the code is never read and applied in a Christian way: what counts are its rules and these rules are purely practical rules that are translated into single-word terms composed of irreducible concepts, such as, for example, “sacrament”.

The logical insipidity that follows is worthy of the worst of the Bourbon courts (if one sets aside the ebullient passion and love for even formal law in the southern courts). The horrible ecclesiastical monotony is much more dismally deprived of all forms of “human warmth” than that of the Bourbons. In the eyes of the judges of the Sacra Rota, men appear to be completely lacking not only any inclination to goodness, but, which is much worse, of all vitality in doing evil (or the non-good). Since everything there is to know about their age-old weaknesses is already known, they offer nothing new. Their desperate desire to obtain from life the little that they can, perhaps by means of lies, hypocrisy, mean-spirited calculation, mental reservations, etc. (the whole repertoire that, all in all, makes men brothers), in the eyes of the judges of the Sacra Rota does not seem to be cause for either reflection, or emotion, or indignation. The only accents of indignation in all these Sentences are of an ideological nature: their targets are secular and liberal culture and, naturally, worse yet, socialist culture. Words of condemnation are pronounced against fascism: but this condemnation is an objective one that is indifferently pronounced against all human weaknesses and sins. Fascism and human weaknesses are indistinctly part of a reality based on constituted powers, which is the only reality that the Church seems to recognize. Furthermore, these judgments do not even have room for gestures of sympathy or approval. The only cases, in this sense as well, are purely formal. For example, people who, socially, are considered to be “practicing Catholics” are viewed with sympathy and approval. Concerning this point the judges of the Sacra Rota know no moderation: they are quick to engage in any dissociation and any contradiction, painstakingly ruling out any possibility of Jesuitical casuistry (which seems to be their primary logical model). For example, a girl is frigid due to a vaginal contraction caused by hysteria. The judges know this well: and they also take it into account! But not even in their wildest dreams would they associate this monstrous form of hysteria with the rigidly Catholic education that has been imparted to the girl in a convent school—and for which they have words of indisputable praise. On the other hand, in a case in which a marriage was annulled due to impotence, this time that of the husband, they do not spare this unfortunate person from any of the most atrocious condemnations with which he is branded, he is marginalized, this impotent man is lynched, when his impotence is due to homosexuality. They seem to be simply ready to

hand him over to an executioner who would imprison him in a concentration camp, while waiting to eliminate him in some cremation oven or gas chamber.

However, they never asked themselves whether, for example, he, too, had not spent his youth in a school run by priests (with the resulting sexual repression), they never asked themselves whether by chance his venture into marriage was an attempt to show his neighbors that he was an honorable or normal man, or whether his marriage was perhaps a confused search for nothing more than a maternal situation.

Nor did they ask themselves, furthermore, whether he married to advance his own interests, from some mean-spirited calculation (to get someone to take care of him, the poor helpless thing): no. The only thing the judges were interested in was the pure and simple fact of his social unworthiness: the curse that comes from that reality in which human weaknesses, sins and fascism find an objective possibility for existing. But what is even more shocking (and scandalous) in reading these sacred sentences is the degeneration of Charity. I have said that the authors of these texts sincerely refer, or at least refer to with a certain amount of passion, to God and his purposes: Faith and Hope are accommodated only as the foundations of the rules: foundations whose basis is never sought at any more profound source, but deferring to authority—Saint Thomas or some luminary of canon law whom we have never heard of—and the normative responsibility of the fact. As for the relation between Faith and Hope and the codes that are derived from them (in this case, the codes that regulate the annulments of marriages and therefore define marriage), the judges never examine their merits. It is true that, on the purely practical plane in which they operate we might allow them a justification in their favor: but, on this practical plane, if they can ignore Faith and Hope, they cannot, however, ignore Charity.

And this is what is so horrible. Charity, which is the highest of the sentiments of the Gospel and the only one that is autonomous (one can have Charity without Faith and Hope: but without Charity, Faith and Hope can even be monstrous), is here degraded to a pure pragmatic measure of a self-absorbed apathy [*qualunquismo*] and a cynicism that is just scandalous. Charity seems to serve no other purpose than stripping men down to their most miserable and squalid nakedness as creatures: without either pardoning them or understanding them, after having so cruelly stripped them. Pessimism towards the earthly man is too total for allowing for any impetus of forgiveness and understanding. This casts an obscure, leaden light over everything. And I see nothing less religious, nothing more disgusting, than this.

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Prison and the Fraternity of Homosexual Love

The pretext for my article is an another article published in a newspaper that belongs to the same opposition ideology to which I subscribe; and it was probably written by a

totally innocent colleague, who had no idea of the enormity of what he wrote and who, therefore, I do not want to attack in a direct polemic.

The topic of the article in question is “sex in Italian prisons”: a theme that was suggested to its author by a recent incident. A fifteen year old boy from Milan was caught while committing a minor theft and, after having been sentenced to serve time in a prison for minors, was sent instead, due to a lack of accommodations, to the adult prison at San Vittore. He was put in a cell with two other prisoners (some newspapers said they were adults, others say they were also minors, or at least very young men), who tried to take advantage of him. He resisted and had to endure the violent reaction of his cellmates. Everyone knows that “there is no intention on the part of the executioner that is not suggested to him by the look on the face of his victim” (and that Maria Goretti, let’s say, is as responsible for her own sacrifice at least as much as the sacrificer). Which does not obviate the fact that the incident in the cell at San Vittore is brutal, offensive, and odious: like everything that reduces a “man” to a “thing”. Moreover, it would have been just as odious (according to gradation that is irrelevant with respect to substance), if, instead of a boy, it was a girl, or a woman or an adult male: basically, in fact, it was a schizoid exercise of power (in this case of the archaic and individual power of physical force) that dissociates the other from himself and despoils him of that minimum essential of freedom that is the freedom of one’s own body.

There are laws for the punishment of such incidents: and the Italian criminal code—in this case, with surprising wisdom and perhaps in spite of my friend DeMarsico—makes no distinctions with regard to gender. This is not to say that when Italian progressives talk about reforming the legal code, they are thinking in terms of changing this aspect of the code. But they might very well be thinking just such a thing—at least to judge by the article to which I am responding (which is not, furthermore, a rare exception—quite the contrary).

This is what I want to say about this incident. The intellectual world of Italian “progressives”, having buried ’68 with relief, has retained some of its features, which it evidently found congenial. Among these features is a blackmailing sense of urgency, the neurotic anxious imperative of immediate reform. This urgency has a noble cultural pedigree: the “Paradise Now” of the pre-radical-protest American New Left (that is, a typically “reformist” cultural milieu); the verbalism and terroristic vehemence by means of which, however, this urgency is normally expressed today (and this is also the case with respect to the article in question) does not have such a noble pedigree: it is born directly from the cultural inclinations of the Italian petty bourgeois, eternally obsessed and incited by its own “unhappy consciousness”. An “unhappy consciousness” that makes it frantic, ready for anything—an unstable mass waiting for the first person to preach the preeminence of action over thought (which is in turn improvised on a plane that is by definition sub-cultural: in which Marxist ideology is applied by forcing it into the mold of sociology, not Marxist but fashionable sociology, plus the leftovers and horrendous clichés of apathetic individualist [*qualunquista*] humanism and Catholicism). With blind insistence, that gratifies him and blackmails everyone else, the average Italian intellectual never misses an opportunity to nobly rise up in defense of a whole series of

causes now recognized as just by the whole body of the intelligentsia: it does not matter if right up until yesterday he had nothing to do with them, ignored them and considered them to be utopian and unpopular. One of these causes is prison reform.

Swept along by a kind of *raptus*, the Italian intellectual milieu, knowing that it is totally, indisputably, on the side of reason, can hardly resist expressing its indignation in highly emotional outbursts (which, I repeat, are gratifying for it) concerning prison conditions and, in general, its own intransigence in calling for immediate reforms. And I agree (I made a film about this topic in 1962) that these reforms must be implemented, and that they must be implemented “immediately”. But I also know that while I still believe this today and voice my concerns, I can only do so within the context of a general campaign of tolerance ordered by power: which, in this case, needs my autonomous thought, my Marxist ideology and my radical passion to implement certain reforms that it now considers to be necessary (and for the purpose of which it cannot find any suitable “ideologues” among its own traditional staff).

It is this tolerance on the part of power—in which the member of the opposition can behave with such noble and exaggerated aggressiveness—that I shall analyze and unmask. When it comes right down to it, this is the reason for a whole series of mistakes and erroneous perspectives (moral, ideological, political). For example: all prisoners are “good”, they are “on our side”. Their struggle for reforms is defended not only indiscriminately (and that is good) but even with a terroristic insistence. This gives rise to ridiculous contradictions. In the case at hand, for instance, the prisoners who tried to rape a boy are “bad”: but they are only “bad” in a “radical” way, according to the most backwards morality of the old power. So how can they also, at the same time, be our good brothers, whose struggles for reforms arouse not only our ideological solidarity, but our human sympathy? This is the place—for an intellectual—to confront the contradiction: how not to present as “bad” men, in order to make them candidates for a lynching, those unfortunates (as Manzoni would say) who have found no other solution for their miserable desire to make love than to engage in abject violence against a weaker person. Another example: the tolerance of power in the domain of sexuality is unambiguous (and therefore essentially more repressive than ever before): it concedes many more rights than in the past to the heterosexual couple, even outside of marriage: but, first and foremost, this “couple” is presented as an obsessively obligatory model, just like the consumer-automobile couple, for example.

Not owning an automobile, or not being part of a couple, now that everyone “must” own an automobile and “must” be part of a couple (the two-faced monster of consumerism), can only be considered a major misfortune, and an intolerable frustration. Thus, heterosexual love—so permissible as to be compulsory—has become a kind of “social erotomania”. Furthermore, this sexual freedom was neither desired nor conquered from below, but was, in fact, granted from above (by way of a false concession of the consumerist and hedonistic power to the old idealistic demands of the progressive elites).

Finally, “all of this only concerns the majority”. Minorities—more or less clearly definable—are excluded from the great neurotic binge. Those who are still classically

“poor”, many categories of women, ugly people, invalids and, to return to our topic, homosexuals, are excluded from the exercise of this freedom conceded to the majority who, although themselves enjoying a tolerance that is nonetheless illusory, have never in fact been so intolerant.

