

*Letters to the Heretics:
Correspondence with the Leaders of the New Italian Left*

By Enrico Berlinguer (Pier Franco Ghisleni)

Publication history/Translator's introduction (2012)

Author's notice to the French reader (1987)

Introduction to the Italian edition by Giulio Einaudi (1977)

Preface to the Italian edition by Enrico Berlinguer (1977)

Letter I: to Marco Panella in which one sketches out a reform of the social spectacle, criticizes the traditional recourse to bloody methods, and argues that working-class resentment is more useful than harmful to governments.

Letter II: to Goffredo Fofi, in which the author wonders if passion is compatible with the planning of economic development, gives a negative response, and invites cultural agents to represent life in all of its manifestations.

Letter III: to Adele Faccio, in which the author explains why feminism must be positive and abstract, and desires that the extinction of lovers, as one says, is done with remorse.

Letter IV: to Angelo Pezzana, in which the author rambles on about the beauty of the body and formulates the question: where have all the *pieces of ass* gone?

Letter V: to a partisan of armed struggle, in which the author, displaying little-known juridical knowledge, demonstrates that the law must be instilled in the people.

Letter VI: to Andrea Valcarengi, in which one finally sees the figure of the drug addict exposed as a laughingstock.

Letter VII: to Antonio Negri, in which the letter-sender tasks revolutionaries with an important mission.

Letter VIII: to the Metropolitan Indians, in which one hopes for the degradation of the environment, but on the condition that it is done in planned way.

Publisher's Blurb on the Back Cover

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Appendix: *The Case of Berlinguer and the Einaudi Publishing House*

Letter from Giulio Bollati

Author's Response to Giulio Bollati

Publication History/Translator's Introduction

I first learned of and became interested in this book, published in February 1977 under the title *Lettere agli eretici: Epistolario con i dirigenti della nuova sinistra italiana* ("Letters to the Heretics: Correspondence with the Leaders of the New Italian Left"), because I'd read somewhere that it was written by the former situationist Gianfranco Sanguinetti. But this information turned out to be false. Though Sanguinetti is friends with its real author (who was active in Italy's post-situationist milieu in the early 1970s), and though the book itself is strongly influenced by Sanguinetti's *Rapporto Veridico sulle ultime possibilità di salvare il capitalismo in Italia* (1975),¹ it was actually written by Pier Franco Ghisleni.

Like the *Truthful Report*, which was first published under the pseudonym of Censor, Ghisleni's book was originally presented as the work of Enrico Berlinguer, then the Secretary General of the Italian Communist Party (ICP). Following a tradition originally established by Paul of Taurus in his letters to the Corinthians, these eight letters were addressed to eight different people (or organizations) that were seen as "heretics" with respect to the dogmas of the ICP: Marco Panella, a member of the Radical Party; Goffredo Fofi, a Left-wing film critic; Adele Faccio, a radical feminist; Angelo Pezzana, a homosexual-rights activist; an unnamed member of a group that engaged in armed struggle (possibly Renato Curcio, founder of the Red Brigades); Andrea Valcarengi, an advocate for the use and legalization of drugs; Antonio Negri, a founder of the *Potere Operaio* (Workers' Power) group; and the Metropolitan Indians, an environmentally-conscious and amorphous protest group.

Written in honest language, these letters did not attempt to persuade or dissuade their addressees from continuing their heresies, but try to demonstrate to them that, despite appearances, their respective activities were actually working in tandem with those of the Communists. Their common project: the spread of State power and capitalist valorization into every aspect of human life, all over the entire planet.

Quite obviously, the thing was a fake, a hoax designed to bring ridicule upon everyone involved: not just Berlinguer and the eight people/organizations to which he supposedly wrote these letters, but also the publisher *Giulio Einaudi Editore*, whose name, format and brand had been plagiarized to put this self-published book before the eyes of the public. Though the *Lettere agli eretici* did not create the immense scandal that was caused by the *Truthful Report*, it did create a minor sensation. (Sanguinetti did his best to help: he independently published *Il Caso Berlinguer e la Casa Einaudi: Corrispondenza recente*, a translation of which is included here as an appendix.)

Ten years after its original publication, the book was translated into French as *Lettres Aux Hérétiques: Correspondance avec les dirigeants de la nouvelle gauche italienne* (the name of the translator is unknown) and published by *Éditions du Rhododendron* (Grenoble). For this volume, which includes several clippings from Italian press accounts, Ghisleni wrote a special preface, *Avertissement au Lecteur Français* ("Notice to the French Reader").

In November 2012, I translated this book into English, using both the Italian original and its translation into French as source materials. Because this book is virtually unknown in the English-speaking world (it has never been translated into English before), and because its

¹ Translated by Bill Brown, *Truthful Report on the Last Chances to Save Capitalism in Italy* (Colossal Books, Brooklyn, 2014).

contents are distant from us in both time and space, I have added comments in brackets [thus] and additional footnotes.

Special thanks to Gianfranco Sanguinetti.

Bill Brown
New York City

Author's Notice to the French Reader

In 1977, when *Letters to the Heretics* appeared, the structures of Leftism were already fully decomposed. And yet, many *stars*² of the epoch, implicated by the critiques of the false Berlinguer, felt the need to take positions to show everyone that they were still alive: *fans*³ of proletarian virtue, politicized homosexuals, feminists with easy access to Valium,⁴ and several others surreptitiously subscribed to the opinion that the unknown author was a reactionary.

The publisher Giulio Einaudi, then considered to be representative of Leftist culture in Italy (a hybrid of Gallimard and Maspero,⁵ to give the French reader a clear picture of him) and whose trademark had been borrowed by *Letters to the Heretics*, went even further and didn't hesitate to denounce the work to the magistracy – the very one that, several years later, took care of Einaudi's petition for bankruptcy. The morality of this man, inflexible in matters of literary fakes, because curiously malleable when it came to falsifying his accounting books. But today it would be cruel to hound Einaudi, reduced as he is to wandering from antique dealers to directors of art galleries to sell off the furniture that he amassed when his [proverbial] cows were fat.

This was the epoch of the *impegno* (*commitment*,⁶ to say it in your language), a formidable paralysis of the spirit communicated to Italy by the *fashionable*⁷ workshops in Paris where, in the 1950s, provincial fashions were created.

Today, all of them – just like Einaudi – have closed their shops due to the general bankruptcy of the imposters: the militants of the local Communist Party, the intellectuals of the Left in general, and the progressives. Their silence has been bought by industry, the *mass media*,⁸ and local governmental ministries and administrations, in which those who were “committed” are now employed as executives. Is this a good thing? Personally, I believe it is, at least because, at this stage of decomposition, no one, not even the most timid and amiable person, hesitates to treat them like old and worn-out shoes. The addressees of the letters from the false Berlinguer, as well as their friends, are among them, and remain so.

The partisans of armed struggle, who were openly criticized, never objected to the *Letters to the Heretics*. Obviously, they have shown themselves to be deprived of the gift of speech, that common property of all. We had already intuited that, when they operated on the ground, and we

² *Italian to French translator*: French in original.

³ English in original.

⁴ The meaning of the French here, *féministes au Valium facile* (“feminists of easy Valium”), is a bit obscure, and we have been unable to locate the Italian original of this “Notice.” And so we chosen a phrase that conveys the most likely meaning.

⁵ A combination of a Stalinist and a Bowdlerizer.

⁶ *Italian to French translator*: French in original.

⁷ *Italian to French translator*: French in original.

⁸ English in original.

have had confirmation of it since then, when they had the chance to speak from the cages of the courts: aphasia, in both cases, in freedom as in captivity.

The literary critics of the newspapers, however, condemned the text loudly and strongly; some of them called out the misprints in it, while others saw in it a pastiche of theses,⁹ that is to say, [ideas that were] too explicit and thus unfortunate. But above all, what appeared incomprehensible to the men of the pen was the question *who benefits*¹⁰ from this literary hoax, and it seemed unacceptable to them that a small, anonymous book could not only be openly sold, [or] stolen, but could also benefit from publicity provided by the newspapers and television stations, *right away*,¹¹ without its author having to produce a laborious *curriculum vitae* composed of pettiness, compromises and flattery.

I must formally acknowledge that a certain free spirit showed his approval for the *Letters to the Heretics*.¹²

In general, the predictions of the false Berlinguer have today been confirmed: the “heretics” have renounced their beliefs; the Socialist *new comers*¹³ have looted the country like they were Verres;¹⁴ public opinion has become exhausted and rendered apathetic; *starlets* and *showmen*¹⁵ (which is what wandering minstrels are called in Italy these days) associate with government ministers, a little like Rome under Caligula, forty years after J.C.¹⁶ I note in passing that chiffoniers and hairdressers have become national treasures (in France, you have experienced the same thing). Executives are well off and are as bold as ever, spending their income with a repugnant bulimia, as when one throws a few morsels of spoiled liver to sea lampreys so as to catch them.

According to an aphorism of one of your philosophers, the spectacle is wealth that is only contemplated.¹⁷ That is the state of things in Italy in 1987: a deaf and dumb people who limit themselves to *contemplating* the spectacle. Such a people, finally deprived of all interpreters of their silence, “can inspire nothing good,” as the *Letters to the Heretics* said ten years ago.

Pier Franco Ghisleni
September 1987

⁹ An allusion to Giulio Bollati, the director of Éditions Einaudi, who asked, in a letter published in *La Stampa* on 19 November 1977 (and reproduced on the cover of the French translation of this book), “Who if not a dilettante would lose the thread of his ideological proclamations to ramble on in laborious digressions that betray his true convictions and break the unity and credibility of the pastiche?”

¹⁰ Latin in original.

¹¹ *Italian to French translator*: French in original.

¹² An allusion to Gianfranco Sanguinetti, who, in 1978, published *Il Caso Berlinguer e la Casa Einaudi: Corrispondenza recente* (see below).

¹³ English in original.

¹⁴ Gaius Verres (120-43 BCE), a Roman magistrate who mismanaged Sicily.

¹⁵ English in original.

¹⁶ Jesus Christ.

¹⁷ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, Thesis 49, which states, *Le spectacle est l'argent que l'on regarde seulement* (“the spectacle is money that one only looks at”).

Introduction by Giulio Einaudi

Once I learned of Berlinguer's custom of corresponding with the most prominent people in the new Italian Left, my professional interest was soon after aroused by the possibility of making public this epistolary collection. For me, such a collection would be a way of combating the particular timidity of our publishers – a kind of taboo, one might say – where the publication of the private documentary sources of living people is concerned. The singular prohibition according to which the personal writings of living beings and, *a fortiori*, those who, due to their professional responsibilities, ascend to the rank of figure and attain historical dimensions, should only be divulged after the death of their authors seems without foundation to me and has always seemed so.

Before I even knew the content, tone or length of the collection in question, I asked my friend Berlinguer if I could read his letters in the perspective of their possible publication. He agreed and, shortly thereafter, I received photocopies of them, arranged chronologically. The envelope was accompanied by a brief note in which he explained to me that the correspondence therein had been turned over “after consultation with and agreement by the addressees.”

From my first reading, I was convinced that publication of the collection would be of remarkable political and cultural interest. These were very recent writings addressed to the most prominent people in the political arena of the Italian Left, whom the title of the collection had named, by obvious antiphrasis, “heretics.”

The attentive reader will not fail to wonder what chain could link together such diverse personalities in the cultural, ideological and political worlds, which the author and his addressees are. Why would the Secretary of the Communist Party want to dialogue with speakers who are so far from him and, why would he, and precisely where his rivals on the terrain of political activity are concerned, reject the use of normal channels of communication (the press, communiqués, *interviews*,¹⁸ etc.) and instead choose to use the means of direct dialogue and the tone of total sincerity? These are questions to meditate upon attentively. In other words, what terrain makes possible comprehension between people who are apparently so different in every regard?

I do not intend to furnish a key to the reading of this epistolary collection, which would distort its provisional and problematic character. Thus, I will limit myself to observing that, if one seeks a relationship between the actors in this correspondence, one will find it in a veritable cult of intelligence – pessimistic intelligence, it pleases me to add. If I did not fear being badly understood, I would dare to directly affirm that this epistolary work from Berlinguer to people who are apparently far from him is the constitution of a new party: the party of cynical intelligence.