The author of the article in question who addressed the question of sex in prison, acting as the spokesman for the majority, has behaved like a perfect racist. Homosexuals and homosexuality are viewed as forms of “Evil”: but of a remote Evil, transferred to a place occupied by the “Other”. Where it becomes monstrous, demonic, degrading. He does not even allow that it might be debatable: having a homosexual relationship is seen as an apocalyptic threat, a definitive condemnation that radically transforms the nature of the accused. The old Catholic sexophobia is combined with the new secular contempt for anyone who does not appreciate the goodness of the heterosexual couple, as a marvelous freedom enjoyed by no less than the overwhelming majority. Faced with the idea that (as is perfectly natural) homosexual relations exist in prisons, the average progressive intellectual is “paralyzed”: he feels that he stands before the intolerable and conducts himself with the tragic calm of someone who is profoundly shaken, but who cannot, unlike all the others, refrain from seriously confronting the problem. Dismayed, he peruses the statistics: “Twenty-two percent of homosexuals have brought their disorder to prison, but seventy-eight percent acquired it there!” “Forty-seven percent of the inmates admit . . . to having had homosexual relations with other inmates!” He turns pale when he reads the Salierno report (which, by the way, reveals—inadvertently—its fascist cultural origins). He (naturally) calls for immediate reforms, that is, a kind of “legalized stud farm”, ultimately based on the old model of legalized brothels. But the result of his intervention, in practice (and I hope that this is despite his own intentions), can only be that of granting “public” espionage authority to the prison guards who will be charged with surveillance of the sexual conduct of the prisoners and therefore will be obliged to increase their vigilance and repression. Furthermore, it would force the more impoverished prisoners to either submit to monastic abstinence or engage in masturbation. All of this is comical; but also tragic. For it is tragic that an intellectual who considers himself advanced, cultured, humane, does not understand that the only solution to the problem is, first and foremost, to reduce its scope.

It is tragic that he does not understand—in such an institutionalized and brutally conformist way—that a homosexual relationship is not Evil, or, more accurately, that there is nothing evil in a homosexual relationship. It is a sexual relationship like any other.

How can you claim to be, I will not say tolerant, but intelligent and cultured, if you do not understand this? It does not leave indelible marks, or sores that turn one into a pariah, or racial deformations. It leaves a man perfectly the same as he was before. Indeed, if anything, it helps him to more fully express his “natural” sexual potential, since there is no man who is not “also” homosexual: and this, if nothing else, is exactly what homosexuality in prisons proves.

All in all, this involves one of the many forms of liberation whose analysis and acceptance generally constitutes the pride of a modern intellectual. Anyone who has expressed—albeit in a situation of emergency—his own homosexuality (helped along by a courage that is certainly more characteristic of the common people than of the bourgeoisie: hence the class connotation of hatred of homosexuality) will no longer be, at least in this domain, a racist and a persecutor. In his human experience there will be one more “real” element of tolerance, which was not there before. And, in the best cases, his knowledge of people of his own sex will be enriched, and his relations with them can only be, naturally and inevitably, of a homoerotic nature, whether in hatred or in fraternity.

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M. Daniel – A. Baudry: *The Homosexuals*⁷³

Two French scholars have written an educational text on homosexuality, destined to replace (in a utopian way, of course) similar works of an erotic, scandalous, commercial, etc., nature on the newsstands. It is a book that purports to be honest, clear, exhaustive, democratic, moderate. And indeed it is. Contrary to my usual practice as a critic (but it is clear that in this instance I am not acting as a literary critic), I will begin by providing a series of quotations that are particularly effective for introducing the reader to a subject that is always “taboo”, as Daniel and Baudry, the authors of this “little book”, correctly argue.

1. “It is therefore necessary, at all costs, to *break down* the taboo. This is no longer an era when—everyone will undoubtedly agree—painful or delicate problems can be passed over in silence or swept under the rug.... Topics that were long considered to be prohibited, like contraceptives, abortion, or sexual relations between adolescents, are now the subjects for radio and television programs, and newspaper articles. It would be an exaggeration to say that the same thing is true—at least in France—with respect to homosexuality.”
2. “At the origin of all of this we might refer to a brief passage from Saint Paul, in his Epistle to the Ephesians: ‘Do not even talk about these things’.”
3. “Even the communications media known for their liberalism and intelligence display surprisingly conformist attitudes on this point.”
4. “In other societies that also freed themselves from Christianity, the old religious condemnation, all too deeply rooted to disappear, took the form of a false rationalism and retains all its vigor: the USSR and Cuba have severe laws against homosexuality in the name of the defense of the people against the vices of decadent capitalism.”
5. “It is significant in this sense that Hitler sent three categories of minorities to the concentration camps with the intention of exterminating them, with the same

⁷³ Editore Vallecchi, 1974.

- motivation of safeguarding the purity of the race: Jews, Gypsies, and homosexuals (homosexuals, distinguished by a pink triangle, were the object of particularly abominable treatment. They are, however, the only ones to have never obtained the right of indemnification after the war).” Furthermore, we may add, they are the only ones for whom things have remained substantially the same as before, without the least sign of any form of rehabilitation.
6. “Statistically speaking, it is therefore likely that, out of every fifteen people known by the reader, at least one is homosexual. This is an observation that is worthy of reflection.”
 7. “... there are no examples of boys who have suffered from sexual violence who have remained homosexual due to that violence. To assume the contrary, even for a second, is an evident absurdity. On the other hand, the trauma of that violence is capable of permanently turning him against homosexuality. At least as long as the violence was not in fact only an alleged attack, and as long as the boy had not, consciously or not, actually sought what happened to him.”
 8. “Nothing allows us ... to assert or to even suspect that there is the least relation of cause and effect between homosexuality and neurosis: the connection, if it exists, lies in the fact that the social condemnation of homosexuality generates neurosis.”
 9. “Judges have often displayed evidence of a surprising indulgence with respect to boys accused of having brutally injured, and sometimes even killed, a homosexual: as if, in their hearts, they thought: ‘He deserved it.’ At the same time, it is common for a homosexual, accused of any crime whatsoever, to be found guilty for the simple reason that, as a homosexual, he is guilty by definition.”
 10. “It is necessary to take into account an unconscious reaction that is well-attested by psychologists: many people who insult homosexuals are motivated solely by the refusal to admit their own incipient homosexuality. Jean-Paul Sartre expressed himself clearly on this point: ‘As for those who most vehemently attacked Genet, I am convinced that they were constantly tempted by homosexuality and just as constantly denied this temptation, the object of their deepest hatred: they are happy to abhor it in others because in this way they had an opportunity to divert attention from themselves.’”
 11. “The news coverage of homosexuality and drugs (note the significant contiguity) has nothing to do with the workers movement”, Pierre Juquin, a member of the Central Committee of the French Communist Party, declared (*Nouvel Observateur*, May 5, 1972).”
 12. “... the happiness of one-fifteenth of humanity is not a matter from which one can turn away in disinterest with a good conscience.”

The above are a dozen quotations expressing the minimum degree of obvious common sense that can be expressed concerning this subject. The “little book” by Daniel and Baudry is not totally summarized here. It is an exposé, but of a scientific nature and therefore complex.

However, there are a few more observations that should be made (which the reader will be able to understand only after having read the text in question: something that I highly recommend, by the way).

The first observation refers precisely to Freud. It is well known that only psychoanalysis is in any position to explain the nature of homosexuality. Daniel and Baudry also know this: however, on the one hand they declare, outrageously basing their analysis on common sense, their dissatisfaction with the Freudian explanations; on the other hand, they claim that Freud is the main culprit responsible for the idea that homosexuality is an “abnormality” in relation to a “normality”—the “normality” of bourgeois society—that Freud passively and perhaps viciously accepts. This does not seem fair to me. When Freud uses the term “normality” (which is always a formal and schematic outcome) he substantially understands “normality” as an *ordo naturae* that has existed without interruption in history and in society. Even in societies that were favorable to homosexuality, the “normal” was the “average”, that is, the sexual conduct of the majority. “Abnormal” is a word like any other when its meaning is rational (and not positive or negative).

This “residue” of respect for the ideas of the “normal world” that constitutes the basis of the viewpoint of the two authors who, although they claim that they are moderates, accept for the most part the “revolutionary” report of the FHAR (Front Homosexuel d’action révolutionnaire), is also demonstrated by another fact: they condemn, almost flattering the indignation of the majority, the irresponsibility of the “libertine pederast”, who exercises his erotic interest in “ephebes”, adolescents at the threshold of young adulthood. The accusation is of the usual kind: that of steering an undecided adolescent (bisexual: number 3 on Kinsey’s scale) towards homosexuality. But this contradicts everything the authors have said. That is: if someone is bisexual, he will in any event remain bisexual: if, hypothetically, he were to express a certain preference for homosexuality, *this would not be a bad thing*.

Besides, libertinism by no means excludes a pedagogical vocation. Socrates was just such a libertine: from Lysis to Phaedrus, his love affairs with boys were countless. Indeed, anyone who loves boys, can only love *all* boys (and this is, precisely, the reason for his pedagogical vocation).

Apart from that, however, to induce a boy (up until this moment innocent: which is only an entertaining hypothesis) to enter a homosexual relationship, does not imply separating him from heterosexuality. There is an “autonomous” moment in sexual life that is that of autoeroticism, not only psychological but also physical. A young man alone on a desert island will not cease to have a sexual life. As for a definition of the age of a “minor”, Daniel and Baudry struggle valiantly. A revision to the French legal code implemented during the fascist Vichy period establishes the age of adulthood at 21 years. This is just plain crazy. In Italy, where (miraculously in this domain) the Napoleonic Code is still in force, the age of adulthood is set at 16 years (and not 18, as Daniel and Baudry claim). This “fact” leads me to another consideration (and leads me to argue with some of the

positions expounded in this little book, which good sense should advise me to recommend without finding fault).

This consideration is as follows: Daniel and Baudry are trying to insert—sincerely believing in the goodness of their ideas and the efficacy of their impact—the problem of homosexuality into the context of the nascent tolerance (existentially, in the practice that is already established, even if the laws, as usual, are behind the times): a tolerance that concerns heterosexual relations (contraception, abortion, extramarital sex, divorce—and with respect to Italy—sexual relations between adolescents); only then do they connect all this to the (political) problem of minorities.

I do not believe that the current form of tolerance is real. It was dictated “from above”: it is the tolerance of the consumerist power, which needs an absolute formal flexibility in “existences” in order for unmarried people to become good consumers. An unprejudiced, free society in which couples and sexual (heterosexual) demands multiply is *therefore* one that is eager for consumer goods. For the mentality of a French liberal, it is certainly harder to understand and contextualize this fact, than it is for an Italian progressive, who grew up under fascism and lived in an agricultural and paleo-industrial society, and is therefore “defenseless” against this monstrous phenomenon. To have a girlfriend is today for a young man not a freedom but an obligation, insofar as he would otherwise be afraid of not measuring up to the freedom that has been conceded to him. Thus, there can be no more age limits. The laws that establish age limits are now derisory (and therefore apply only to homosexual relations). Beautiful souls and romantic parents (who are so terrified by the idea of being repressive) should have no illusions: between two adolescents of different genders, even though they may be very young, even pre-pubescent, today their erotic relationship is the same as it would be between two adults.

I am saying that Daniel and Baudry are mistaken in their hope that tolerance also includes homosexuality among its objectives: such would be the case if it was a real tolerance, conquered from below. It is, however, a false tolerance, which is furthermore the prelude to a period of intolerance and of racism that will be even worse than Hitler’s (although perhaps less grotesquely melodramatic [*granguignoleschi*]). Why? Because real tolerance (falsely assimilated and embraced by power) is the social privilege of educated elites; while the “popular” masses today enjoy a horrible phantom of tolerance, which makes them in reality the prey of an almost neurotic intolerance and fanaticism (that was once characteristic of the petty bourgeoisie).

Thus, for example, this little book by Daniel and Baudry can only be enjoyed and understood by educated and therefore tolerant elites: only they are in a position, perhaps, insofar as they are no longer affected by it, to free themselves from the “taboo” against homosexuality. The masses, however, are destined to accentuate yet more their Biblical phobia, if they are subject to it: if, on the other hand, they are not yet subject to it (as in Rome, Southern Italy, Sicily, and the Arab countries), then they are ready to “renounce” their popular and traditional tolerance in order to adopt the intolerance of the formally highly-developed masses of the bourgeois countries who have been rewarded with tolerance.

At this point our discourse becomes political. And the little book by Daniel and Baudry also devotes a few pages to the “political aspect” of the question. But their analysis is dominated by a form of anti-communism that, while perfectly justified with respect to the issue of homosexuality, is in any event also suspect: because it is part and parcel of that zeal for moderation and integration that practically dominates the whole book. But the analytical shortcomings of Daniel and Baudry with respect to the relation between homosexuality and politics are not derived so much from a questionable political ideology as from a questionable ideology of homosexuality. For the book by Daniel and Baudry, at least implicitly, is based on the assumption that a homosexual loves or makes love with another homosexual. But this is not altogether the case at all. A homosexual, in general (the vast majority, at least in the Mediterranean countries) loves and wants to make love to a heterosexual who is willing to have a homosexual experience, but whose heterosexuality is not even subject to the least doubt. He must be “virile”. (Hence the lack of hostility towards the heterosexual who becomes involved in a sexual relationship merely to satisfy a whim or advance his or her personal interests: something that in effect is a guarantee of his or her heterosexuality). As the only political reality that counts, Daniel and Baudry imply that homosexuals are to be found not only among the wealthy and the bourgeoisie, but also among workers and poor people. Homosexuality would therefore guarantee a sort of inter-classist ecumenicism. This is not unimportant, because it turns homosexuality into a problem, from the class perspective, that is universal and therefore inevitable. The kind of Marxism that avoids it or denies it, and even worse, rejects it with contempt, is no less dangerous than the fascist who, in the French parliament, wanted to define homosexuality as a “social calamity”. But this is not the point. The “political aspect” of homosexuality must be sought elsewhere, and it does not even matter if it is found in the margins, at the extreme limits of public life. I will refer to the example of the love between Maurice and Alec, in Forster’s wonderful novel written in 1914, and the love between the worker and the student in an equally wonderful (but unpublished) account by Saba.

In the first case, Maurice, a member of the English haute-bourgeoisie, is in love with the “body” of Alec, a servant, which is an exceptional experience: the “knowledge” of the other social class. And likewise, in an upheaval of relations, the worker with the student from Trieste. Class consciousness is not enough, if it is not supplemented by class “knowledge” (as one of my old poems says). However—apart from this exchange of practical but also enigmatic “class knowledge”, which to me, and maybe only to me, seems to be of great significance—in opposition to the inter-classism, which I have called ecumenical, of Daniel and Baudry, I will recite this passage from Lenin (from after 1917) referring to the Jews: “Most Jews are laborers, workers. They are our brothers, like us, oppressed by capital, they are our comrades. The rich Jews are like our rich people ... they oppress, they rob the workers and sow discord among them.” If you want to cause homosexuals to become “normal”, I do not know of a better way than the one Lenin suggested with respect to the Jews, which certainly does not open up on a false perspective of tolerant coexistence. Moreover, Daniel and Baudry seem to have forgotten the most important ideological response of a homosexual to the servile and ferocious pogrom of the so-called “normals”: I am referring to the suicide of the homosexual

protagonist of Cocteau's *White Book*, who took his own life because he understood that it was intolerable for a man *to be tolerated*.

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Francesco DeGaetano: *Adventures of War and Peace*⁷⁴

Concerning the relations between bourgeois "culture" and popular "culture", I have had some embittering experiences over the last few months. I have had to undergo the experience of learning that Italian intellectuals have never addressed the problem of popular "culture" and that they do not even know what it is. They think that the people have no culture because they do not have bourgeois culture; or else that their culture is that rudimentary bourgeois culture that one can learn in school or in the barracks or in any event in all one's everyday bureaucratic relations with the ruling class. The people are therefore supposed to live in a kind of pre-cultural dream, that is, a pre-moral and pre-ideological dream. Where morality and ideology are seen as the exclusive possessions of the bourgeois class (or more precisely, of the intellectuals themselves, writers, scientists, politicians).

Seen through the lens of such an extremely class-bound, not to say aristocratic, notion of "culture", the people are therefore considered as a kind of reserve army, and those who belong to this reserve army are allowed by the so-called parliamentary democracy to have an opportunity to contribute the country's "culture" only on the condition that they are capable of being called up from the reserves and of being socially "promoted". That is, as long as they are capable of accepting and embracing the "culture" of the ruling class.

I am speaking in very elementary terms because I must be didactic. Not due to conceit. But to avoid new misunderstandings. Due to my personal life, and to the choice that I made about the way I would employ my days and how I would commit my vitality and my desires, ever since I was a boy I have betrayed the bourgeois way of life (into which I was born). I broke every rule and transgressed every limit. This has given me experience—a concrete, real and dramatic experience—of the boundless world that exists below the level of bourgeois culture. The peasant world (of which the world of the urban sub-proletariat forms a part); and also the world of the workers (in the sense that a worker also belongs, in mind and body, to the popular culture). To this I have added my existential experience, and also specific interests. Linguistic interests, for example. But also ethnological and anthropological interests. I do not have a scientific background in these fields; but I do have the knowledge that comes from a profound interest. It is all of this that underlies my shock at discovering the total ignorance of most Italian intellectuals—and not just the most miserable ones, like Barbato—concerning these problems.

⁷⁴ *Avventure di guerra e di pace*, Edizioni del Formichiere, 1974.

In general, the “people” are apprehended psychologically and mythically: like an everyday “otherness”, so ontological that they do not merit further study.

The connections between dialects and popular culture are not investigated; the sedimentation of codes of conduct inherited from previous civilizations are ignored; the contribution of prior cultures to a Catholicism that has always been a class religion is considered to be purely theoretical and “remote”, etc., etc.... That “corporeally distinct” aspect that defines the common people is therefore completely dismissed, or accepted as a comical detail.

“Folk artists” can in a sense reinforce these bourgeois misunderstandings concerning the popular culture and constitute a confirmation of the just relation of paternalistic superiority with respect to the members of the popular classes.

In reality, the “folk artist” [*naif*] performs a naive operation of submission to, and in any event, acceptance of, bourgeois culture. His good will and his trust lead him to a form of integration, imperfect due to his inability to assimilate the rules and techniques of another culture (an assimilation that can be achieved only after years of study, that is, by way of the transformation of one’s own existence). The “folk artist” has neither the time nor the means for such a petty bourgeois palingenesis. He remains that man of the people that he is. But, from the moment when he takes a paint brush in his hand, or a pen, he renounces total innocence and hears from the ruling class, with whom he has been in contact from his birth, a different way of expressing himself. From this, nothing but a “pastiche” can arise, that is, a contamination between two modes of existence and two ways of speaking. But, usually, the work of a “folk artist” is a product that is supposed to exist under the sign of grace: hence its rapturous effect. While a “pastiche” is not, by its very nature, something that issues from grace (in some great writers this can lead to an exciting effect: but never quite rapturous). This means that in the works of the “folk artist”, his popular nature is prevalent and the element of “pastiche” is only on the surface. For there are in fact popular poetry and painting (the products in turn of contaminations that took place in previous eras): and their patterns prevail even in the work of the most bourgeoisified “folk artists”. Take *Adventures of War and Peace* by Francesco DeGaetano, for instance. This book consists of the memoirs (very concise: 66 pages) of a peasant from the province of Benevento, concerning for the most part his participation in two bourgeois wars, that of 1915-1918 and the Ethiopian war (in both of which he was taken prisoner). A very brief appendix tells us about the last chapter of his life (he emigrated to America). Francesco DeGaetano is practically illiterate (he only completed the second grade of elementary school), yet nonetheless, in the depths of the province of Benevento, while still an adolescent, he was touched by the siren song of another world, which he felt as superior. Superior but foreign. Irremediably foreign. In fact, as soon as he departed for the Great War—as a draftee—his enthusiasm and his curiosity quickly discredited the old world with its ferocious and stupid violence. The gaze that the young DeGaetano casts on things comes from a distant source, and, indeed, one one that is so foreign, that it politically and ideologically impoverished and ridiculed it, at least as much as, to the contrary, it phenomenologically magnified it. The war and his imprisonment, by way of this gaze, which, like that of the true poets, sees everything

and focuses on the essential—appear as an immense farce: DeGaetano has a lot of feeling but he is not sentimental, and therefore death does not upset him very much.

The gaze that the young DeGaetano casts on things, in his great adventure, is all the more poetic the more he lives and expresses himself on a level that the word, practical, can hardly encompass: it is in fact a level of pure utilitarianism put at the service of the most absolute necessity. While the bourgeois world undergoes the apocalypse, De Gaetano thinks solely and exclusively about how to obtain a crust of bread or a rag to cover himself. Oblivious to the enormity of the disproportionate desecration implied by his actions, he “muddles through”, full of good will, almost with good humor: which is the last touch to the unconscious anarchist blasphemy of his every gesture. Here is how he describes how he got ready to die: “They laid me on the bed, they covered me with some blankets, they said, ‘slofffi, sloffi’, which means ‘go to sleep’, and one of them left and the other stayed to watch me, to see when I died.”