Even if I do not know everything about the biographies of the addressees, the little that the public knows allows me to advance the idea that all of them are indistinctly united by a single passion. A single spirit governs them all: the spirit of power, to use Ritter's famous expression.¹⁹

This said, it is still necessary to raise a possible question. I know that the word “power” today arouses suspicion and provokes difficulty in the consciences of democrats. And in fact I do not intend to allude to power in its crudest appearance, which is content with the possession of perceptible matter and disappears when external manifestations evaporate, but rather to the

¹⁸ English in original.

¹⁹ Cf. Gerhard Ritter, *Luther, Gestalt und Symbol*, as well as 2 Timothy 1:7: “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power.”

power that is limited to riding the material flux of events without claiming to be able to stop and imprison it at will.

How else to explain, if not in the terms of the refined cult of power, the grace and elegance with which the people brought together by this epistolary collection move in the chaotic magma that is life? If they have obtained the social positions that they have, this cannot be the result of chance. On the contrary, they have understood that life is chaos, erupting magma, and they have known how to govern it without claiming to put it into order. They have also understood – each in his way and in his particular area of competence – that the time was right for this or that initiative and they gave expression to what already existed, limiting themselves to raising its flag. None of them have made false steps; none have made themselves ridiculous by getting lost in anachronisms. Devotees of the past or futurists, they have all conformed to the era, and the era has welcomed them as its exemplary interpreters. Having perceived the signals that the times were sending out, they have known how to transform these signals into signs. Is this not the work of the precursor?

This privileged sensibility, which is not a natural gift but the fruit of exercise practiced every day, is, in my opinion, the *unifying trait*²⁰ between Berlinguer and his “heretical” interlocutors. It can prosper in each individual only if he conceives of his life as [a] manner, as [an] artifice for the realization of power, and lives accordingly. Mannerism is not simply an artistic style; it is also a conscious attitude, and the amateur of power is, in the widest sense of the word, a mannerist, a subject who has agreed to work uniquely within the norms that the times have imposed upon him.

This is, it seems to me, the affinity that has made possible the understanding between Berlinguer and the “heretics” to which he has addressed himself.

In these letters, the author expresses his point of view on the most varied questions in a frank and direct form, without care for the contingent line of the party that he leads, and he sets aside all deference for his readers among the general public. It would almost seem that, by making good use of the freedoms of epistolary expression, he manages to sort out certain ideological threads that the official writings of the [Communist] Party often tangle together.

The texts herein do not lack didactic value and can therefore be read as a manual for conduct for political militants; as a kind of practical guide that can furnish simple and immediate support for political conduct and that is capable of penetrating into the reasons for action more directly than the ideological formulations of the various political parties; and as a collection of maxims for use by everyone, because the themes explored here have less to do with the doctrines of Marxist-Leninism than the good practice of politics.

The titles that precede each letter have been provided by us and have been approved by the author.

I hope that this cultural operation will inspire other, similar ones. Indeed, it seems to me desirable that there arises a new editorial practice, one that is turned towards the disclosure of the private writings of all those who occupy positions of responsibility in the management of public matters. This would contribute, I think, to the reduction of the distances that separate the governor from the governed, the citizen from the administrator, the voter from the elected, and the politician from the common man: the distances that, today more than in the past, have given rise to several critiques. By examining the private documents of all those who preside over the fate of the country, the citizen can give up his preconceived mistrust concerning this joining together and enter into the play of political forces to which he seems irremediably foreign.

²⁰ *Italian to French translator*: French in original.

To conclude, it pleases me to recall and adopt the words that my friend and collaborator Bollati²¹ said in the course of an interview and that marvelously summarize the intention behind this publication: “I would like our books to have a wider distribution, that they reach much further, outside of Einaudi circles, I mean. To furnish books that have use, that are instruments. (...) It is a question of accompanying these movements, humbly helping society in its development, convinced that a Libyanization²² is not desirable nor unavoidable.”

Giulio Einaudi

Preface by Enrico Berlinguer

I have agreed to the proposition made by the publisher Einaudi to publish some of my private letters, and I share the motivations that he has expressed in a separate note. Thus I will limit myself to inviting the reader to carefully consider the date that accompanies each letter²³ to historicize it, if I may be allowed to use this term. The localization in time of each one of these writings will partially explain their apparent contradiction with the current theses of the political party in which I work. Communist ideology is not a doctrinal body that is intrinsically foreign to social and economic reality, but a formulation that exerts its force precisely from its links to reality, from its adequation to the reality of capital and political economy. If it were otherwise, our ideology would not be discernible from some kind of social utopianism. It is only by keeping in mind this necessary and perpetual chasing after reality that one can explain certain apparent differences between the positions that I have expressed in private letters and the current formulations of the Italian Communist Party [ICP]. A purist could certainly accuse me of revisionism. I am used to it. It is useless to enter into dialogue with someone who nourishes a preconceived lack of trust in Communist leaders. Yet it is easy to avert this objection by recalling that being anchored in reality does not mean being fatally subjected to its crushing weight. One can rid oneself of such an overload sooner or later, but one can never get rid of one's anchoring in the reality of capitalism. But would capitalism with a more reasonable and human face still be capitalism? We Communists do not think so and, thanks to this nominalism, we can still call our party the “Communist Party.”

The reader will note that certain letters concern themes that are normally neglected by our propaganda. The working-class origin of the ICP in fact demands that the debate primarily touches upon the themes that working-class sensibilities are already prepared to receive: that is the meaning of democratic centralism. On the other hand, as the organization that plays a certain role as forecaster, the ICP – either through elaboration by certain, individual representatives or through an initial, limited debate – must deal with the problems that the majority of the population can only grasp later, but in such a way that these problems are not taken up in an impromptu fashion by new exigencies nor able to control and conduct the possible evolution of working-class sensibilities, which would be disordered and dangerous to civil society.

If I have tried to make this point clear, it is certainly not to attribute to myself some kind of prophetic virtue, but only to recall that the Communist concept of the “planning of development” is not only applicable to the simple level of political economy, but also to every

²¹ Giulio Bollati (1924-1996), co-director and general manager of *Giulio Einaudi Editore*.

²² Cf. letter to Marco Panella (below).

²³ This is odd: neither the Italian original nor its translation into French includes dates.

aspect of the population's everyday life. In fact, to be able to plan, it is necessary to divine the probable deviations from the development that one has proposed and to be able to control and reabsorb them.

Some of my letters presaged what has subsequently taken place; others presage what has still not been verified but, in any case, will not take us unaware.

I know well that forecasts do not determine deeds, but that deeds realize forecasts. When the deed doesn't take place, the forecast evaporates and everything stops there. But in human history, there have been many events that would never have taken place if they had not been predicted by authoritative sources. And it is precisely this category of events that I most take to heart.

I indistinctly consider to be friends all the addressees of my letters herein made public, even if the feeling isn't mutual and some of them haven't bothered to respond to me. Friendship is a camaraderie that is infinitely more elevated than the bonds that customarily unite all those who profess identical opinions, for an immediate goal, within a single political party. When it appears, friendship abstracts from human pettiness and incarnates itself in participation in a superior project, at the heart of which momentary hostility and intolerances are the fertile *ground*²⁴ of civil society.

When this is the case, even the enemy of the moment can and (even better) must wear the costume of the "comrade," despite his proclamations to the contrary and his declarations of hostility. Such a person often doesn't know that his antagonism is the unique cohesive element of the society that he scorns, but in which he must live, like everyone else.

Rereading these letters before giving them to the printer, I realized that I did not ask any of the addressees to rethink their positions, nor to modify their practices: to do so would have been more harmful than useless. In fact, I desired the opposite, namely that each one perfect his own positions, frankly radicalize them (in some cases), so that they all become aware of their participation in the great project of the capillary capitalization of the planet. This capitalization is the fact that I would like to raise by means of the forecasts that I have written in the form of letters that I have sent to friends who are apparently dispersed but are in fact fundamentally united in the preservation of the [current and] only possible society.

The antagonism between ideas and practice hardly matters. On the contrary, well-informed politics often deliberately seeks antagonism out, because, as Gramsci recalls, "when the equilibrium of the ship on which he sails is thrown off because it is overloaded on one side, he wants to carry the light weight of his reason to the other side, so as to have the balance restored."²⁵

Enrico Berlinguer

²⁴ Latin in original.

²⁵ Though Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) was indeed interested in the concept of the "moving equilibrium," he never "recalled" this proverb, which, of course, mocks those whose faculties of reasoning are "light weight."

First Letter

Dear Marco,²⁶

The time for bombs in henceforth past. The phase of bloody terrorism, conducted with an unspeakable clumsiness by our secret services, cannot and must not be pursued.

It is quite true that the operation at the Piazza Fontana²⁷ and others of the same type, though they succeeded for some time, have brought about a stupefying tactical success (paralyzing the social movement of the time and preventing it from tipping over into an insurrection), but, on the strategic plane, they have cost us harmful consequences, even today.

If we go into the question a little more deeply, I think that, today, no one can deny that the operation of 12 December, and it alone, was able to conjure away the worst. At a moment when, to paraphrase Hegel, Italy could no longer be regarded as a State, nor was it effectively one – since the roles and functions that we assigned to our subordinates were practically put into question, and each subordinate, some more than others, aspired to take the reins of the public administration under new forms of organization, apparently reconstructed with the names retained – only bombs had the power to paralyze working class presumptuousness and to allow the unions to clear the streets and gently settle the contractual disagreements that were still in abeyance. For its part, the Italian Communist Party [ICP] found itself in a position to recall the workers to it, under the pretext of the famous anti-fascist vigilance, thanks to which we have held the day until now. Not negligible results, it seems to me.

But in the long term, the recourse to bombs has shown all of its fragility, and in fact we no longer employ them today. The error was to defer *in toto* the management of the massacres to the secret services, which, essentially composed of military men, conduct themselves honorably when it comes to the practical execution of operations, but neglect to conduct an adequate disclosure of the operations that they put into action with so much skill, which is indeed the nature of military men, who are, with a few exceptions, little inclined to exploit their successes on terrains other than the battlefield, properly speaking.

Therefore, if we want an operation to produce a spectacular effect, it isn't enough to provoke it, even if we must be in a position to present it, after the fact, with a plausible definition that is capable of subsequently evoking the impression that it produced at the time. In other words, it isn't enough to display several mangled bodies on the television screen – let us say in passing that our TV operators can compete with the masters of German expressionist cinema when it comes to elaborating bloody images in horrific style – because the suggestion that results is certainly very vivid but of a short duration and very difficult to control politically. It is also indispensable to elaborate a credible version of the operation, that is to say, to reveal its goals and the feelings that it is supposed to elicit. As Marxism-Leninism teaches, the people must not be left uncertain; their consciences do not tolerate a void. But this is precisely what has happened in Italy, where the consternation that the bombs first elicited gave way to doubt and then uncontrolled indignation towards a State that, after making *blunder* after *blunder*,²⁸ was forced to keep silent.

²⁶ *Publisher's note:* Marco Panella, parliamentarian, member of the Radical Party, is the most authoritative Italian representative of the regeneration of the State through working class resentment. There is reason to believe that he has never read Nietzsche.

²⁷ On 12 December 1969, the “secret services” (the intelligence agencies) of the Italian State arranged for a bomb to be exploded at the train station at the Piazza Fontana in Milan.

²⁸ *Italian to French translator:* French in original.

I would call the strategic result of such a clumsy use of the massacre a loss for the State.

Everyone, from provincial editorialists to judges of the second rank, from student protesters to the man in the street, have clearly perceived that they were duped.

The expectation, each time disappointed, of some kind of public unveiling of the mystery has definitely removed all credibility from the official explanations, with the result that today we have had to witness the miserable spectacle of a State ready to be butchered by some judge.

Lacking any confirmed truth, each person has had to elaborate his own private truth in which the State is always and in every fashion the accused, which – for the moment and fortunately so – is only confirmed in words.

Certain military men and politicians have thus been the object of a purge, while others have been indicted.

But the enormity of the imbroglio in which our republic has been placed demands measures infinitely more draconian than a banal change in the ranks. A State such as ours, so profoundly undermined in its domestic credibility and in the international credibility that it begs for here and there, cannot regenerate itself by means of a simple injection of men who are “new” because of their public morality or their political affiliation. I have no illusions, dear friend, that the Communist or democratic elements mechanically introduced into key posts will do better than their Christian Democratic predecessors. To change a State, it isn’t enough to change men. And to survive, a State must change. I relay to you these words, full of political wisdom, from an English *whig* of the 18th century, which one might believe came from your mouth.