In his second adventure, the Ethiopian war, DeGaetano was more “cunning”. He is no longer an adolescent, but a full-grown man. As for the world of the ruling class, he knows what it is all about. He participated in the war out of self-interest. For it was his goal to open up a bar in some province of the Empire. He was not afraid of the contradictions: he flew over them with the swift passage of a migratory bird. He had respect for the authorities (with whom he had a certain amount of experience), but his foreignness to them remained substantially intact. He accepted fascism (insofar as for him it was nothing but another form of power and, in his view, was not any different from the liberal power) but, precisely because it is so unreal for him, he behaves towards it with the most absolute dissociation, totally stripping it of all value, annihilating it in his own consciousness. Yet he abided by pacts of honor [*patti d'onore*] and he conducted himself with dignity when the fascist army was defeated. And during all those highs and lows his passion for life did not falter for even one instant. If something stood in his way or tied him down, he acted like the bird in the folk songs: “Every morning I went to the door like the birds in their cage....”

Now DeGaetano is seventy-three years old and lives in retirement in his native country. He has wonderfully described his situation in three verses that serve as the epigraph of the book: “As man makes his way on a long journey/before arriving at this destination he loses his way/and strays from his path.” In his life as in his writing, he accepted the patterns of conduct and the rhetorical canons intuited in a world at an infinitely higher level, and he is also convinced of having applied them: in reality he erased them with a content that is perfectly “alien”, that is, one belonging to another culture. That culture is now being destroyed by the acculturation of the most totalitarian of all Powers. It is not even conceivable that the twenty-something descendants of Francesco DeGaetano, today “acculturated” and therefore the true slaves of power, could ever be like him.

(Published in *Tempo*, July 12, 1974.)

Ferdinando Camon: *Literature and the Subaltern Classes*⁷⁵

In 1970 Ferdinando Camon published a novel entitled, *The Fifth Estate*. This “fifth estate” was the peasant sub-proletariat whose condition was experienced by Camon in an “underdeveloped” area of the Catholic Veneto. His novel is therefore above all else a novel about his childhood and his family. But it is also a judgment formulated “at the highest levels of political consciousness” concerning a world that has remained disproportionately backwards.

This disproportionality, however, does not daunt Camon. Both ideologically as well as esthetically, his is an undertaking with “no time to spare”. He stalks the theme of his novel without doubting for even an instant the extreme contemporary relevance of the problem that it constitutes. Esthetically, then, he attacks it by “re-living” it, that is, representing it by way of a long internal monologue which is characterized by the linguistic contamination between the character who says “I” (an idealized petty bourgeois who only up to a certain point coincides with the author) and the characters of the book who speak in dialect. Thus, within the book, a violent tension arises between the progressive “center”—which speaks a debased, technical and scholastic Italian—and the periphery, which speaks an unaltered, purely oral idiom, as old, one might say, as the land. Camon’s first concern was that of preserving the stability of his “pastiche” by avoiding the phenomenon of “rejection” (as he calls it), on the part of the Italian of the center, of that poor dialect that is so terribly marginal: a disgraceful relic. It should also be said that, although he reversed the reasons—by projecting them from the left, that is, instead of from the right—Camon is the first to consider this world of the dialect of his impoverished parents as a “disgraceful relic”. *The Fifth Estate* is therefore one of the most original contributions, and most poignant, to the narrative of the last few years.

Camon (as the reader will already have imagined after reading this preamble) is also a critic. His most recent book of criticism, *Literature and the Subaltern Classes*, addresses, in ideological terms, the themes that he had to deal with in his practical experience as a writer. Of particular interest in this book by Camon is the second part. Indeed, it is of more than just particular interest, I would say it is of exceptional interest. For two reasons: one subjective—concerning Camon as a “poetical person”—and one objective—that is, the fact that the book addresses the theme of the consciousness of a “popular culture” that is systematically absent from Italian scholarship. Above all with respect to his own personal story, the pages of *Literature and the Subaltern Classes* are perhaps the most beautiful ever written by Ferdinando Camon.

This is what happened: after reading *The Fifth Estate*, an older relative of his wrote a letter to Camon that is an extraordinary text. It is a critique, intolerant and indignant, but at the same time invincibly delicate, of the novel of the “prodigal son” or “*enfant prodige*”: this novel is considered to be scandalous and undignified because it uses and manipulates real people and real events, inaccurately, tendentiously, shamelessly, and for a self-serving moral purpose, with guile and cunning. In short, the book casts discredit

⁷⁵ Marsilio Editore, 1974.

and dishonor on Camon's family and on its poor peasant village, violating the code, that is, the code of honor [*l'omertà*], the code of silence, the code of human respect. All these things are said in a "style" against which the critic is powerless to either define or describe. Here we are face to face with the "oral culture" of the subaltern class, its values and its spirit, which are translated into expressive and interpretive codes that cannot be expressed in the language of the culture of the ruling class. It is understood that this inexpressible character is due to the lack of terminology, that is, the lack of any real interest in these codes and the consequent absence of a critical tradition that would address them. I am therefore rendered utterly incapable of expressing what the text of this "humble" relative of Camon's is figuratively saying. To obtain an approximate understanding, it would fall somewhere in the spectrum what would for us be a "pamphlet", a "sermon", a "critical essay", or a "diatribe", but it is by no means any of these things. Its similarities with these structural "figures" are entirely accidental; just as the references to notions and terms that its author obtained from above are also entirely accidental: parish culture (which seems to be very well organized in the Veneto) and the *mass-media*.⁷⁶ The predominant quality of the whole letter is its "informal" character in which the voice and the sentiment of the author invent a totally new space, while perfectly preserving their ingenuousness: the childlike grace of the moralism of an old peasant.

Camon's response to this letter is totally unexpected. And, I must say, worthy of his elderly relative. Instead of earnestly accepting the criticism that came from the heart of the old man's existence and looking for a grain of truth in his criticism, Camon responds with almost the same Biblical indignation that is displayed in the old man's letter. And, what is even more unexpected, he translates this indignation into the cold terminology of criticism, "plunging headlong" into a ruthless textual analysis, so as to demolish the enemy's text point by point. With scientific lucidity, Camon distinguishes inauthentic sources, applied interpretive codes, interpolations, and, above all, he analyzes the particular paleo-Catholic ideology, typical of the "structures of scarcity", under whose aegis that text was written. While so engaged, Camon repudiates all contact with the "person" of his opponent: not only does he not address him directly, but he does not even count him among the possible recipients of his response. He is eliminated as an interlocutor. Camon directly addresses his canonic audience: that is, an intellectual of his own culture, bypassing the culture of the "subaltern classes", which is considered, at least tentatively, as a reality concerning which only "the others" can speak.

I will say it again: Camon's "self-defense" is very beautiful: written in "jargon", it is true, but at the same time with concreteness and simplicity (as its practical recipient requires). The speech in self-defense of the accused is as good as—in another cultural universe—the speech of the Biblical old relative who speaks for the prosecution. Within it there is the same fanaticism and the same existential uncertainty: the shame of being a peasant.

Finally, Camon comes to the particular and justified sentence that he pronounces against his old relative: he is a moralist paleo-Catholic, a sanfedist, basically a provincial: he is,

⁷⁶ In English in the original [American translator's note].

in short, the archetype of the petty bourgeois “in his native habitat”, before his mentality was affected by the arrival of a new world, that of industrialization. I cannot say that Camon is wrong: that is actually the way it is. But I cannot say he is right, either. Due to the simple fact that the “form” in which his old peasant relative expresses himself, adds something to that content that Camon so perfectly analyzed (as well as in its particular formal results). And this “something” added by the form, is inseparable from the judgment. It ends up nullifying both Camon’s ingenuous attitude as well as his pitiless critical examination.

Now, this “something” added by the form, is extraordinarily similar to that “something” that exists in another text analyzed by Camon in his book, a test-sample Apulian text (Marco DiMauro, *Bello Stabile*) that Camon considers to be antithetical to the Venetian test-sample. So that this “something” (which is the manner of expression) that these two texts have in common, as ineffably as indissolubly, means that the antithesis of the two texts (the first, Catholic and moralistic; the second, humanistic and individualist, etc.) is a historical antithesis whose meaning is partial. For, first of all, all peasant cultures are not just Catholic: there is a continuum of Catholicism, Christianity, paganism, and primitive religions. Second, they are not national: they exist in a transnational context, which is furthermore even more extensive than the “third world”. By trying to disseminate or, more accurately, to provide a basis for the consciousness of the “culture of the subaltern classes”, as Camon attempts to do with such acuity, we must not overlook the stylistic quality of their “expressive” texts that is essentially identical in the “popular cultures” all over the world (at least as they have existed until now). The expressive and interpretive code of the “humble” is enormously stratified and its stratifications by no means correspond to the stages of official history.

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Against Official Authoritativeness in History: Unclassifiable Testimonies⁷⁷

Ferdinando Camon, in his book, *Literature and the Subaltern Classes*, delineates a kind of schema of the relations between the educated writer and popular culture. These relations are linguistically very complicated; and furthermore, Camon’s schema does not seek to completely address them, insofar as he applies it to practical questions concerning above all the relation with the “audience” (what is the “subaltern” or popular audience, for an educated writer; and what is the educated audience, for a popular writer).

⁷⁷ *Bamboo Chimneys: 99 Chinese Poems Written Since the Great Leap Forward*, introduction, translated and annotated by Anna Busatti, Officina Ed., 1974; Sciortino Pasquale, *Orange Blossoms, Oranges and Lemons*, Vallecchi, 1974.

For when an educated writer imitates—by way of free and indirect discourse—the language spoken by common folk, the scope of this mimesis of his has practically no limits. Besides, the languages of the subaltern classes that he can imitate are countless.

But even when a “subaltern” writer decides to “write”—by way of a “stimulus” (as Camon says) that is always by its nature inaugural—he has before him infinite perspectives and within him infinite possibilities. He may have studied much, or only a little, or not at all. He can present himself as a “writer” to readers who are his peers or he may even seek to have as his audience (unconsciously “fawning” over them) the rich and the educated, etc. The most well-known and widespread case, although it is not typical, is that of the “primitive” [“naïf”] writer (I discussed this in my article on Francesco DeGaetano’s *Adventures of War and Peace*). The “primitive” writer promotes himself in a situation of subordination in relation to an official culture of which he knows nothing more than that it exists. This implies a submission to the *a priori* image that the ruling class has and wants to continue to have of him. He submits to being a “comical figure”. This results in a voluntary attenuation of the irreducible characteristics of a person who lives the culture, “alien” and profoundly “foreign”, of the ruled social class.

But there are also other “popular” writers who are not exactly “primitive”. For example, those who have written under the guidance of others (of a priest, or a sociologist). This is the case of the writers of the “leggera” (that is, the sub-proletariat of northern Italy) who are discussed by Camon, in his analysis of a book that was published a few years ago, *Autobiografie della leggera*, edited by Danilo Montaldi. Writers of this genre are, so to speak, “transcribed” or, more accurately, “recorded”. It is an operation that I myself undertook in my first novel, *The Dream of a Thing* (in a chapter in which a Friulian peasant who emigrated to Switzerland recounts, in the first person, his adventure); it is an operation that has been performed by Danilo Dolci, who compiled the biographies of Sicilian peasants; and it is an operation, finally, that was performed by Dacia Maraini, in a style reminiscent of Calvino, in her very beautiful *Memorie di una ladra* [Memoirs of a Female Thief]. In this case, although the narrators still have the “style” of a “primitive”, they do not, however, have even a slightly euphemistic tendency, or reverential awe, or self-restraint. They tell their stories, and because for them (to get the job done) *nomina sunt res*,⁷⁸ their stories make the transition from life by restoring, without boring us, its excruciating character of “givenness”.

For a later work that I would like to see Camon write, two books published recently have enabled me to identify two new “cases”.

The first (concerning which I can only speak briefly, given my specific lack of competence), is an anthology of Chinese poems, convincingly edited by Anna Busatti. These poems were written since the *Great Leap Forward*: the “multimillion poem” composed in China, in fact, by millions of worker-poets (two million poems in the small city of Tengshan alone). A frenzied outburst (modest editions, daily wall posters, public readings) which has destroyed the convention of the relation between author and

⁷⁸ Latin: “names are things”.

audience, that is, between the intellectual and the masses. Everyone is an author and everyone is part of the audience: this was the ideological assumption. We are in a world where the “subaltern class” has seized power and where therefore there can no longer be any meaning in the distinction between “literature” and the “people”.

Characteristic of these millions of poems is traditional formalism. The “form” is a privilege which the people have taken into their own hands, to express new contents. They did not find it necessary to be avant-garde: for those who have never used the medium, it is new in itself. It cannot be said, however, that reading these anthologies is as exciting as it is interesting. The worker-poets are prisoners of a euphoria that seems quite disastrous. Everything is fine, everything is wonderful, everyone loves one another: it is an obsession. There is a person who is poor and good, Li Ying, who is not otherwise more specifically identified, who is presented with some of his little children and with some very nice, little old people; and also a “collective” (the Group for Artistic Creation of the Datia commune, in the Xinjin district): and it is no coincidence that they are peasant versifiers, who talk about their village, where, finally, the great Optimism of the famous Leap Forward becomes “creative”: but it is necessary to take into account that the agricultural world of China does not have, so it would seem, nostalgic connotations, but progressive ones.

The second case is a novel by Pasquale Sciortino, the brother-in-law of Salvatore Giuliano. It is entitled *Orange Blossoms, Oranges and Lemons*: this title is extremely inconsistent with the author’s character, so inconsistent that it makes you think that it was someone else’s idea. Sciortino was just released from prison. This is therefore the novel of a prisoner who is now a very well-known and much-discussed “case”. What is special in Sciortino’s case is the fact that he is a highly-educated man. His “subaltern” origins did not prevent him from obtaining a diploma from the Convitto di Catania. Furthermore, his “career” as a gangster allowed him to frequent, first in Sicily, and then in America, a milieu whose culture is certainly not that of the common people (although it is not literary, either). In reality, Sciortino was completely “transformed” into a petty bourgeois. And in prison, evidently, he was exposed to a bookish culture. However, the popular characteristics—belonging to the otherness of the popular culture—were irreducible in him.

In his book, Sciortino often contrasts—and does so quite deliberately—Mafia and State. And in fact, his real culture was that of the Mafia, although later the State put a prison library at his disposal that gave him the opportunity to read Lombroso and Hegel, DeAmicis and Tolstoy. Here is a summary of his most recent experience with the justice system: “Interrogated in court presided over by the Honorable Mario Scelba ... the Honorable Bernardo Mattarella ... by the Prince Gianfranco Alliata di Montereale and by the deputy Leone Marchesano, refused to make any statement”: there is no doubt that what dominates Sciortino’s language as a novelist, too, is the silence of the Mafia. A culture of King Arthur and Punch and Judy (as for mythography) that is not however presented as “inferior” as opposed to the immense culture of the State: indeed, it is presented with aggressive violence, as an alternative and competitor.

Silence is, however, as eloquent as it is ambiguous. Eloquence (the eloquence of silence) and ambiguity characterize Sciortino's novel. His eloquence is precisely Carolingian in its depths, but also humanistic, and even enlightened, in its historical layer. Against the State, the greatest, most real, most terrible weapon is silence: but this "eloquence of silence" is no joke: it is entirely derisory, detached, contemptuous, and, in its own way, brutally aristocratic. Inventing or combining this "biography" of a small-time Sicilian criminal (who tells the story of his life to his cellmates), may seem paradoxical, but Sciortino adopted the same stylistic forms as the Marquis de Sade. Every one of his pages is—a little more humbly and, with respect to its content, much more prudently—a page from *Justine* or from *One Hundred Twenty Days*. You must not think, however, that this humility and prudence are due to respect. They are due, instead, to a supreme contempt. Sciortino proclaims that he loves "euphemism", but evidently, out of insolence: to compose a caricature of that official and universal writing that he in fact imitates, sadistically. Actually, his philosophy knows no limits in its contempt for the State and its cultural institutions. With a double-edged language, of Lombrosian criminality—unfathomable and elusive rather than refractory—Sciortino discredits and nullifies even anarchy itself, which might possibly be considered to be his essential ideology: no, anarchy, too, is an institution for "slackers" [*polentoni*]. Father Vipera, who, with the deliberate enunciation and linguistic rotundity of a Socratic-Boccaccian dialogue, plays the role of the devil's advocate in the prison cell (that is, of a rather pedagogical Legality and Respectability), is no less ferocious and immoral than the narrator. The Dialogues (reminiscent of the *Philosophie du Boudoir*) which alternate with the narrative are perfectly sacrilegious, and the participants never lose their absolute calm and self-control. Along with the eloquence of "mafioso" silence there is also, as we said, ambiguity: the ambiguity of Sciortino structurally consists in having narrated another biography instead of his own, by speaking therefore of the Mafia as it would have looked when seen by another and not by him, thereby deceiving and evading the reader just as he deceived and eluded the justice of the State. Nor can you blame him: in view of the fact that the State needed the Mafia, it is clear that Sciortino knows the State very well....

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Genocide⁷⁹

You will please excuse me if I use some imprecise or inaccurate terminology. The (preestablished) subject is not literary, and unfortunately or fortunately it is the case that I am a writer and therefore I do not possess the proper terms to discuss it. It is also preestablished that what I will say is not the product of political experience in the specific

⁷⁹ This article is the text of a presentation delivered at the Summer 1974 Conference of *Unità* held in Milan. The written version was transcribed by the editors of *Rinacista*. My own "voice" may be heard in this text and therefore I did not exclude this repetitive and stubborn writing from this volume.

and, so to speak, professional sense of the word, but of experience of a sort that is more or less existential.

I will say right away and you will already have guessed this, that my thesis is very pessimistic, more bitter and painfully critical than Napolitano's. Its theme is genocide: I think that the destruction and replacement of values in today's Italian society is leading, although without massacres and mass shootings, to the suppression of large areas of society itself. Moreover, this is by no means a totally heretical or heterodox assertion. In Marx's *Manifesto* there is a passage that clearly and precisely describes the extremes of genocide that are carried out by the bourgeoisie with relation to certain strata of the ruled classes, above all the classes that are not working class, but sub-proletarian or various colonial populations. Today, Italy is dramatically experiencing this phenomenon for the first time: large layers of the population, which had previously remained, so to speak, outside of history—the history of bourgeois rule and of the bourgeois revolution—have suffered this genocide, that is, this assimilation to the ways and quality of life of the bourgeoisie.

How did this supplanting of values happen? I maintain that it is taking place today in a clandestine manner, by way of a kind of hidden persuasion. Whereas in Marx's time there was still an explicit, open violence, colonial conquest, violent coercion, today the process is more subtle, clever and complex, the process is much more mature and technically profound. The new values replace the old ones by stealth, and perhaps it is not even necessary to say this in view of the fact that the major ideological discourses are almost entirely unknown to the masses (television, to give an example to which I will return, will certainly not broadcast the speech by Cefis to the students of the Academy of Modena).

I can explain this better if I return to my usual way of speaking, that is, as a writer. These days I am writing a work in which I confront this theme in an imaginative and metaphorical way: I imagine a kind of descent into the underworld, where the protagonist, to experience the genocide of which I am speaking, strolls down the main avenue of a neighborhood in a big southern city, probably Rome, and he has a series of visions, each of which corresponds to one of the streets that cross the main avenue. Each is a kind of infernal pit, and there are circles of Hell like in the *Divine Comedy*: at the entrance to each cross street there is a particular model of life that is unobtrusively set up there by the powers that be, to which the young people above all, and even more the young men, who live on that street, rapidly accommodate themselves. They have lost their old model of life, the one that they adapted to by living and with which they were in a way satisfied and even proud even if it entailed all the miseries and disadvantages that once existed and still exist—I agree—like the ones mentioned by Napolitano: and then they try to imitate the new model clandestinely set up there by the ruling class. Naturally, I enumerate a whole series of behavioral models, about fifteen of them, corresponding to the ten circles and five pits. For the sake of brevity, I will describe only three of them: but I will say that mine is a city of the center-south and the discourse applies only relatively to the people who live in Milan, in Turin, in Bologna, etc.