A State without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation. Without such means it might even risk the loss of that part of its constitution which it wished most religiously to preserve.²⁹

This is why we Communists are not pressed to govern, despite the solicitations that are made to us from all sides. To govern a State, one must have a State that is credible and, to be credible, one must have a State that is different from this one, which we can hardly expect to have in current conditions. Thus we must first recreate the State’s credibility; then we can advance our candidacy. But how?

Therefore, a State is credible when it appears capable of determining the course of things, and can truly do so. Such is the meaning of the planning that we have always supported. But we must no longer understand that planning in a reductive manner, as has been the case until now, as an authoritarian programming of productive development based upon disposable resources, opportunely inventoried. Instead, this programming must invest in the customs, behaviors and representations of the citizens. We must no longer leave to them the archaic privilege of disposing of particular, private sensibilities. Such sensibilities must, on the contrary, be induced, fashioned *ad hoc*, and generalized. It matters little if one calls it the “class consciousness” of politicized individuals or the “civic sense” of the man in the street. The essential thing is to have the power to orient the people’s reactions when faced with events.

But one could ask oneself, is it truly necessary that the people have a particular reaction? From the perspective of programming, would it not be preferable to have citizens who are absolutely catatonic? Certainly, but this is a long-term objective and we are far from having reached it.

Human consciousness, as I have told you, is subject to the law of the *fear of emptiness*³⁰ and feeds upon continuous representations. In the absence of the central production of images,

²⁹ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the French Revolution*. English in original.

³⁰ Latin in original.

consciousness, on its own initiative, gives itself the representations that seem the best to it. As everyone knows, therein lies a supreme danger for any State.

The necessity of furnishing representations appears obvious to the politician, who, if he is well advised, has less recourse to ideological pitches than to the deeds from which ideology begins. Thus it falls to the State to determine every event in a manner that easily furnishes the key to its interpretation to the intellect and the sentiments of the members of society.

You certainly are not ignorant that governments of the masses have always had recourse to spectacle to keep their subjects in a state of controlled numbness. The vaunted Caesars and the *circuses*³¹ are the unsurpassable models from which any State spectacle must take its inspiration, and the great masters have already understood that the paralyzing power of playful representation is much stronger when the space between the stage and reality is reduced. They also do not hesitate to show real throat cutting as fiction. We must make our own the lesson of the Roman State by leading it, in the new conditions in which we operate, to its ultimate consequences. The space between representation and reality must disappear. There will be real events that serve the spectacle, and fiction in the strict sense of the word will be left to the sector of human activity that one calls “art.”

In a pinch, any event, if it is presented with the appropriate artifice, can advantageously be employed for spectacular ends. But, as one knows, the people are insatiable in their appetite for emotions, and the well-advised governor will be able to perceive the new exigencies and be able, in a timely fashion, to renew the events and the scenarios in which to insert them.

This is why it is necessary to provoke certain deeds and prevent those that perturb the government through the manifestation of disordered phenomena. It seems to me that this is the meaning of the planning of the emotions.

And one must not believe that the people ceaselessly and only demand vile slaughter, as the statesmen of the recent past have believed. We Communists, we have never hidden the fact that we aim for hegemony over the management of the social spectacle, but we do not intend to reach it by the authoritarian route, but rather by the persuasion of all those – unfortunately still very numerous today – who defend the exclusive recourse to bloody spectacle. The pertinence of our proposition will convince the skeptical, and the first positive results will lead our most irreducible adversaries to advocate our methods.

Therefore, although at first this seems unbelievable, we can from now on present a proper spectacle, not only to discourage the people from making a revolution, but also to induce them to actively take the route of counter-revolution. Once and for all, we must liquidate the old prejudice that counter-revolution is the exclusive product of the dominant class, free to act after having paralyzed the subversive will of their inferiors. If this was ever the case in an authoritarian regime, it can no longer be so today in a democratic regime, where the initiative, any initiative, even a counter-revolutionary one, must come from the people. Thus, if it is true that bombs are completely indicated when one wants to annihilate revolutionary will or to render the people indolent or distressed, that is to say, similar to Tasso’s serpent, “biting its tail,” they are, on the other hand, absolutely unsuited to induce in the masses a contrary will, the will by which any concrete realization is not an end in itself but uniquely an instrument to conjure the revolution away to some other day,³² which one precisely designates by the term counter-revolution.

³¹ Latin in original.

³² Latin in original.

Unfortunately, a few isolated, scenic actions, or even a coordination of them, will not be enough to obtain this uninterrupted and tireless popular activism. The only result would be an indifference to all misfortune. But if the governors, instead of having recourse to episodes of crude effects, will know how to present to their inferiors spectacles that are perhaps less captivating but more usual, less adventurous but more evocative of the hassles of current life and, in any case, not denuded of a certain *pathos*, they will rule – thanks to the smallest stroke of genius – a people who aren't paralyzed by terror, but simply resentful,³³ annoyed, perpetually irritated and incapable due to the weak intensity of the vexations to which we will subject them.

Resentment, dear friend, is not hatred. As everyone knows, hatred unleashes war between the social classes. Nor is it apathetic indifference, which, on the contrary, provokes the abandonment of the field of social war, in sum, desertion.

Resentment admirably realizes the forced but democratic coexistence between attacked and attacker, and these absurd communities mutually accept each other, in the same manner that quarreling neighbors *willy-nilly*³⁴ become a single community with a dividing wall. As Nietzsche noted, the resentful person deeply identifies with the attacker's reasons and the attacker, paradoxically, by nourishing that resentment, permits him to continue to exist as a resentful person. What would come of a resentful person if he were deprived of the things he resents? A wreck, a person deprived of identity, dispossessed of his unique manner of manifesting himself to the world: jeremiads.

Nevertheless, it is good that in civil society there always exist ample motivations for resentment and that they continually appear, even at the cost of a certain apparent disorder. Freedom, as our illustrious friend Bobbio³⁵ teaches, “does not remain immobile, and he who thinks it does has already abandoned it.” Thus, when motivations for resentment are lacking, it becomes necessary to replace one with another, judiciously conceived, with the result that the resentful course to freedom never ends.

In the past, there existed categories of individuals who were resentful but indifferent to the particular source of resentment, veritable professionals always ready to detect reasons for discontent and to ceaselessly feed them by preventing both the extinction as well as the exacerbation of the most inflamed sentiments. Traditionally, they were the causes of disorders, the troublemakers and ringleaders; they were responsible for the social management of resentment. Similar attitudes can still be encountered among individuals like you and others, who are very skillful at transforming any human fracas into a motivation for official resentment that is exchangeable on the market of political negotiations. Exasperated by trifles and capable of taking them for the whole of society by presenting them as questions of life and death, you have known how – like it was a natural gift – to season the parliamentary salad with the spice on which you hold a monopoly: continual resentment.

Alas! Notwithstanding the praiseworthy activity of these moaners, too many courageous people persist in living in peace, finding pleasant that which is made to be pleasing. They are foreign and insensitive to the hassles that occupy the minds of political complainers in the best of times. Today, too many people remain perfectly indifferent to the problems that nourish contemporary political struggles and do not at all resent the hassles, whether they are real or imagined, against which their champions fight.

³³ *Italian to French translator*: we have employed here *ressentimenteux*, a neologism that combines *risentito* and *risentimento* (current meanings: irritated and resentful).

³⁴ *Italian to French translator*: French in original.

³⁵ Norberto Bobbio (1909-2004), a liberal socialist philosopher and historian.

Until now, nothing has come to disrupt their disinterest, neither divorce, abortion, the reform of the [criminal] codes nor even monetary inflation. They continue to live *as if nothing bothered them* and the temptation is strong to describe them as irremediable *qualunquisti*³⁶ and to combat them as such. But what if, instead of this, the “party” of the deaf and dumb, inaccessible on the inside, was precisely thus, not because its members were indifferent to this or that legislative problem, or skeptical with respect to this or that economic measure, but because they were hostile or foreign to legislation and the economy as such? I cannot affirm this possibility, but I would be ill advised to exclude it.

Therefore, everyone knows that a deaf and dumb people can inspire nothing good. Unpredictable, they are the easy targets for suggestions when they aren’t influenced by their own suggestions, which is even worse. The greatness of our project resides precisely in the fact that it would transform each silent citizen into a “professional complainer,” which until now has been the prerogative of the elements that have made discontent a political issue; and to make people come out of their shells, we must importune them, obligate them to complain, to show them the many reasons for discontent every day.

Nevertheless, we must limit ourselves to showing that existing problems still do not suffice: the little people – unlike the intellectuals who are always on the alert to transform the evils of the world into “problems” – are too conditioned by their own hassles and they rarely complain about things other than the cares that effect them personally. The display of the disasters of the black market for abortion or the ecological degradation of particularly polluted locations as political problems leaves perfectly indifferent all those who have no need of abortions and those who, fortunately, still live in habitats that are not excessively degraded. From whence comes the silence and indifference with respect to political and legislative solutions to such questions. In the light of these considerations, I have expressed the desire that the space that has always separated touching fictions from pathologically realities should disappear, and I now maintain the necessity of indiscriminately generalizing to everyone the suffering of hassles and humiliations in a continuous rhythm. It is only thus that each citizen will finally be constrained to take the floor and participate in basic political initiatives by expressing his or her jeremiads. The people must be constantly kept under pressure, constrained to a permanent activity, if one wants to see the project of the politicization of society progress. A beautiful verse by Schiller clearly expresses the concept of democratic participation: “When kings build, the draymen have plenty to do.”³⁷

And when a motivation for discontent is finally exhausted, that is when it should give way to another, which will take over from the first one. The people will thus comprehend that their complaints are not made in vain and, as Bobbio says, one will endlessly run in search of freedom.

To normalize the situation in Libya, one had had, as you know, to put a dead body in every yard and have the corpses visible to all. Certain political commentators coined the term “Libyanization” to designate the propagation of massacre in every corner of Libyan society. My intention is not to apologize for such savage carnage, which would be morally unacceptable and politically useless in Italy today!

³⁶ *Italian to French translator*: an insult used in Italy by the Left to designate all those who refuse political commitments. The term appeared after the war to designate an ephemeral movement called *L’Uomo qualunque* (“The Ordinary Man”), of conservative orientation.

³⁷ Friedrich Schiller, “Kant and His Interpreters,” *Xenien*.

I nevertheless believe that our country must be Libyanized in its turn by means of a procedure that is less barbaric than that of its origin. It is not a question of putting a dead body in every home, but of propagating in Italy, in a capillary fashion, motivations for discontent, hassles, small and large humiliations. What sensitive chords will it be necessary to vibrate?

Expecting that suffering must be continued, but lightly, it will be a question of importing small evils into places where there was health, fatigue where there was idleness, parsimony in place of prodigality, a quarrelsome character where there was the spirit of concord, and so on.

The regime of restrictions that has inaugurated what one has called *austerity*³⁸ – a general euphemism to designate human capital that digs into its refuse – presents a good example of the route to be followed. The hassles that one has occasioned among the citizens are modest; the restrictions are still not penury; and the result has been superior to that of a famine that has only been shown on a screen. To exhibit severe hunger in the pockets of under-development creates an emotion that is both immediate and temporary, while parsimony that has been forced upon every family creates a light but permanent difficulty. Moreover, no one today dares to buy anything without first having asked the price; at the moment of placing one's hand on one's wallet, everyone reflects, hesitates, for a moment. Even the spendthrifts, the generous and the improvident are finally convinced that everything has a price and that nothing in nature is available in unlimited quantities, not even money. People have thus felt a certain difficulty; they are irritated; they have left their apathy behind and have given free rein to their jeremiads, which is the only mainstay of a democratic State.

The members of society will have the occasion to persuade themselves gradually that a certain malaise is proper to the human condition, which is an old axiom of existentialism that we Communists have too hastily rejected.

The happiness of the people, my excellent friend, is a vain philosophical notion, and it is fitting to abandon it to the philosophers and the dilettantes of utopia. We who have the fate of the State at heart must absolutely avoid giving ourselves the obligation to choose between a people who hate us and a people who ignore us. All the powers have, sooner or later, seen themselves constrained to confront one or the other of these popular attitudes. If, in place of this choice, we know how to work in the direction that I have sketched out, we will finally and definitively escape the jaws of that vise. The socialism that we recommend does not foresee hostile or apathetic men, but citizens who democratically participate in political life, putting the least of their everyday resentments on the table.