There is, for example, the model that presides over a certain inter-class hedonism, which is imposed on the young people who unconsciously imitate it, adjust their behavior to it, in the way they dress, in the shoes they wear, in the way they wear their hair and laugh, in the way they move or gesticulate in accordance with what they see in the advertisements for the major industrial products: advertisements that refer, almost racially, to the petty bourgeois way of life. The results are obviously pitiful, because an impoverished young person in Rome is not yet in any position to effectively embrace these models and this creates in him or her the anxieties and frustrations that lead to the threshold of neurosis. Or there is the model of false tolerance, of permissiveness. In the big cities and the rural areas of the center-south a certain type of popular morality used to exist, one that was rather free, to be sure, yet contains taboos that were characteristic of it rather than of the bourgeoisie; it was not hypocrisy, for example, but simply a kind of code by which the whole population abided. At a certain moment, power needed a different type of subject, one that was above all else a consumer, and this subject could not be a perfect consumer if he or she was not conceded a certain degree of permissiveness in the sexual domain. But the backward Italian youth also attempted to adapt to this model in a foolish, desperate and always neurotic way. Or, finally, a third model, which I call aphasia, the loss of linguistic capacity. All central-southern Italy had its own regional and municipal traditions, of living language, of dialects that were regenerated by continuous invention and within those dialects, rich jargons of inventions that were almost poetic: to which everyone contributed, day by day, every evening a witty new phrase was born, a joke, an unforeseen word, there was a marvelous linguistic vitality. The model that is now installed there by the ruling class has linguistically blocked these developments. In Rome, for example, no one is any longer capable of invention, a kind of aphasic neurosis has fallen upon the city; one either speaks in a false language, which experiences neither difficulties or resistances, as if everything was easily discussible—they express themselves as if they were in a book—or, on the other hand, one succumbs to real aphasia in the clinical sense of the word. One is incapable of inventing metaphors and real linguistic movements, one almost grunts, or thrashes about, or laughs out loud without being able to say anything.

This is only to give a brief summary of my infernal vision, which, however, I am presently living existentially. Why has this tragedy been inflicted on at least two-thirds of Italy? Why this genocide due to the acculturation deceitfully imposed by the ruling classes? Because the ruling class has drawn a solid line of demarcation between “progress” and “development”. It is only interested in development, because it is only from development that it extracts its profits. We have to once and for all make a drastic distinction between the two terms: “progress” and “development”. One can conceive of development without progress, a monstrosity that is what approximately two-thirds of Italy is currently experiencing; but it is also possible to conceive of a kind of progress without development, which is what would happen if, in a few peasant districts, new cultural and civil ways of life were to be applied, with or without a minimum of material development. What is necessary—and this is in my opinion the role of the communist party and the progressive intellectuals—is to become aware of this horrible dissociation and to bring this consciousness to the popular masses precisely so that it will disappear, and so that development and progress may coincide.

What kind of development does power want to impose instead? If you want to understand it better, you should read the speech given by Cefis to the students at Modena which I mentioned earlier, and you will find a notion of development as multinational power—or transnational, as the sociologists say—a power based upon, among other things, an army that is no longer national, technologically extremely advanced, but alien to the reality of its own country. All of this sweeps away, all at once, traditional fascism, which was based on nationalism or clericalism, old ideals, of course, but false; but in reality what is being established is a completely new and even more dangerous form of fascism. Allow me to explain. In our country, as I have said, a replacement of values and models is underway, in which the mass media and most of all television have played a leading role. In saying this I am by no means saying that these media are in and of themselves negative: indeed, I agree that they could constitute great instruments of cultural progress. Up until now, however, as they have been used, they are means of appalling regression, of development precisely without progress, of cultural genocide for at least two-thirds of the Italian people. Viewed in this light, the results of May 12 also contain an element of ambiguity. In my opinion, a major role in the “No” vote was played by television, for example, which over the last twenty years has clearly devalued all religious content: yes, we have often seen the Pope on television pronouncing blessings, or Cardinals attending inaugural ceremonies, or countless religious processions and funerals, but these were counterproductive for the goals of religious consciousness. What in fact took place, at least on an unconscious level, was a profound process of secularization, which delivered the masses of the center-south to the power of the mass-media and through them to the real ideology of power: to the hedonism of the consumerist power.

That is why it occurred to me to point out—in a perhaps too violent and exaggerated manner—that in the “No” vote there is a double meaning: on the one hand, real and conscious progress, in which the communists and the left played a major role; on the other hand, however, a false kind of progress, through which Italians have accepted divorce due to the secular demands of bourgeois power: because anyone who accepts divorce is a good consumer. This is why, because I love the truth, and out of a painful sense of critical duty, I can add a prediction of an apocalyptic order: if the part played by power should prevail among the masses who voted “No”, it will be the end of our society. This will not happen, because it is precisely in Italy that there is a strong communist party, and a very advanced and progressive *intelligenza*; but the danger exists. The destruction of values that is underway does not imply an immediate substitution of other values, with their good and their evil, with the necessary improvement of the standard of living along with real cultural progress. There is, during the transition, an imponderable moment and it is precisely this conjuncture that we are presently experiencing; and it is here that the great and tragic danger resides. Consider what an economic recession could mean under these circumstances and you will certainly not confront without a shudder, even for an instant, the comparison—perhaps arbitrary, perhaps imaginative—with the Germany of the 1930s. There is some similarity between our industrialization process of the last ten years and the German industrialization process of the 1930s: it was in just such conditions that consumerism paved the way, with the recession of the 1920s, for Nazism.

This is the desperate fear of a man of my generation, a man who saw the war, the Nazis, the SS, a man who has suffered trauma that he has never completely overcome. When I see the young people around me who are losing the old popular values and absorbing the new values imposed by capitalism, thus running the risk of succumbing to a kind of inhumanity, an atrocious form of aphasia, a brutal absence of critical capacity, a conformist passivity, I recall that these were precisely the typical characteristics of the SS: and I thus see the horrendous shadow of the swastika extending over our city. My vision is apocalyptic, of course. But if along with this vision and the anxiety that produces it, there was not also an element of optimism, the conviction that there is a possibility of fighting against all of this, then I simply would not be here, among you, to speak.

(Published in *Rinascita*, September 27, 1974.)

Fascist⁸⁰

Today there is an archeological form of anti-fascism that is also a good pretext for laying claim to being a real anti-fascist. This is a facile anti-fascism that has for its object and its target an archaic fascism that no longer exists and will never exist again. Let's start with Naldini's recent film, *Fascista*. So this film, which examines the problem of the relation between a leader and the crowd, has proven that both the leader, Mussolini, as well as the crowd, are absolutely archeological characters. A leader like that is today absolutely inconceivable not only by virtue of the nullity and the irrationality of what he says, for the logical vacuity behind what he says, but also because there is absolutely no place, and no credibility, for him, in the modern world. Television alone would be all it would take to annihilate him, to destroy him politically. The techniques of that kind of leader were good on stage, at a rally, in front of an "oceanic" crowd, but they would be totally ineffective on a television screen.

This is not just a simple, surface-level, purely technical assertion, it is symbolic of a total transformation of our way of being, of the way we communicate with each other. And the same is true of the crowd, that "oceanic" crowd. You need only take a look at the faces of that crowd to see that such a crowd no longer exists, that they are dead, they are buried, they are our ancestors. That is all it you need to understand that fascism will never be repeated. This is why a good part of today's anti-fascism, or at least what passes for anti-fascism, is either naive and stupid, or it is pretentious and in bad faith: because it fights, or pretends to fight, a phenomenon that is dead and buried, in fact, an archeological phenomenon, which can no longer frighten anybody. In short, it is a comfortable and relaxed anti-fascism.

⁸⁰ Interview with Massimo Fini. See the footnote appended to the previous selection.

I believe, I profoundly believe, that the real fascism is the one that the sociologists have called, with too much good will, “consumer society”. A definition that seems innocuous, purely nominal. It is not, however. If you take a close look at the reality and above all if you know how to read the objects, the landscape, the city-scape, and, above all, the men around you, you see that the results of this carefree consumer society are the results of a dictatorship, of a real and true fascism. In Naldini’s film, we have seen the young men regimented and in uniform.... With one difference, however. At the very moment when those young men took off their uniforms and went home to their villages and fields, they once again became the Italians of a hundred or fifty years earlier, the way they were before fascism.

In fact, fascism turned them into clowns, into slaves or even to some extent convinced some of them, but it did not profoundly affect them, deep down in their souls, in their way of being. This new fascism, this consumer society, on the other hand, has profoundly transformed the young people, it has penetrated deep into their souls, it has given them other feelings, other ways of thought, of living, other cultural models. It is no longer, as in the era of Mussolini, a superficial regimentation, all staged and play-acting, but a real regimentation that has robbed them and transformed their souls. Which ultimately means that this “consumer civilization” is a dictatorial civilization. To summarize, if the word fascism means the arrogance of power, “consumer society” has very effectively realized fascism.

A marginal role. This is why I said that reducing anti-fascism to a struggle against these people is to engage in mystification. For me, the struggle is much more complicated, but also much more clear; the real fascism, as I have repeatedly said, is that of consumer society and the Christian Democrats are, although without realizing it, the real, authentic fascists of our time. In this context the “official” fascists are nothing but continuation of an archeological variety of fascism: and as such they should not even be taken into consideration. In this sense, Almirante, no matter how much he tries to modernize that kind of fascism, as far as I am concerned is just as ridiculous as Mussolini. Instead, a more real danger is posed today by the young fascists, from the neo-Nazi fringe of fascism that now has a few thousand fanatic supporters, but which tomorrow could become an army.

In my opinion, Italy is today undergoing something similar to what happened in Germany on the eve of fascism. In Italy, too, you see those phenomena of homogenization and of the abandonment of the old peasant, traditional, local and regional values; this homogenization constituted the soil in which the Nazi movement grew in Germany. There is an enormous mass of unstable persons who are fluctuating, in a state of the imponderability of values, but who have not yet embraced the new values born from industrialization. These are the people who are becoming petty bourgeois but who are still not either one or the other. In my opinion, the nucleus of the Nazi army was

constituted precisely by this hybrid mass, by this human material from which, in Germany, the Nazis came. And Italy is exposed to that same danger, now.

As for the fall of fascism, first of all it is a contingent, psychological fact. The victory, the enthusiasm of victory, the reborn hopes, the sense of rediscovering freedom and a whole new way of existence, made men better after the liberation. Yes, better, purely and simply.

But then there is another, even more real fact: the fascism that the men of that time had experienced, those who had been anti-fascists and had gone through the experience of the 1920s, the war, and the Resistance, were, in short, living under a fascism that was better than today's fascism. Those twenty years of fascism, I think, never claimed as many victims as the fascism of just the last few years. Horrible events like the massacres in Milan, Brescia and Bologna never occurred in all the twenty years of the old fascism. There was the assassination of Matteotti, true, there were other victims on both sides, but the arrogance, the violence, the evil, the inhumanity, and the cold-bloodedness of the crimes that have been committed since December 12, 1969, were never seen before in Italy. This is why there is more hatred, more scandal, a lesser ability to forgive.... It is just that this hatred is directed, in certain cases due to good faith and in others to bad faith, at the wrong target, at the archeological fascists instead of at the real power.

Let's follow the black trail [*pista nera*]. I had an idea, perhaps somewhat bizarre, but I think it is correct, about the affair. The novel goes like this. The men in power, and I might be able to provide the names now without fear of being too mistaken—in any event some of the men who have been ruling us for the last thirty years—first implemented the anti-communist strategy, and then, once concerns over the events of 1968 and the immediate communist threat had subsided, these same, identical men then implemented the anti-fascist strategy of tension. The massacres were therefore always perpetrated by the same persons. First, they arranged for the massacre at the Piazza Fontana and accused the left wing extremists, then they carried out the massacres in Brescia and Bologna and accused the fascists and made rapid and furious attempts to cloak themselves under the spotless mantle of the anti-fascist cause that they needed after the campaign for the referendum and then after the referendum in order to remain in power as if nothing had happened.

As for the episodes of intolerance you mentioned, I would not define them as intolerance. Or at least it is not the intolerance typical of consumer society. What we have here are actually cases of ideological terrorism. Unfortunately, the left is currently existing in a state of terrorism that arose in 1968 and which still prevails today. I would not say that a professor who, responding to the emotional blackmail of a certain kind of *gauchisme*, refuses to give a passing grade to a right wing student, is intolerant. I would say he is terrorized. Or terroristic. But this type of ideological terrorism only bears a formal similarity to fascism. Both the one and the other are terrorists, this is true. But under the schemas of these two sometimes identical forms, we must recognize profoundly different

realities. Otherwise we would inevitably end up accepting the theory of the “opposed extremes”, or “Stalinism equals fascism”.

But I called these episodes terrorism rather than intolerance because, in my opinion, the real intolerance is that of consumer society, of the permissiveness conceded from above, and desired from above, which is the real, the worst, the most deceitful, the coldest and the most ruthless form of intolerance. Because it is intolerance disguised as tolerance. Because it is not real. Because it can be revoked whenever power feels the need to do so. Because it is the real fascism from which this fashionable anti-fascism is descended: this useless, hypocritical anti-fascism that is essentially welcomed by the regime.

(Published in *L'Europeo*, December 26, 1974.)

Butting Heads with the Scapegoat

I insist. Casalegno is behaving exactly with the thoughtless aggression of a crook or a whore. I will explain why. He maintains that my ideas are confused. Then he attributes to me a series of contradictions, which are indeed confused, born from his own head. For example: first he claims that I “avoided . . . Lombrosian arguments comparing the measurements of the cranium and political activity”, then he claims that I think that “the Christian Democratic hierarchs do not look like the comrades of Il Duce but look more like those of Hitler”. So, if I first avoid a physiognomic analysis and then I perform just such a physiognomic comparison, this is a contradiction. The reality is as follows: for me, the language of the body and of behavior are important because it is a language like any other: indeed, it is frequently much more sincere. Therefore, I have “read” the faces in the film by Naldini and the real faces all around me today as if they were kinds of speech: I have made a comparison that has turned out to be, for example, negative for today’s Christian Democrats, in relation to the ridiculous and archaic servants of Il Duce. I did not say, however, that it is these “leaders” who have a Nazi “soma” or “seme”. And here is another one of Casalegno’s confusions. I said that today’s young fascists are Nazis.

Another example: Casalegno attributes to me a “very recent doctrine about the perennial nature of fascism”. This is a banal concept that only he could imagine, seeing that everyone currently thinks, and have always thought that this was true, that is, that in Italy there is a “perennial” fascist element. My “very recent doctrine” says instead exactly the opposite: it says that fascism is finished (and therefore anti-fascism is superfluous) because something worse has replaced it: the power of consumerism and its hedonistic ideology.

For Casalegno himself makes me say that “that was an archaic fascism, which today belongs to archeology rather than to politics”. It would take a lot of cheek to simultaneously attribute to me both this claim and the other one about the perennial nature of fascism.

The fact is that Casalegno cannot accept the responsibility of the Christian Democracy for the introduction in Italy of the “development” of consumerist capitalism, the worst of all fascisms, the one that disposes of all the old structures can only be cherished by a conformist like Casalegno: formal democracy, Church, family, respectable customs, infra-culture [*culturame*], etc.

As for Casalegno’s claim about my “nostalgia for a past dyed in black”,⁸¹ let’s get one thing straight: if he dares to repeat such a thing ever again, I will board a train, I will go to Turin, and I will teach him a lesson.

(Published in *Panorama*, November 7, 1974.)

Fragment⁸²

In my whole life I never engaged in a single violent act of a physical or moral nature. Not because I am a fanatic believer in nonviolence. Which, if it is a form of ideological self-constraint, is also violence. I never once in my life did anything physically or morally violent because I trusted my nature, that is, my culture.

There was only one exception. And I would like to tell you about it. It happened about ten years ago. I had been invited to a debate at the “Student Center” in Rome. On the way there—it was getting on towards evening—a group of fascists attacked me.⁸³ They threw a jar of white paint at me and began to threaten and insult me. Some of my young comrades were with me at the time: and it was above all the violence that was employed against them that exasperated me. We responded in kind and forced them to retreat. I then went after the most fanatical of them. I chased him for more than a kilometer through the neighborhood of San Lorenzo. Just when I was about to catch up to him, he jumped on a tram, and, despite the kicks he gave me from running board, I managed to climb aboard, too. Then he ran away again and jumped from the front exit of the tram onto the street. I followed him. And I ran after him through the streets of San Lorenzo, until he disappeared into a garage, where I could not find him, as it appeared that he made his escape through a back door. At that moment, however, if I had trapped him there, I probably would not have done anything else to him. The blind rage that had seized me had passed. And that was the first and only time in my life that I had been overcome by such blind rage. But the indignation aroused in me ten years ago by that miserable fascist is nothing compared to the indignation that has now been aroused in me by an article by a self-styled anti-fascist: that is, the assistant editor of *La Stampa*, Casalegno.

⁸¹ *Tinto di nero*: “dyed in black”. The color associated with fascism in Italy (e.g., *pista nera*, blackshirts, etc.) [American translator’s note].

⁸² Unpublished.

⁸³ At that time this was not an everyday phenomenon and was in fact quite rare.

In one of his articles, employing all the worst “journalistic” clichés that would have been old-fashioned for Dostoyevski’s irony of 1869—he argues against me, Moravia, Parise and Pannella because of a debate we participated in concerning the film, “Fascist”, by Nico Naldini (this debate took place at a seminar organized by *Panorama* and Riccardo Lombardi: but Lombardi is a politician, not a writer. So Casalegno leaves him alone).

Casalegno’s article was published in *La Stampa* on October 22, 1974. So, at this time, it is already old news. If I want to talk about it now this is because the question it addresses does not seem to be fully resolved.

Casalegno’s attack against me is based on two points:

1. The intellectuals are “traitors” because they play “with ideas and facts due to their sectarianism, snobbery, lust for success, fear of not being in tune with the latest fashion”.
2. I have “nostalgia for a black-dyed past”, and Almirante, if he was at that seminar, “could not have expressed it better than [I] did”.

Insofar as the first point refers to the intellectuals in general, while the second refers to me in particular and is, at least apparently, less important, I will begin by addressing the latter, but I will only devote a few lines to it.

Casalegno drew his two extreme conclusions that practically turn me into a para-fascist evidently without reading anything I have written that is “scandalous” in this sense. It is clear that he clings to the simplification that despicable and dangerous imbeciles—among whom, evidently, we may count his friends—have conceived. This mistaken simplification—which has, insofar as it refers to me, an undoubtedly racist origin—was at first quite widely disseminated: but naturally, it had to die at birth; and it could only survive in the worst milieus and the worst heads.

Everything I have “scandalously” said about the old and the new fascism effectively comprise the most anti-fascist remarks that can be expressed today. This has now become clear to everyone. I admit that someone, due to his inveterate hatred, political interests or simply from stupidity, will continue to be mistaken about this. So I asked myself whether this person should not have thought twice before launching against me the atrocious suspicion of being a supporter of a defunct fascism: today, if you make such an accusation against someone, it means that you are implicating him, not in the ridiculous atmosphere of *coups d’état*, but in that of bombs and massacres.

Only a provocateur, a spy, a rat or a hysteric would dare to make such an accusation today, or even hint at such an accusation, of “nostalgia for a black-dyed past”, against someone. I truly hope, for his sake, that Casalegno has targeted me for “lynching” out of pure thoughtlessness; that he did not know what he was doing. That in him what took place was the purely automatic response of someone who is obsequiously only doing his job.

I will return to discuss this second “point” later, in order to address it on a more general level. Now I will address the first point.

Here, I will make two observations: a) Casalegno, because he has such a low opinion of the psychological reasons that impel these intellectuals to take an interest in political problems, cannot be familiar with the works of these intellectuals; and he cannot be familiar with them because he does not want to familiarize himself with them; and he does not want to become familiar with them because he is a bourgeois who hates intellectuals. All he would have to do is read—finally with a certain “love” of culture—two of my pages, or Moravia’s, or Parise’s—to have at least some doubts about his own *a priori* contempt; b) (and consequently): the “sectarianism”, the “snobbery”, and the maniacal “lust for success” that Casalegno attributes to us intellectuals, are, technically, pure and simple inferences.

It is easy to discredit someone *in limine* and to destroy someone by way of *inferences* (all the more so when your audience is extremely inclined, as always, to have the same view about infraculture [*culturame*]). With respect to Casalegno I could, for example, turn the tables on him and very easily engage in my own “technique of inferences”. I could very logically begin by asking myself: what is Casalegno doing at *La Stampa*, whose chief editor is a respectable person in the true sense of the word and where so many of my friends work, indeed some of my closest friends, from Soldati to Ginzburg, from Siciliano to Pestelli? What is Casalegno doing at *La Stampa*, which, for more than twenty years, has always expressed such favorable views of my work, which is the only thing that counts to establish the real reasons that impel an author to become involved outside of his own specific field? And I could answer these questions precisely with an *inference*: Casalegno is at *La Stampa* to guarantee an open door for the worst Piedmontese bourgeoisie, and, practically, to be the “gatekeeper” not of the financiers, but of the “employees of the financiers”. Of course, this inference is unjust, like all *inferences*. It is not, however, entirely illogical; just as it is not entirely illogical to believe that an intellectual possesses a certain degree of snobbery and lust for success: by-products of ambition, which cannot, however, change what he says.