Men have always feared power and have fought or avoided it. But if power goes to men, and if they approach it in their turn, the fear will be less intense. Then, for the first time in history, the sacred exhortation of Saint Augustine will know a profane realization: “*Wish to flee from God? Flee to him.*”³⁹ And we will be the ones who have accomplished it.

³⁸ English in original.

³⁹ Latin in original.

Second Letter

Dear Goffredo,⁴⁰

To you, who are a cultural operator particularly attentive to the problems of the class struggle, I submit my reflections on the current functions of culture so that you can work with their benefit. These are reflections that are urgent because large segments of the population are completely impermeable to the fascination for spectacular representations and quite decided upon paying them no attention. I will not recall to you in detail the enormous risks that the propagation of such an obscurantist attitude carries. I will limit myself to indicating the two principal ones: the disappearance of the role of the cultural operator and the subversion of society as a whole. You, who are a revolutionary, can perhaps admit this second point, but do not forget that such a development would implicate the disappearance of people such as yourself. But let us proceed as indicated.

The terse Marxian formulation according to which the class struggle is the motor of human history should not be understood in a reductive fashion. Indeed, the class struggle is not a military confrontation between antagonistic parties (in this case, I use the word “parties” in its historically accepted meaning: this seems perfectly clear to me) about which one could – mechanically and from behind a desk – deduce which side will emerge the victor, but, on the contrary, it is an entanglement of social tensions at the heart of which people (the unpredictable variable) intervene, not as a numerical mass, but as bearers of passions that make them take action. The class struggle, such as it appears, is thus the finally manifested result of human passions. This is properly the crux of the question upon which I have meditated for a long time. I have asked myself and I still ask myself to what extent it will be possible to integrate the intense desires of people into the programmed development of society. This doesn’t preoccupy me so much vis-à-vis our young militants, for whom, on the contrary, entry into our youth organizations as a general rule coincides with an absolute renunciation on the terrain of the realization of passion. We can almost say that young people only join the Italian Communist Party when civil society has already extirpated from them all of their passions, frustrated them, and inculcated in them feelings of powerlessness and uselessness. For some, entrance into the Party recalls the “putting on the habit” by those who, due to disillusion, have decided to renounce the things of this world. It seems clear to me that this process of frustration will prosper the more our ranks increase, and it is also quite clear that civil society, due to its inability to offer an outlet for those who are troubled, becomes one of our very solid allies. No problem at the heart of our Party.

My fears are for the future, for the moment when our Party might be able to exercise hegemony, even a relative one, over the entirety of the country, that is to say, when we become a governing party, either alone or in collaboration with other political forces. It is our duty today to confront the problems that we must resolve, not only to equip ourselves with the material and intellectual instruments that will permit us to face the situation, but also precisely because, starting from today, we can put pressure on the political forces that directly govern, so that we can be entrusted with a situation that isn’t completely a compromise,⁴¹ but is at least controllable.

⁴⁰ *Publisher’s note:* Goffredo Fofi, cinematographic critic tied to the extreme Left and reorganizer of the journal *Ombre rosse*. Even if he admits the primacy of political economy, it is the superstructure that retains his full attention. If a “Ministry of Representation for the People” would be formed, the portfolio would be his.

⁴¹ An allusion to the “historic compromise” that would bring the Italian Communist Party into the ruling coalition.

How can we resolve the question of the latent passions of the citizens in view of this future test? To what extent are they an obstacle and what favors them? It doesn't fall to us – come on, Goffredo, we are not philosophers! – to take care to distinguish the good demons from the bad ones, although placing the problem under moral categories can often be useful when it comes to propaganda. Instead, we must distinguish the desires that favor the mechanisms of value-production or, in any case, those that conform to it, and those desires that, on the other hand, are refractory and irremediably hostile to it. Thus, we must strengthen the former (though we must not allow those desires to be taken literally) and be opposed to the latter by every means.

This being the case, it seems necessary to me that we analyze the problem to determine the level of danger that the passions present to the instauration of the socialist order. We must certainly confront – this is proved historically if we observe the countries in which socialism has already been built – the cravings inherited from the recent past, from bourgeois society, but our attention must primarily be focused on the passionate raptures that have nothing to do with the moral system of the bourgeoisie, that is to say, the new passions that, if they evoke some vague memory, are in fact tied to a very ancient age (the anthropologists speak of “primitive communism”) and certainly do not belong to any individual's memory but, historically, to that of the species as a whole.

One after the other, I will indicate to you my opinions about the ways we can confront these two dangers.

Concerning the passions inherited from the bourgeoisie, we must act in a manner that is both preventive and repressive. Most often it will be a question of inclinations, we might even say vices, that go derive from the canons of consumption. In matters of prevention, we will have to promote a relative leveling of consumption by withdrawing from circulation the commodities that, by virtue of their scarcity, immediately evoke a symbolic social status; by reducing the circulation of substances that are dangerous for the human organism; and by making a less indecent and provocative use of advertising and propaganda messages that speculate on the reduction of men (and women, in particular) to the status of commodities.

In the perspective of prevention, it will sometimes be advantageous to take the diametrically opposed route: to distribute and popularize certain consumer goods instead of rendering them illegal and clandestine. Let us take the example of pornography. I must admit that, in this particular area, the Social Democrats in Northern Europe have shown themselves to be very farsighted. By spreading pornography to the popular masses, they have rendered banal the particular demand that makes the obscene image desirable and have neutralized the risks of erotic insurrection supported by certain authors. Once popularized, pornography – although it is personally detestable to me – has nevertheless had the unquestionable merit of making its adherents understand that license, when it remains confined to the sexual domain, does not particularly demand the subversion of one's own life; one can be quite appreciative of sexual *debauchery*⁴² and yet continue one's social role and one's productive function in a disciplined manner. These stories, made up of words and images, are welcome among housewives, students, employees and licentious hippies, provided that it remains clear that such practices must take place tranquilly, in secret, without shocks to society! Pornography has also been liberalized in Italy without our intervention being necessary: it has been enough and it will continue to be enough for us to simply observe the reduction [of everything] to the state of merchandise that capital is in the process of accomplishing, even in this sector.

⁴² *Italian to French translator*: French in original.

We must consider the risk that some hothead will take these suggestions concerning pornography literally, thus surpassing the limits of the behaviors that are authorized; this would occasion the commission of sexual offenses and violence. In cases of this type, it will certainly be important to adopt a severely repressive attitude, more to make examples than to punish the offenders. When offenses against people take place, whatever the motivation, sanctions must certainly be applied to the guilty party, but the systematic propaganda that accompany them must be proportional to the effects that one seeks in public opinion. Prevention and repression then become two complementary aspects of a single inspirational principle: the control of the population.

I will not comment any further, dear Goffredo, on the problems that bourgeois vices will occasion us. A little good sense will be sufficient to render them inoffensive. Never forget that, in our epoch, passion has reached the height of mediocrity by being lowered to the desire to consume. The rich person of today is none other than the one who possesses an excess of impoverished objects. He only has a passion for quantity, for numbers, for accumulation. In itself, a hardly enviable fate. A prudent leveling would complete the job.

Even more alarming, particularly for those who are preoccupied with the social lives of other people, is the necessity of confronting the desires that have no connection with our epoch and to which political economy and its laws cannot respond, nor will they ever be able to do so. I speak of the impulses that are difficult to translate into words, since the language of capital knows nothing of the things that are foreign to it or tend to deny it; they are manifested in the form of subjective inclinations that, for some, recall the passions buried in the distant past and that can only be designated by figural language. These are dispositions of the body and soul unknown in our epoch, but which are born, so to speak, from its decomposition.

Some individuals, isolated or working together, clandestinely or openly, sometimes believe that they can give reality to similar stimulations and give themselves to them body and soul. This has taken place in the past and will take place in the future. The passionate and mad character of these individuals incites them to invent impossible behaviors, impossible in the sense that our epoch considers them and renders them impossible. History is full of famous villains and anonymous underprivileged people who take the route of hopeless adventure. In politics, we describe them as “adventurists” to indicate that their conduct is incompatible with the possibilities offered today.

Today, more than in the past, the perfection of the control of society discourages anyone who would venture into the unknown by condemning them to a holocaust in advance. But this very control, reducing the field of human activity to nothingness, creates the subjective conditions for a desperation that augurs nothing good. How to prevent this danger? By hiding from the eyes of the greatest number of people the harmful actions of several handfuls of individuals in the hope of avoiding contagion? Certainly not, since censorship exercised at the society level, in addition to being exorbitantly expensive, would, if felt by the general population, expose us to critiques of all sorts. Maybe reprimand in an exemplary fashion the perpetrators of conduct foreign to the epoch? No, because the contagion would erupt without slowing down. The only means to confront the surge of such irrepressible desires resides in representing them: showing them, forcing people to look at them, and thus inculcating the conviction that everything is possible, not in real life, but in its representation.

It would be unproductive to investigate the origins and historical epochs of the separation between *ontos* and *logos*, and this returns us to our immediate task. It is enough to consider that such a separation exists and that any reconciliation between the two terms is impossible. Why

persist in wanting reality and its representation to join together? Why persist in seeing the abolition of this separation as the goal towards which history must ineluctably tend? Why presuppose that such reconciliation is the old dream of mankind? No symptom legitimizes such an expectation. Until now, the people themselves have disavowed this arbitrary hypothesis: their instinctive repulsion for revolution shows this. And the workers have quite clearly grasped, as have a number of their defenders, that contemporary revolution can no longer limit itself, as it did in the past, to attacking things, the king's palace, the instruments of production and other, similar nonsense. Contemporary revolution immediately puts into question individuality, the specificity of each person; it brings the abandonment of the limits that separate each person from the totality, the abdication of his *uniqueness*,⁴³ the return to the general matrix (if you will allow me the utilization of this hardly seductive psychoanalytic category), to the reign of indistinctness, to the heart of a confused material magma in which being and manifestation are indistinct in a timeless lethargy, an ahistorical time, in sum. A hardly pleasant scenario, as you can see, except for several degenerate obscurantists.

This is why, today, no one wants revolution! And this is why, on the contrary, everyone today hoists the flag of difference, specificity, deviancy and subjectivity! Thus let us apply this natural tendency of the people and accentuate the separation between *ontos* and *logos* until the day when representation – universally imposed – appears as the only visible reality. That is the true passion of power, its *idée fixe*: to make representation the only reality in which it is possible to live.

Pardon me, Goffredo, for this philosophical digression and allow me to return to the terrain that suits me better: the terrain of political action.

Thus, let us ask what instruments does modern society have to represent itself: only the *mass media*⁴⁴ and culture, unfortunately. Hardly anything, basically. This is why we must utilize them the best we can. Thus, if the management of culture in its quasi-totality is differed to us, the management of the *mass media* essentially escapes the control of the Leftist parties.

This division of labor in social control is, moreover, perfectly rational and advantageous for each and all. The *mass media* effectuate a first polishing of the passionate phenomena that germinate in social life. It is only when the work of the *mass media* reveals itself to be ineffective at containing the passions of those who are excited that one turns to culture to neutralize them.

The *mass media* are the maneuverers of representation; culture is the craftsman of luxury. In the language of the *mass media*, the fact that a man has been killed by another, for whatever reason, is described as an “atrocious crime”; while the prisoner who rebels against his general conditions of existence is included in the concept of a “legitimate struggle for the reform of the [Criminal] Code”; the impulse of the one who seeks, by way of communication, to break the yoke in which the vocabulary of political economy encloses him is charged with “delirium.” The messages of the *mass media* present themselves as communication, but they are, in reality, definitions of all that is possible to be lived, which, from then on, can only be deployed within the limits traced out by those definitions. “*All determination is negation*,”⁴⁵ recalled my Idealist professor of philosophy, quoting Spinoza. And doesn't defining something mean tracing out its limits, that is to say, denying everything that doesn't enter into the definition?

⁴³ Latin in original.

⁴⁴ English in original, here and hereafter.

⁴⁵ Latin in original.

Will the people revolt against the representations of real life that the *mass media* offer them? In other words, will they break the pre-established definitions of their intentions? I do not believe so, and if they do, they would run into a second obstacle: that of culture. In their crudeness, the *mass media* can only hurl curses at the passions of life and try to exclude them from the community, but fail. Then it falls to culture to bring the penchants that might undermine civil society's foundations into its heart, thereby blunting them and representing them as cultural problems with the goal of annihilating them as materially constructed life [forms]. To present every manifestation of life as a literary, artistic, or poetic object, or the object of sociological and political investigation, is the task of culture and its function in the framework of a planned social development! The strength of our epoch consists in the fact that all the events of life are made the objects of cultural debate, and involved in endless quarrels for which there are a thousand pretexts to continue.