A man like Casalegno (and here I proceed to more general considerations) has been overwhelmed by two syndromes that are the worst ones that are currently afflicting the Italian bourgeoisie. The first is hatred for culture, which compels it to constantly shout about the “treason of the intellectuals”: and this eternally transforms the representatives of “infraculture” [*culturame*] into “lepers” targeted for lynching. For they are to blame for the shocking economic conditions of Italy, they are to blame for the threat of recession looming over an impoverished world in which the values that once compensated for poverty have collapsed, they are to blame for the degradation of the cities and the countryside, they are to blame for a failed “development” that has become an environmental disaster, they are to blame for the politics of patronage and, most of all, for the criminality of the Christian Democracy. And of course, the blame for these things certainly does not lie with the men of power, the ones that Casalegno defends so zealously.

The other disgraceful syndrome which Casalegno has not been able to marshal any worthy defense against, is the mania that has seized Italians and causes them to constantly call each other fascists. Most likely, this is a great truth. In this instance, however, taken on a case by case basis, this accusation is criminal. As I have said, it automatically establishes responsibility for criminal acts and even for massacres.

These are the reasons for my indignation towards Casalegno, who, for the second time in my life, has led me to consider engaging in an act of violence.

Naturally, it is not at all surprising that *Il Popolo d'Italia* has intervened in defense of Casalegno against a representative of the “infraculture” [*culturame*], and has also, naturally enough, called me a fascist. But—with respect to necessary, and precisely evangelical, violence—those who finance and contribute to *Il Popolo* should take heed: it is precisely among the moneychangers of the Temple that they sell their goods and their words.

Things Divine⁸⁴

The philological problem posed by *The Imitation of Christ* consists precisely in knowing the identity of its author and when it was written. There are two hundred and fifty “codices” of the manuscript. The codex of the Royal Library of Brussels of 1441 is considered the most authoritative of them all, along with the codex of Arona, which is now located in the Turin Library. It was on the basis of these two “codices” that the two most important editions of *The Imitation of Christ* were produced: one attributes the work to Thomas à Kempis (ca. 1380-1471), and the other to Jean Gerson, the abbot of Santo Stefano in Vercelli between 1220 and 1245. J. Pohl is the editor of the former, and Monsignor Puyol the editor of the latter. An inexpensive edition has recently been published in Italy that has opted for the text edited by Monsignor Puyol. Because, so it would seem, it is more accurate and more correct. It also has the merit of pushing back the date of its original “publication” and as a result ennobling it and making it more fascinating. This is possibly what Elémire Zolla was thinking when he wrote a brief introduction to the book (claiming that the book “leads one to forget about the problem of who actually wrote it”: and any philological quest in this sense is therefore guilty of pride or contempt). I lean towards the position that this book was written later and definitely agree with Pohl.

It does not seem to me that this *Imitation of Christ* is a book for specialists, that is, for ecclesiastics. It does not seem to me that it was composed in the aristocratic confines of a monastery (in the climate of magical spiritualism that is so dear to Zolla). It seems to me, instead, that it is a catechistic book, *ad usum delphini*: bullying, repressive, querulous; indeed, it seems to me, a product of the pre-counterreformation era. True, its prose is

⁸⁴ *The Imitation of Christ*, Universale Rizzoli, 1974; Don Giovanni Franzoni, *Sermons at Saint Paul's outside the Walls*, Mondadori Editore, 1974.

based on unbreakable rules, of a profoundly medieval nature: its *ars dictandi* seems to have been poured into a mold and the *cursus* are of the kind of *cursus* that are committed precisely to achieving a comical effect. Reminiscent of certain “goliardic” rhythms rather than “religious” ones, these *cursus*, in a way, expose the degeneration and linguistic standardization of the latter. The religious texts of the High Middle Ages are always very poetic even when they are humble laments directed at totally passive and childlike believers. Here, in the *Imitation*, one senses instead the unctuousness of ecclesiastical propaganda, the pedagogical affectation, in which the application of the old rhetorical rules uses an extremely “vulgar” “language” that verges on “macaronic”.⁸⁵ And I, while perusing this Latin, instead of being captivated by some mystical and archaic enchantment, cannot help but to be insistently reminded of Merlin Cocai.⁸⁶ However, the pedantic teachings of the *Imitation*, which are addressed to the “you” of the “classically inferior” novice (the son of a peasant who is studying for the priesthood), have something terribly pragmatic about them. They recall the medical rules of the Schola Medica Salernitana, for example. Thus, prayer to or fear of God appear on the same, vaguely comical, level as eating or defecating. It seems to me, finally, that the legendary *Imitation* in question is, to say the least, an anthology (even if the book is attributable to a single author, the latter is a compiler who indifferently excerpted and modified a contemporary popular catechism, and incorporated into the book parts of other, older texts, as well).

Religious language has been unbearable for centuries, at least in Italy. It was the Counter-Reformation that was responsible for this. Among other things, it added the odious sentimentalism of the traditional subcultures of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Italian liturgical language spoken today in the Church is almost disgusting. This long linguistic tradition—profoundly embedded in the specific culture of the Church—can play nasty tricks even on those who are alien to it. For example, the *Diaries* of John XXIII are awful: it seems inconceivable that a man like him could have written them. Sentimental, affected, superficial: they seem to testify to the impossibility of a modern western man having a real religious experience. Yet even in the prose of Don Milani, for example, one notes the suggestions of a similar linguistic degeneration. Not to mention the magazines of even the most advanced Catholic left: a secular person, if he could read them, would agree with everything they say, but they are unreadable (by the way, they are somewhat like the first issues of *Il Manifesto* in this regard: the same gloomy asceticism, which is all the more gloomy the more “revolutionary” the text: for, with respect to gloomy asceticism, and even gloomy spiritualism, even the religious writers of the Reformation cannot hold a candle to them).

I confess that, in accord with what I have said up to this point, I experienced a feeling of annoyance and disgust when I had before me the small volume (an ascetic, spiritually bare and anonymous work) entitled, *Omellie a San Paolo fuori le mura raccolte dalla Comunità* [Sermons at St. Paul’s outside the Walls, Collected by the Community] by

⁸⁵ “Macaronic”, according to the Oxford English Dictionary: “Denoting language, especially burlesque verse, containing words or inflections from one language introduced into the context of another.” [American translator’s note.]

⁸⁶ Merlin Cocai, a/k/a Teofilo Folengo, an Italian “macaronic” poet of the 16th century.

Don Giovanni Franzoni.⁸⁷ I opened up the book and leafed through it: my dismay increased. What now? Even Don Franzoni uses this kind of language? “Sermons”, meanwhile: but they are execrable. Then that whole ridiculous litany of the themes of a parish priest, ordinary or not, on “Sunday”: “The Third Sunday of Advent”, “The Fourth Sunday of Advent” ... “The Lord’s Epiphany” ... “All Saints’ Day” ... “Holy Mary, Mother of God”.... Is it possible? The secular degeneration that turned the Gospel into a text for the infernal proliferation of catechists, liturgists, spiritualists, emanating norms that end up being superimposed one upon the other in a nomenclatural involution of characteristics spanning from the esoteric to the masochistic, full of “taboos” and of “rituals of approach” that are very similar to the ritualistic behaviors of neurotics, all in a hierarchical habit (Father, Lord, Shelter, Punishment) that classically torment the impoverished masses, diabolically transferred to Heaven, etc., etc.: has all of this succeeded in contaminating even the “rebel” Don Franzoni, too? Was this not the first thing of all that he should have freed himself from, in the name of that secular, free, modern, minority “culture” that he had chosen to in order to challenge the gangrenous Vatican subculture? And then should he not have first of all desecrated his Saint Paul, the first creator of the Christian code and its conventions, who in reality founded that language (eclectic, esoteric, syncretist) precisely at the moment when he morbidly began to proclaim the absolute preeminence of Christ’s “Gospel”, reducing it to the paroxysm of authority?

Then, however, I mustered the necessary fortitude and I began to seriously read these sermons which, due to a misguided humility (a religious man can sometimes allow himself to be somewhat arrogant, wouldn’t you say?), Don Franzoni tried to force into the mold of the homilies of good parish priests (who do not exist).

They are extraordinary sermons: that is, they are not sermons at all. They are brief speeches improvised before the community, which evidently address problems that the community is familiar with and which it has been discussing. Its references are also specialized: but this time the specialization is perfectly secular: because history is a secular illusion and it is as such that Christ evidently understood it. And it is a specialization that follows developments in historical events: incidents that are always, systematically due to the violence of power. Accusations, imprisonments, persecutions, deaths, massacres: an endless succession, concerning which one must always be present with one’s own judgment. Even if it is futile: because only in a critical attitude of absolute tension can hope be lived as a vital energy. The hope that power seeks, always and in every instance, to abolish and destroy, replacing it with the horrible surrogates that bear its name. There is not one sermon by Don Franzoni that, conventionally taking as its starting point the Gospel or the Epistles of Saint Paul, does not implacably conclude with an attack on power for its most recent, inevitable crime: all over the world (this is the first time that the Church has in this way presented itself as concretely universal). There is not one sermon by Don Franzoni in which he does not address a current problem, not to

⁸⁷ Mondadori, Milan, 1974. Edited by Fernando Vittorino Joannes and Aldo Gecchelin. [American translator’s note.]

elevate it or to use it as an example: but to resolve it or at least to pose the problem of its solution.

Now, all of this, if said or done by a secular person, is almost normal, whether in the milieu of a cultural or political élite. If it is said and done by a priest, however, it is almost shocking. It has frequently occurred to me, while reading these homilies, that I felt overwhelmed by a powerful emotion. But not due to the external fact that things that are normal for a secular person, when said or done by a priest take on a particular value as testimonials, that is, of “danger or risk”: but due to something internal and almost inexpressible. Giovanni Franzoni’s talks on the trial of the Basque separatists or the trial of the “psychoanalyst” Father Grégoire Lemerrier, on the pill or the Jesus “blue jeans” (“Jesus” was the name of the ship that brought the first African slaves to the Americas), on disabled people and on prisoners, and in short on the whole infinite series of similar events and problems (because “love is made of these things”), has its own objective originality, a meaning that is not the same even if it is transferred literally into another context. Now, Don Franzoni has been suspended by Vatican authority “*a divinis*”. All the better. It remains to be asked, however, if, by chance, whether in the Vatican they have not completely forgotten what “things divine” consist of, and whether the Bishops who in Synod declare that they are progressives are actually hypocrites, when the only way to be a progressive, for a priest, is to obviously be a progressive in an extremist (or Christian) way like Giovanni Franzoni.

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