At bottom, it matters little in what register life is represented, as long as it is registered as cultural fact. Then all the actions of men who have tried to realize their passions appear as artistic license, as poetic *exploits*,⁴⁶ as collective dissatisfaction of the sociological kind.

Our project on the cultural plane must be immense. What is at stake? The lassitude of all passion, including, of course, the passion for lassitude.

The time for curses and censorship is over. Today we are partisans of cultural freedom in all domains. How is it possible that people have still not grasped that all that is touched by culture, like a modern philosopher's stone, becomes boring and insignificant?

Naturally, although the means that culture primarily uses is problematization for its own sake, this doesn't exclude the fact that sometimes culture has recourse to definition in the sense that I've used this word with respect to the *mass media*. An appropriate vocabulary has already been successfully experimented with. Consider, dear comrade, the denigrating and demoralizing efficiency of epithets such as petit bourgeois, voluntarist, waiverer, vitalist, decadent, subjectivist, etc. I need not insist, because you know this vocabulary all too well. But we must go further. We must pursue definitions and cultural classifications so that any passionate behavior, actual or potential, has a conceptual representation. Only then will the danger be removed; only then will the planning of development have nothing to fear from "variable" mankind, and value will be definitively independent from human passion.

How to arrive at this state of affairs? By seeking to enlarge the operational field of culture: we must create a living and credible school for the masses that can make its students absolutely inoffensive, transform bookstores into supermarkets, put emphasis on cultural circles, research centers and publishing houses, and favor so-called alternative, revolutionary and avant-garde cultures and popular *revivals*,⁴⁷ and thus favor the cultural confrontation between opposed factions so as to remove real confrontation, naturally.

And so that someone doesn't tell me that the population, and particularly the subordinate strata, would in any case remain impermeable to cultural propaganda, because the indigence of passion in our era is such that everyone is ready – out of a preference for the lesser of two evils – to choose the simulation of passion instead of the inanity of existence. The simulacrum is in fact the image of the thing, not the thing itself, and what is important for us is to distance mankind from *its* thing even further by making it appreciate the simulacrum. To do this, intellectuals of your caliber must continue to produce culture in always-new forms, it hardly matters which ones. It would be unfortunate that you come to disappear or are condemned to silence!

⁴⁶ *Italian to French translator*: French in original.

⁴⁷ English in original.

I am certain, dear Goffredo, that you will be sensible to the problem that I have hardly sketched out here. You must reflect, then decide and act. Thus I seek your opinion and suggestions.

Third Letter

Dear Adele,⁴⁸

I will begin with a beneficial self-critique. I must in fact recognize that several years ago, when the feminist movement showed its first signs of life, few were the politicians who understood the meaning of the phenomenon and divined the importance that it would soon take on, and I was among the last ones to grasp the excellence of your struggle. It seemed to me that history was once again clashing with one of the tiresome changes of course that delay it, provisionally divert it towards secondary objectives that are, at that moment, perceived as primary. To my eyes, the character of your appeals were not at all opposed to, indeed, were in conformity with the exigencies of capitalist development, and your attitude did not seem to differ from the proverbial imbecile who breaks down a door that, in fact, is already open.

But time and the evolution of your conduct have made me revise my opinion, and the reservations that I had concerning the identity and insignificance of your claims finally dissipated and those claims, having today reached maturity, powerfully impose themselves as an absolute pretention to offer the people a project for a positive life, one qualitatively different from the one lived until now. Similar in this to the fourth estate,⁴⁹ which, being nothing, nourished the ambition to be everything, you feminists present yourselves on the stage of history with a project that embraces all of the aspects of life, nevertheless rejecting – here you distinguish yourselves from the fourth estate and reveal your imposing modernity – all of the traditional forms of domination and political participation. But I need to interrupt this praise, because flattery harms the one who gives it as much as the one who receives it, and I do not want unlimited praise to divert you from the immense task that you have set yourself.

Instead, I will stop and begin to discuss your project, although it is difficult for me to reduce it to a single proposition, because it disperses itself into an infinity of watchwords, appeals and *requirements*.

Perhaps the best *slogan*⁵⁰ that describes the positivity that you propose is the famous phrase *Donna, è bello*,⁵¹ which evokes your refusal to continue to see the feminine condition as cursed by God and scorned by men, and which is a *slogan*⁵² that, on first sight, is absolutely insane – something shared by all *slogans*⁵³ – but marks, if one reflects on it for a bit, your desire for positivity, a kind of starvation of self-realization, a distinctive trait of the classes and individuals who have never realized anything. And you, the last to appear on the stage of history, you have affirmed your project of feminine life with a pride that is completely exaggerated. That

⁴⁸ *Publisher's note*: Adele Faccio, who received a degree in Roman philology from the University of Genoa, participated in the Resistance in Liguria. In 1973, she founded the Center for Information About Sterilization and Abortion, of which she is the president. Among other institutional objectives, she aims for the irreversible sterilization of speech. It is precisely due to this task that Berlinguer addressed himself to her.

⁴⁹ *Italian to French translator*: a term, no longer used, that evokes the classic proletariat of the 14th century.

⁵⁰ English in original.

⁵¹ The title of a film directed by Sergio Bazzini and released in 1974.

⁵² English in original.

⁵³ English in original.

is your ideal strength, the only one today capable of bringing aid to the established order, which, as one knows, changes to always remain the same.

How could we ever dare to imagine – we, the politicians in an epoch that has finished with politics – the stupefying appearance of a workers’ advocate (it hardly matters if he were to be part of the rank and file or the leadership) who would be audacious enough to proclaim “The worker, he is beautiful” or, if you prefer, a sociologist who would scorn danger to the point of defending the enviable character of the conditions in which a young person or a student lives? It was a long time ago that we regretfully had to retire similar fantasies: some of us due to cowardice and others due to a sense of modesty. And we had already been used to living day by day, somehow patching together the tears in the social fabric, when you arrived, bearing a conception of feminine life that, after a few retouches, was applicable to the stronger sex as well, to fill the frightening emptiness of the values that had meanwhile grown hollow. Heeding the SOS sent out by capitalist society with a sense of opportunity and a zeal with which history is stingy (if these historical and sociological remarks interest you, I can mention, by way of comparison, the support offered to the established order for the last century by the intellectuals of all stripes), you built your grandiose ideal at the precise moment that all political positivity had failed and you replaced it with a positivity of everyday life (an “existentialist” positivity, one would have said five years ago) that is placed upon much more solid ground in that it is attached to every domain of human activity, including the most secret ones.

Moreover, your *slogan*⁵⁴ does not speak of what is beautiful in the feminine condition. But, though it is vague, your *slogan*⁵⁵ isn’t at all equivocal; in fact, it does not even claim to speak of the feminine condition such as it has been lived until now, nor as it would be lived in a future and revolutionized future. On the contrary, it glorifies femininity as it is manifested *here and now*,⁵⁶ provided that women work and struggle within the feminist movement, in solidarity with its comrades, not as isolated monads, but as part of a whole. Similar to the lascivious clothes that emphasize the shape of a beautiful woman’s body and yet abstain from exhibiting it openly, the stupefying effectiveness of your formula, which is worthy of a political propagandist of the highest order, resides precisely in the fact that it reveals and does not reveal, leaving one to suppose an unknown paradise of delights.

Nevertheless, if one examines in detail the daily activity of an average feminist, one in truth sees empty hands: domestic war over *household*⁵⁷ duties for the conservatives; lesbian practices for the extremists; and activism at consultation centers and “self-awareness” sessions (“self-awareness”⁵⁸ being an improper term that would make poor Hegel turn in his grave) for the moderates. My analysis certainly isn’t exhaustive, but, to be sincere, I have left aside a few things. Namely: behind “*Donna, è bello*” there is in fact not enough of substance to justify a *slogan*.⁵⁹ This is certainly a secret, but it is a clown’s secret, a public secret.

Today, despite a catalogue of such impoverished lived moments, you have successfully founded nothing less than a well-followed protest movement, one capable, due to its conception of life, of penetrating into many sectors of society: this is what leaves us – the traditional

⁵⁴ English in original.

⁵⁵ English in original.

⁵⁶ Latin in original.

⁵⁷ *Italian to French translator*: French in original.

⁵⁸ *Italian to French translator*: *autocoscienza*, a term reprinted in the 1970s by feminists and other activists, influenced by psychology, to designate consciousness-raising sessions, usually in groups.

⁵⁹ English in original.

politicians – open-mouthed, sincerely stupefied by the extent of the results that you have been able to obtain with such limited means!

But if at first glance your success seems inexplicable, a less hasty reflection allows one to understand the reasons for your rise and our (the other politicians’) simultaneous fall. The fact is that politicians, the Marxist ones especially, have always operated with the conviction – history will determine if that conviction was well-founded or erroneous and, for my part, I hope its verdict comes as soon as possible – that the proletariat was, due to its historic destiny, “the inheritor of classic German philosophy,” and thus those politicians always treated it with the intellectual and moral respect that its legacy conferred upon it. But you, endowed with a much more developed practical sense, have understood very well that the little people bring with them a much more miserable heritage, that of the Roman pigs with their filth and manifest immorality and, basing yourselves on such insights, you have taken them where we politicians have failed [to dare].

Even more radically than we did, you have abandoned all illusions about the intellectual level and sensibility of the most humble classes – the very ones that a democratic regime must flatter and hold in respect –, and you have recognized the representations of the people for what they are: an abyss of baseness and triviality. As a result, you have been perfectly accurate in your intuition when you composed your program with the *slices of life*⁶⁰ of a very advanced naturalism, certainly more appetizing for crude palates than a Hegelian turn of phrase or Ricardo’s economic analysis. Also the preferred themes of your program are extracted from the everyday lives of the people, with an obvious predilection for the most spicy cases and the most degrading vicissitudes: abortion, badly practiced sexuality, domestic warfare, lesbianism, bastard children, feminine prattle: these are the sad affairs with which you entertain the people, who are, as always, morbidly attentive to those who speak to them of their tribulations and vices.

Nevertheless, unlike theatrical forms such as the mime of the Romans and the *Commedia dell’arte*, which crudely ridiculed human baseness, you are serious, and you want to be taken seriously. What had been hardly rebellious, previously relegated to the shadowy zones of the social territory, and indifferent to the imperatives of religion, the State and the economy; that which is currently designated by the expression “private life,” only escapes from its banality at moments of noisy coarseness or open immorality, or sometimes flees from it into artistic activity or concrete activity: your program of action has neutralized or sterilized it by transforming it into the subject for austere cultural debates or political *meetings*.⁶¹ All the human attributes that have fallen into your claws (and very few have escaped) – whether they are lascivious, spicy, obscene or sensual – have become *abstractions* worthy of figuring in treatises or essays, but surely not desirable from the point of view of concrete sensibilities.

I am certainly not someone who would support the idea that sensual impulses should lose their attraction once they have emerged from the taboos that surround them. But – come on! – there is a way of speaking of them. It is one thing to hold forth on love in a course on sexual hygiene, and quite another to speak of love in the bedroom. But thanks to you, we have finally come to the point that one speaks of it everywhere as one would speak of it at a center for prenuptial consultation or in a treatise on psychotherapy.

To prove what I have advanced, I will provide an example from my personal life. During the evening, free from political obligations, when I can dedicate several hours to study or reflection, I often see my oldest daughter return home, and I am in the habit of speaking to her

⁶⁰ *Italian to French translator*: French in original.

⁶¹ English in original.

for a while when she does. Sometimes she appears with rouge on her cheeks and her hair disheveled. In such cases, I ask her with gentle insistence, which is justified by the trust that we share, how she spent the evening, and the dear child inevitably responds to me, “I went to X’s place and I had good sexual relations.” These are her affairs, I don’t discuss them, but, finally, this is truly not a response likely to provoke a surge of complicity in a father as open and democratic as I flatter myself to be. But what I fear above all is that she refers to her “relations” not only with me, but also with the people of her age, her comrades and, *it is incredible to say so*,⁶² even with her *partner*.⁶³

Thanks to the work of the feminists – but I must recognize that the student protest movement had already shown the way – life (of which one is still permitted to speak) can only be depicted in the style of an essay. In the description of human interactions, sterilized abstraction has taken hold of disgusting reality, transforming materiality into ideality, and vulgarity into nobility. Just as one once passed from scholarly language to common speech, today we witness the transformation of the common into the abstract. This is a perfect example of current degeneration because, as Seneca says, *wherever you find a corrupt literary style in favor, you can be certain that morals have also deviated from the right path*.⁶⁴ One speaks of everything as if one were writing an essay, and the events of life no longer come from the linguistic paths that describe them, but turn towards the abstract. That this phenomenon cannot be reduced to the simple intellectual conformism of the Left, which feeds upon common expressions, as several writers for *l’Espresso* have claimed, appears obvious provided one wants to consider the fact that there are no more “sex fiends” but only “liberated managers of their own bodies,” no more “debauchees” but brave people who “make their own experiments,” no more “wet cunts and stiff cocks” but “good sexual relations.” Whether this is flesh becoming mummified or thought completely drained of blood that becomes the gravedigger for living flesh, I don’t know. What is certain, on the other hand, is that you feminists, despite your proclaimed sensuality, have made a precious and irreplaceable contribution to the process of generalized burial. It will be easy for you to object that my argument leads straight to the obscenities of the whorehouses and the barracks, but it does nothing of the sort.

Despite appearances, what I desire is something else: that the linguistic codes that you have developed with such great skill become our collective heritage and that the oases in which speech still flows, fluidly and sensually, are finally dried out. That everyone speaks abstractly; that everyone always chooses the most affected expression; that we reform the dictionary by crossing out the most sensual and evocative words; that everyone expresses himself like an essayist, whether they are at a bar, at urinal or in the bedroom. Who will feel lust after knowing that the object of his concupiscence is “sexual relations”? Who will feel the desire to seek adventure after knowing that his actions will be placed under the rubric of “making his own experiments”? Who will take great pleasure in reporting his own affairs and those of other people if doing so is “expressing himself”? Nietzsche would say that interiority “has learned how to leap, to dance, to put on makeup, to express itself and gradually lose itself in abstraction and calculation!”⁶⁵ Have patience! But the social situation that will result from this will be orderly, and words, rendered inoffensive, will forever cease to constitute an element of subversion in the

⁶² Latin in original.

⁶³ English in original.

⁶⁴ *Epistles*, 114. Latin in original.

⁶⁵ From *Untimely Meditations*. German in original.

mouths of unconscious people, who will always be ready to put their hands up but never use them to recognize acceptance [by the others].

The times of crudeness and disorder in the definition of things must come to an end. An old brocade expresses the essence of marriage in this way: “To drink, eat and sleep together is marriage, it seems to me.”⁶⁶

This is a brutal and reductive conception that, today, would horrify any progressive: to drink, eat and sleep together seem to be trifles in the eyes of our contemporaries, and they certainly do not resemble conjugal *relations*. But the rustic who imagined this pithy formula was not deprived of grandeur: in the terms that were the closest to him and that best expressed his crude appetites, he described the limited but consistent reality that he knew; he knew what he wanted and he said it, and his context, as one says, perhaps didn’t allow him to want anything else. In sum, he was a sexist pig and he couldn’t deny it.

If a modern-day man dared to enunciate such an aphorism at one of your assemblies, you would certainly make his life difficult and, in the mildest of circumstances, you would accuse him of desiring, not a woman, but an object, a woman-object, as is now the custom to say. And he would indeed merit such a fate, because his triviality would infect the purity of the interpersonal relations that you are trying to instaurate. The obscenity of his thinking could only result in lubricious acts, thus disturbing the antiseptic cohabitation of the members of society. At the very least, one would have to reeducate him through repeated psychotherapeutic sessions.

To me it seems beyond question that, in a Socialist society, the fundamental norm would basically be reduced to an absolute respect for the personality of the others, as you intend that one should have for women, who have been the victims of irreverent attention until now. Paradoxically, one could say that Socialism would place each person under a glass enclosure, in absolute sensory isolation: this would be the most radical means to obtain mutual respect. Molestation during moments of shared thrills and compliments in bad taste would finally be vanquished. The planet would be transformed into a living museum, museums being the places where everything is respected in the extreme: sanctuaries in which one can look but not touch. Each man, freed from the ancient incrustations that cover him, would be presentable in public. This is the direction of the intellectual and moral reeducation towards which you fight. But a museum of identical pieces certainly would not seduce the observer, who above all desires a rapid succession of [different] images. Thus, would it not be necessary to demand that each individual renounce his own difference, his own *uniqueness*,⁶⁷ his particular specificity? But have no fear: you would be able to tranquilly cultivate your “feminine specificity.” What will count will be the fact that this great blossoming of difference will remain without use of any kind, other than being contemplated.

A great novelist who you surely do not like, and who I will abstain from naming, decreed that “there are two great types of girlfriends: those who have ‘big ideas’ and those who have received ‘a good Catholic education.’ Two fashions that the pitiful have of feeling superior; two fashions of arousing the anxious and the unsatisfied.”⁶⁸ Divested of its misogynist character, this observation appears penetrating to me, and in fact I have encountered combative women (the feminists) and resigned women (all the others). As for the fact that such a division of roles might

⁶⁶ *Italian to French translator*: French in original. [Quote is taken from Antoine Loysel (1536-1617). It is worth noting that it concludes with the phrase, “But the Church must agree.”]

⁶⁷ Latin in original.

⁶⁸ *Italian to French translator*: French in original. [Louis-Ferdinand Céline (1894-1961), *Voyage au bout de la nuit*.]

excite the demands of the *anxious*,⁶⁹ allow me to indicate my disagreement. On the contrary, it discourages those who are anxious because the imprudent ones who risk making propositions that are not completely irreproachable know *a priori* the fashions in which their appetites will be satisfied, and there no longer remains anything to glorify *after the meal*.⁷⁰

On the other hand, a futurist of the second rank⁷¹ makes the following classification: “Women can be divided into a single category: the beautiful ones. Men can be divided into three: the rich ones, the poor ones, and the ugly women.” It’s a slightly cynical remark, but not deprived of corrosive power. Its author could not anticipate what would follow, alas, namely that the only feminine category that merits this description [“beautiful”] sees its ranks melted away in the blink of an eye, and this despite progress in the field of cosmetics, which have become articles of popular consumption. But as one knows, the only miraculous makeup is luxury, whose days have ended. Luxury is in fact nourished by freedom of thought and freedom of speech, which have been pushed to become licentiousness in actions. And where today can one find licentiousness in thought and actions? Thanks to their problematization by you and your sympathizers, everything is designated by extremely harmless abstractions. Everything is engaged in the abstraction that corresponds to it, and those cages hide the practical truths that those things contain. The strength of abstraction resides precisely in the magnificent aptitude that it has to hide and isolate the truth.

You feminists, you have contributed the most to this social concealment of practical truth, especially in the framework of what one calls everyday life, thus finishing the job of the falsification of human needs that the political order had hardly undertaken.

Perhaps because you have been too mistreated by a reality that has oppressed you for centuries, you have preferred to leave it behind by choosing the route of abstract truth, separated from all use.

Two centuries ago, Casanova affirmed that “the truth keeps itself hidden in the depths of a well, but when the whim comes to it to show itself, everyone, amazed, fixes their eyes on it, because the truth is completely nude, a woman and very beautiful.”⁷² But he was wrong. He could not know that the feminist movement would distinguish itself through its concealment of the truth, the only one that dispenses its favors: practical truth.

Comrades, to work! This project has hardly begun, and there remains so much to do where the intellectual and moral reeducation of the masses (men in particular) is concerned. It is well known that in certain milieus they still speak of the “ass” and, what is worse, with sensual enjoyment, sometimes actually combining this word with the act of “pinching.” Furthermore, it is common to calumny feminine masturbation by describing it with the disgusting term “fingering.”⁷³ During a tedious parliamentary session, I had to scold a very young colleague who, to show his appreciation for the qualities (certainly not intellectual) of a new deputy, used the expression “pretty cunt.” One could multiply such examples. It is your duty to identify and stigmatize the sleazy things that hide in every discourse, in every word, by having recourse, when applicable, to experts in complaisant semantics. In fact, either you will manage to complete

⁶⁹ *Italian to French translator*: French in original.

⁷⁰ Latin in original.

⁷¹ Filippo Tommaso Emilio Marinetti (1876-1944).

⁷² *Italian to French translator*: French in original. [Giacomo Casanova (1725-1798), *Histoire de ma Fuite des Prisons de la République de Venise qu'on appelle les Plombs.*]

⁷³ *Italian to French translator*: *ditalino*, an obscene term derived from *dito* and, perhaps, *ditale*.

the sterilization of language or you will disappear as a movement and be reabsorbed by the system of masculine values.

I do not think that you will encounter obstacles where men are concerned. On the contrary, I fear there will be resistance from certain women. I am not worried by the traditionalists, because I am convinced that, with patience, you will succeed in rallying them to your cause. On the contrary, there is a very special category of women that is impossible to fit into the feminist-traditionalist binomial, a category that is difficult to delimit, but of which it will be worth the effort to create an *identikit* so that you can size up the danger to be confronted. When I was a child, one said that a little girl with particularly lively manners was a “tomboy,”⁷⁴ an expression that today has fallen into disuse and for good reason. One could perhaps coin the phrase “bad girl”⁷⁵ to describe who I have in mind. This would be – I fear that several specimens are already in circulation – a woman who is insufficiently domesticated by culture and education; not at all inclined to recognize herself in a given cause, not even the cause of her own gender, due to her awareness of the absolute indifference of genital attributes; prone to fantasy and easy whims; lazy; incapable of distinguishing her desires from those of another, and this naïve; unable to distinguish subjectivity from objectivity, or the serious from the facetious; a sensualist by taste and not by dogma; and, finally – that which is essential – perfectly happy to sit down in a vulgar manner on a stool in a *piano bar*.⁷⁶

The behaviors that I have described by way of an example, incontestable salt of life, are very rarely encountered these days and almost never concentrated in just one woman. Do not accuse me, my dear, of sketching out a feminine image for my personal use, one based upon my frustrated desires. The model that I describe is, on the contrary, one that I have no desire to see become widespread, because its appearance would coincide with the ruin of the civil order. Could we still call “society” a *place*⁷⁷ in which women, instead of demanding abortion on demand and other twaddle of the same sort, insist on brazenly engaging in (not on paper but in the flesh) such small spicy adventures as Snow White and the Seven Dwarves – an adventure that has already been exploited by alternative pornography – and others of the same style? And if the women take up such dissolute behavior, what will come of the men? I will confess to you that I have in mind my personal case and that of so many other comrades. How will we continue to claim our portion of wet cunt if the women, due to pure vice, fantasize about being ravished by Saracens or treat themselves to good times in Toyland or other, similar whims? That would be the end of the democratic sheep, who have until now been pulled along by tantalizing them with the masochistic consumption of overcooked food and tedious feminine demands. We have never demanded that those poor devils – who are pathetic and ridiculous at the same time, the new faces of the *Commedia dell’arte*, if not *laissez faire*⁷⁸ capitalism – support or tolerate women who take action; we have kept these sheep as ornaments. This is the modest price they have had to pay in exchange for a place at the bosom of feminine benevolence. We have [only] pushed them to act as *supporters*⁷⁹ of causes that have left them cold, causes for which they have been warned to not show excessive zeal, which could offend the women themselves and their actions.

⁷⁴ *Italian to French translator: maschiaccio.*

⁷⁵ *Italian to French translator: femminaccia, not “sissy,” but “a woman of bad life.”*

⁷⁶ English in original.

⁷⁷ Greek in original.

⁷⁸ *Italian to French translator: French in original.*

⁷⁹ English in original.

It is good that these outcasts rot in the broth in which you have cooked them and for which they themselves have furnished the ingredients: what is at stake is the orderly development of society.

It would be unfortunate if, one fateful day, the women demanded of these men, as the price for the amenities they offer, not patience, but action, and did so not in the framework of economic profit – as certain amiable whores demanded in the past – but, on the contrary, in the particular sphere that some have called “the realization of art”!

But if you continue to work in the way that you have, we will finally attain a completely inert society, from which all trouble and adventure have been banished. Perhaps the charms of life will suffer, but the domestication of the human species will profit, and it is that domestication, and not life’s charms, that constitute the goal of political activity, whether it is traditional or feminist.

Fourth Letter

To Angelo,⁸⁰

The content and tone of my letter will surely surprise you, habituated as you are to having an austere image of me and my political party, which is a little retrograde and not always very sensitive to the problems that one today classifies under the rubric of “the personal.” Perhaps you will be surprised by my statements, which might at first seem to you to escape from the mentality of the Party and clash with the problematics that we typically confront. But if I am resolved to write to you what follows, this is because you can appreciate our levelheaded and calm approach to the same themes that you, on the contrary, have raised in a provocative and slightly confused manner. I allude to the famous sexual liberation, about which one rants in the press, without ever considering that it progresses, not due to your disturbances and problematizations, but as the unavoidable effect of the development of capitalism. You – the radicals, the homosexuals, the feminists and the sociologists of deviant behaviors – have drafted a complete series of essays on the subject, analyzed the most idiosyncratic compartments, and raised the veil on attitudes that were clandestine only a short time ago, all in the name of sensitizing the masses, but without ever seeing that you avoid the heart of the problem and set aside its adequate political solution.

Therefore, it seems to me that the question, stripped of what is excessive and useless, can be reduced to the sad and distressing complaint that Franco Antonicelli,⁸¹ who is missed, often expressed to me in the last years of his life. A great lover of the feminine charms, he deplored the fact that our epoch had irreversibly made ugly the corporeality of men (though it was in fact the corporeality of women that mattered to him), stiffening the grace of their movements and depreciating the delicacy of their manners. No one, especially not the young people with whom he was close at the end of his life, seemed worthy of love or capable of fascinating him. And these reflections depressed him all the more because he saw no way out of this state of affairs. In sum, it seemed to him that the women had become irremediably ugly, insipid and absolutely deprived of the tempting charms that had contributed to making his youth so pleasant.

⁸⁰ *Publisher’s note:* Angelo Pezzana, bookseller, member of the Radical Party and a founding member of FUORI, is a specialist in self-awareness, becoming aware and the passage from individuality to collectivity. [*Translator:* FUORI is the *Fronte Unito Omosessuale Rivoluzionario Italiano* (“United Front of Italian Homosexuals”). In Italian, the word *fuori* means “outside.”]

⁸¹ Franco Antonicelli (1902-1974), an anti-fascist, poet and independent Leftist.

Antoniceilli couldn't explain this generalized ugliness, nor could he come up with a remedy. But his grievances allow us to formulate the question in appropriate terms: what is the human body today or, in other words, where have all the *pieces of ass*⁸² gone? The question might appear vulgar to you, but its triviality doesn't prevent us from responding to it.

It so happens that our epoch, in which one has copulated like never before in human history, has nevertheless provoked an unprecedented self-effacement, thus putting into play the somber deception of generalized ugliness. What is this ruse? The creation of a multiplicity of extra-human interests – the interest in the body that you designate by the phrase “the personal” not being the least one – that divert the attention that each person would otherwise receive.

It is common to present the interests that are external to the human being as being able to enrich it and raise it to a superior level of completeness. These interests range from political commitments to cultural pursuits, from work to drug addiction, and so on: behaviors that answer to the call for “participation,” which is so dwelled upon these days. To participate means to suppress the attention that one brings to oneself, even if one participates in a political activity that centers upon “the personal,” to use your expression, and from this inevitably comes the uglification of the body. I cannot say if this also results in a veritable cellular degeneration, but it is certain that, when each person wastes his or her energy in participation, there truly remains none to dedicate to one's own sensual attractiveness.

Is this a good thing for society and the individual? Perhaps there is no valid answer to this in the absolute, but one must remark that, to the extent that everyone is lowered to the state of average ugliness, certain dissonances that could be created by an excess of beauty or ugliness (the too beautiful and the too ugly, to whom I return below) find themselves attenuated, and conflicts between individuals – created by envy or rivalry – instead become based on a general carnal mediocrity.

And then, one must still wonder: what good is it to become more attractive? The response can only be discouraging because, when an amorous encounter is an everyday task like any other (as it is today), it follows that the body can only expect such an encounter in its habitual sensory numbness. Today, making love has become a function, equivalent to any other activity that permits the day to come to an end. Too many times I have seen young people of both genders go to an amorous encounter with the same bodily and emotional *bearing*⁸³ they possess when they go to a newspaper stand or, let us say, to a political meeting, with the only difference being the *bathrooms*⁸⁴ or their tastes in partners!

Why become more attractive if the sexual function finds itself satisfied in a carefully maintained mediocrity? Because today sex is precisely a question of a function and it is experienced as such. Creatures of sad flesh meet each other and copulate, demanding nothing of their *partners*⁸⁵ except a little hygiene, a little care for the clothes worn, erotic technique, and shared ideas. Above all, they demand nothing of themselves; they tolerate their own mediocre sensuality.

My analysis could stop here, but alas! there is worse. I have in mind the terrible social distress that strikes two categories that are apparently antithetical but are actually very close in their misfortunes: the too ugly and the too beautiful. What happens to them? The first group of people must submit themselves, in solitude, to a process of valorization that is unnatural, or face

⁸² The Italian here is *pezzi di figa* (“pieces of pussy”).

⁸³ *Italian to French translator*: French in original.

⁸⁴ French in original.

⁸⁵ English in original.

exclusion from the general population. Ugly as they are, they must adorn themselves with some ersatz quality: in sum, enhance themselves. If they are taciturn, they must strive to become chatterboxes; if they are unassuming, they must become brilliant; if they are uncultivated, they must become learned; if they are flat broke, they must become wealthy; if they are crude, they must become refined; and so on. The social condemnation that nature has inflicted on them is to be regarded as the mechanism that forces them to seek out a social mediation (other than their bodies) that obligates them to create some exchange-value.

Inversely, the misfortune of those who are too beautiful resides in the fact that nature, in its eccentricity, has sometimes endowed them with additional penchants and aptitudes, but their development has hardly been facilitated by these people's beauty. Dazzled as they are by the base propositions that they continually receive, and ceaselessly spoiled due to their desirability, they are never asked for anything other than their flesh. These unfortunate people must struggle arduously if they want to obtain credibility in domains other than the bedroom. Above all, they must make themselves as ugly as is necessary. It is a rule that beauty is accompanied by intellectual vacuity, or at least that is the common prejudice. And so a beautiful person, to make him- or herself [an] intellectual, must become ugly. In our society, an excess of gifts engenders suspicion, and to enjoy one of them prevents a person from possessing others or, at least, if an individual possesses many gifts, they only exist in small amounts, at the mediocre level of the common man.

The moral of the story, dear friend, is this: no one lives in peace; everything must be won with difficulty, including one's own being! The individual is prohibited from being what he is (here, in passing, is work for the penal legislators of the future: to express in the rule of law the "interdiction of being") under pain of exclusion from society's benefits. And so the beautiful people must make themselves unkempt, the ugly people must give themselves intellectual beauty, and the swamp of the mediocre people must take care to not emerge from the enviable situation in which they live.

It might be the case that the people of previous epochs did not have problems of this kind. They inherited from the past a given *body*⁸⁶ and didn't encounter the necessity of building a *new one*⁸⁷ or attributing value to it. Clothing, also transmitted by tradition, expressed the harmony of the person with the natural universe. In other civilizations, or at least in other classes, one tried to emphasize (excessively so) the discrepancies between the sometimes obscene presence in the world of people and the rule of things by having recourse to extravagant clothing, which was often an unconscious symbol of man's mastery of the world. Today, by contrast, for the first time ever, we witness the spectacle of a humanity that is born and lives *without a body*,⁸⁸ and thus must work hard to attain one. Many times I have diverted my gaze to the sad spectacle of young workers dressed like *disc jockeys*,⁸⁹ ladies disguised as prostitutes, *hippies*⁹⁰ and feminists dressed up in the images of themselves – all of them seeking some identity, a package inside of which they sell, *at a cheap price*,⁹¹ their own raw flesh, which is a perishable commodity like all the others! Thus diverted from themselves in the name of the idea that they should participate in something, they prepare an acceptable image (that is to say, an image having sufficient credit)

⁸⁶ Latin in original.

⁸⁷ Latin in original.

⁸⁸ Latin in original.

⁸⁹ English in original.

⁹⁰ English in original.

⁹¹ Latin in original.

for the society in which they live and conform to the roles that they must interpret, one after the other. Since they do not love themselves, they are the worst lovers, and the absence of lustfulness and luxury is reflected in their very bodies. Lustfulness and luxury are passions that are too strong for our times. Prevent their birth or only allow their deployment through political mediation: the result is the same.

The fact is, my excellent friend, that certain desires are absolutely shameful in the absence of adequate mediation. No one – I say this by way of example – dares to admit that he is a sex fiend or, if he does, it is to hide some small, even more abject vice. Isn't that the case with the hard-line advocates of the groin, among whom you prosper? In fact, you have made public certain practices, such as sodomy and lesbianism, which were previously considered as private or frankly reserved for the whorehouse;⁹² you have, so to speak, revealed your dispositions, your previously secret, small vices. By chance, haven't you wanted to make noble some slight obscenity with the sole end of hiding a more serious one, namely, the creation of canons of debauchery, in the shelter of which deviants can work in peace and in agreement with society? If you have, I can only admire you. Your work would thus be in conformity with the words of Sade, which I relate to you from memory:

“In a word, there is no kind of danger in these mania: if the women were to go even further, as far as caressing monsters and animals, as the examples of many peoples teach us, all this nonsense wouldn't cause the smallest inconvenience, because the corruption of morals, which is often very useful for a government, doesn't harm it in any way, and we must expect from our legislators enough wisdom, enough prudence, to be quite sure that no law comes from them that would repress the miseries that, absolutely favoring [social] organization, never make the one who is inclined towards them more guilty than the individual whom nature has created deformed.”⁹³

If your goal is to reinvigorate the government, I can only congratulate you, but say so, so that everyone can understand this!

In fact, today I believe there can be an agreement between the large popular masses and the deviant minorities, and I desire that it be made. It falls to you to take another step: deviancy cannot be set in opposition to the model that we Communists pursue, and realignment is absolutely necessary. But you must understand that the defense of the “sexually different” individual – a defense that would guarantee him or her the serene exercise of his or her deviancy – is not the ultimate goal. What is more important is the establishment of small social centers (I cannot come up with another expression, since the Anglo-Saxon term *racket*⁹⁴ irritates me) in the framework of which the aspiring deviant would effectuate his or her apprenticeship and gain the right to get his or her rocks off in broad daylight with society's *consent*.⁹⁵ It would be our misfortune if sexual difference were a starting point! On the contrary, sexual difference must be a state of imperfection that reaches its completeness only if the individual earns it; only if he or she acquires it after a difficult struggle. A friend who is a journalist tells me that one of your *slogans*, pleasant and provocative, is “Struggle hard against nature.” Well, you must take that seriously; you must struggle to establish your dignified difference within the heart of society.

⁹² Alexander Trocchi: “I am only interested in sodomy and lesbianism.” Sarcastic remark made after clashing with Hugh McDiarmid at the Edinburgh Writers' Conference of 1962.

⁹³ *Italian to French translator*: French in original. [“Français, encore un effort si vous voulez être républicains” (Yet another effort, Frenchmen, if you would be republicans) in *La philosophie dans le boudoir* (Philosophy in the Bedroom).]

⁹⁴ English in original.

⁹⁵ Latin in original.

Your associations, your publications and your groups are the places where deviancy must be won!

You, dear friend, are too used to reflection for me to have to recall to you that capitalism is not a static entity, but a process of value-creation. And a heterosexual becoming a sodomite is a process. But must it also be a process of value-creation? I can respond to you calmly in the affirmative, provided, of course, that sexual deviancy is politically ennobled in some way. A homosexual who accedes to public *status*⁹⁶ thanks to politics is worth something; he can have respect [*crédit*]; but a man who, among other things, is also a homosexual is not worth anything and must be conscious of this fact at every moment. Thus, he must continue to frequent public urinals!

Thus, why must we be opposed to deviancy when we know that the capitalization of the planet is nothing other than a colossal deviancy with respect to the modes of production and the ways of life that have become implanted so deeply that they are considered to be “laws of nature”?

But there is better [than that]. In the bitter struggle for the construction of sexual difference that has finally been authorized, is it not possible to hide the general carnal mediocrity that characterizes the epoch in such a way that it can be accepted? Can the deviant who pursues and conquers his small, personal vice convince himself that he has attained a more elevated degree of passion in comparison to the norm? Can he convince himself that, to a greater degree than the common man (if you will permit me to use this crude expression), he enjoys the dullness of his passions, which are, all in all, similar to those of a heterosexual, despite the strangeness of his sexual practices? If it has been conquered after a difficult struggle (and thus already represents a lot), deviancy gives to the perverse person a taste for difference and procures for him the feeling of being heroic by managing to hide his corporeal mediocrity.

Fortunately for us, in both our political formations and the inner circles of our friends, we do not often speak of this carnal colorlessness that marks the epoch. On the contrary, we often and gladly ramble on about the various sexual practices; the advantages and disadvantages of each one; the ways of experimenting with them; and the necessity of making them acceptable in the eyes of society. In these great cauldrons, the fantasies and logorrhea of each person are given free reign.

All this being said, I can only regard with favor your struggle for sexual difference, and this approval is seconded by the orderly anthropomorphization of capitalism. As you well know, capitalism demands commodities that are always different and always new. And its voracity continues, today requiring *up-to-date*⁹⁷ human merchandise, which means – in the domain that we have explored here – the introduction of new models of sexual merchandise on the market of behaviors.

Yes to the valorization of deviancy – any and all deviancy.

Yes to the unremitting creation of new deviancies.

Continue, comrades, but vigorously.

⁹⁶ English in original.

⁹⁷ *Italian to French translator*: French in original.

Fifth Letter

Dear X,⁹⁸

Each person has been able to note, some with indulgence, some with apprehension, that for several years the political tensions of this country have exploded in episodes of open and brutal illegality. I do not want to expound the reasons for the rise of this South American situation in our country,⁹⁹ nor on the preventive and repressive measures that could contain this phenomenon, nor do I intend to investigate the political and ideological origins that sometimes underlie such criminal activity. Though such reflections are certainly necessary, they would be fruitless if they weren't part of a solid theoretical framework that would permit us, with assurance and in a systematic way, to confront unavoidable criminal phenomena by attributing to them a useful role in society.

Such a preliminary theoretical inquiry would be particularly necessary today, when the young people who are instinctively close to Marxism nevertheless find themselves, due to the free circulation of a plethora of formulations (generally confused, incoherent and weak-willed) concerning these problems, completely disoriented concerning legality, rights, justice and the State. A serious sweeping with an ideological broom – particularly concerning such delicate matters – can no longer be deferred. It is no longer tolerable that always-larger sectors of the youth squander their lives in illegal political activity (suicidal for them and dangerous for the orderly development of society) on the basis of a bad interpretation of certain Marxist axioms, such as “the withering away of the State and its laws,” which is a formulation that must, on the contrary, be correctly interpreted if it is not to be taken literally and if simple souls are not to believe, in good faith, that armed struggle against the law and the State is in itself a step towards communism. But let us proceed in an orderly way.

According to a classic thesis, the government is nothing other than an extension of the bourgeoisie. According to Lenin, the period of transition to communism is characterized by the continued existence of the State, but a particular kind of State, one “without a bourgeoisie.” In fully matured communism, the State finally disappears. These theses are known by all.

Today, despite the Soviet involution of the State apparatus, which, far from withering away, has consolidated itself with the passage of time, we in Italy will perhaps be the first to see a rare historical event: the extinction of the State and its laws. So that this statement doesn't seem exaggerated or risky, I will try to demonstrate its truth to you.

An anarchist¹⁰⁰ once said, “the superman of the State is the strength of the weak.” I say that the State is the weakness of the strong. It follows from this that the strong (the independent, responsible, self-disciplined individuals) no longer need, have never needed, governmental injunctions, imperatives, juridical norms or threatened sanctions, and that the weak (the submissive, the timorous, the incapable, the herd) have need of the State as an energetic

⁹⁸ *Publisher's note:* This letter was sent to an imprisoned leader of a political formation dedicated to armed struggle. This is why we haven't published his name. [*Translator:* possibly Renato Curcio, one of the founders of the Red Brigades, arrested and imprisoned in 1976.]

⁹⁹ Cf. Censor, Chapter IV, *Truth Report on the Last Chances to Save Capitalism in Italy*: “Moreover, we can reveal that, due to the worst possible choice of guilty parties – someone like Valpreda wasn't believable as the perpetrator of the attack [at the Piazza Fontana in Milan on 12 December 1969], even if a hundred taxi drivers had, before dying, given a hundred statements for subsequent public display – as well as due to the manner in which the police and the magistrates behaved during the affair, we made this operation into a grotesque farce of misunderstanding and gloom that was more worthy of a South American dictatorship than a European democracy.”

¹⁰⁰ This would seem to be Frederick Nietzsche.

school.¹⁰¹ The State is of no utility for the former (and in case the State constitutes a source of privileges, this would be an additional reason to suppress it!); for the latter, the State takes the place of a school for civic power.¹⁰² But once the objective of making all the citizens who are disadvantaged participate in civic affairs, the State no longer has a reason to exist. In other words, the State must force the absent citizen to participate; it must in sum give him courage, not only through the traditional means of voting, but also in more direct forms. At the moment that the participation of all has finally been gained, the State and its legal apparatus will become completely useless structures.

But one might object that participation is one thing, while injunctions, orders and imperatives are quite another. For the moment, a situation in which participation can develop harmoniously, without antagonisms or conflicts of interest, is unthinkable. I am quite aware of that. Nevertheless, when the injunction is the expression of mass autonomy, the product of popular will, it loses its odious and arbitrary characteristics and is spontaneously obeyed, without the obligation to have recourse to constraints. The imperative must never be presented as heteronomous, as the capricious manifestation of an imperative and secret will. The icy “You must” must become “You must because you have contributed to the formation of the will”; the arbitrary injunction must be transferred into a motivated injunction, an injunction whose purpose is obvious to all.

Then the precept will be spontaneously obeyed, and governmental constraints will no longer be necessary.

Moreover, only naïve people have believed and still believe that the individual follows juridical orders due to the sanctions that threaten him. The anarchists are the candid champions of such a belief. Police forces and courts are, in fact, not absolutely indispensable with respect to juridical norms. Back in 1924, the eminent Soviet jurist Pasukanis,¹⁰³ who subsequently fell into disgrace and was finally and rightfully rehabilitated *post mortem*, shrewdly observed that “debts are not only settled by individuals because they ‘would in any case be recovered,’ but also so that they [individuals] can retain their credit in the future.” Replace “debts” with “juridical obligations” and you will easily determine that respect for the norm doesn’t at all depend on the fear of sanctions or on the private conviction that the norm is just, but uniquely on the necessity – in whose grasp we must keep the individual – of retaining his own credibility in the future.

And the credibility of the individual is his credit, the modern capital that is materialized in his being, his past work that annihilates his current life. To pay his debts to obtain credit in the future, to not violate the norm so as to benefit from the privileges that it can dispense: this is the logic that permits us to attain the disappearance of the coercive apparatus of the State. The force of law doesn’t reside in the fact that violations are subject to sanctions, but the fact that the people *think and act juridically*.

The new penal regulations¹⁰⁴ – combated by the most retrograde jurists and politicians – give my assertion the support of experience. Under certain conditions, prisoners have been released; in time, almost all of them returned to prison. The norm imposed their return, although escape was possible. But what escape? The impossible escape from capitalism? They chose the norm; they returned to prison having understood, instinctively but with more acuity than the

¹⁰¹ The Italian here is *scuola di energia*.

¹⁰² The Italian here is *scuola di forza civica*.

¹⁰³ Evgeny Pasukanis (1891-1937), author of *The General Theory of Law and Marxism*.

¹⁰⁴ Passed in response to the waves of protest and sabotage that broke out in 1977, these laws made “subversive association” and the possession of “subversive literature” crimes punishable by long prison terms.

weak-willed ultra-Leftists, that it is impossible to escape from capitalism because it is materialized in the being of each person.

In what sense must we speak of the extinction of the law? The notion must be understood, not as the disappearance of the law itself, but the disappearance of its visible, traditional manifestations: courts, prisons, police departments, etc. The apparatus that is assigned to the enforcement of the law must cease to be concentrated in a small number of specialized organs, and must be distributed to and materialized in the living body of society, in the people and all of its components, so that this apparatus is no longer perceived as a separate body.

Intersubjective juridical antagonism must be transformed, imperceptibly but surely, into intrasubjective juridical antagonism. Modern law should not be heteronymous, but autonomous. It must be the law of the internal forum and, if it is, the *law*¹⁰⁵ will finally return to its original meaning, in which it was not separate from customs; the juridical injunction will once again be nothing other than the community's rule of conduct.

Thus, in a certain sense, we will see the realization of the anarchist ideal of a society without laws, where the norm is spontaneously accepted by all, and obedience will be guaranteed by the fear of being excluded from the community and its benefits – excluded from the only community that dispenses them – the community of capitalism.

The ultimate objective is law without coercion; law that has penetrated mankind to the point that it has created a second nature in it (or perhaps a single [unified] nature); law that is neither cold nor inert, but warm and active in such a fashion that every person ends up a living juridical norm!

For a long time, the most authoritative philosophers of the law have agreed that the law doesn't claim knowledge of life; it isn't a technique or a tool of research. On the contrary, the law wants to direct life. And what more effective system for direction could there be than penetration into the very heart of life and materialization in mankind itself?

This anthropomorphization of the law will assuredly not take place without suffering. In the 19th century, the eminent jurist Jhering recalled that the birth of any new law is accompanied by "traces of sweat and blood,"¹⁰⁶ and, here and there, we have also seen pathological resistance from individuals who have been confronted with the absorption of the law [into their bodies].

How do we create this juridical-human nature? By making evermore faint the boundary between behavior *according to the law*¹⁰⁷ and behavior *as such*;¹⁰⁸ by convincing the people that "just" conduct doesn't derive as much from a law that prescribes it as from the profound adequation of this conduct with reality and necessity; by gradually effacing the limits that distinguish the law, the decree and the other traditional sources of authority from propaganda. Lenin already understood that the law is a form of propaganda and that it generally takes the place of the slogan. Meditate upon his words, which are so rich in political wisdom: "To the simple worker and the simple peasant, we presented our ideas on policy, all at once, *in the form of decrees*. The result has been the conquest of the enormous trust that we have had and we continue to have among the popular masses."¹⁰⁹ Law must imperceptibly become propaganda, and propaganda must imperceptibly become law. The citizen must respect the law

¹⁰⁵ Greek in original.

¹⁰⁶ Rudolph von Jhering (1818-1892), author of *Geist des römischen Rechts* ("Spirit of the Roman Laws"), from which this quote was taken.

¹⁰⁷ Latin in original.

¹⁰⁸ *Italian to French translator*: French in original.

¹⁰⁹ Speech to the 11th Congress of the Russian Communist Party, which was held between 27 March and 2 April 1922.

spontaneously, as if it were a propagandistic slogan that is freely agreed with and, inversely, he must obey slogans (whatever the media that distributes them) as if they were juridical norms.

We have already started down this path. Who doesn't see that the *mass media*¹¹⁰ (newspapers, television, union directives) spread veritable juridical norms of obligatory character and real *diktats*¹¹¹ from which the citizen can only remove himself with difficulty and, inversely, that the laws accomplish an irreplaceable propagandistic function when they are promulgated with opportune *hype*?¹¹²

This progressive identification of the laws with propaganda and vice versa must be accompanied by a gradual multiplication of centers of *diktat*-production. We must confer a normative power, not only upon the center [of power], but the periphery as well (I mean: local organizations, unions, neighborhood committees, human aggregates of all kinds), by diluting the legislative function into the people themselves and by renouncing the mediation of its political representatives.

The people, dear comrade, need laws and cannot abstain from thinking juridically. We need to grant them the laws that allow them to live, but not for free: they must earn them; they must work for [the right to] the formulation of the laws; they must actively contribute to creating the *jurisdiction*;¹¹³ they must express themselves, participate, take the floor. It is too easy to make use of a group of specialists (jurists and politicians) who give you the goods readymade! Goods that, like all commodities, leave everyone unsatisfied and become the source of endless complaints. The people should make their juridical crap for themselves and, if they are discontented with the norms that they have been given, well, let them change them! Provided, of course, that they are never without them.

What did I mean when I said that the men of the law must disappear? Certainly not right away, but their functions must be significantly reconsidered. It is no longer conceivable that jurists continue to be the most universally scorned category; it is no longer acceptable that the juridical operator continues to be treated like the "boss's servant," the "guard dog of power." We must confide him new tasks; his professional role must be transformed and ennobled. It will fall to the people to create juridical consciousness and to the judge to stage the violations of this consciousness.

The jurist can no longer limit himself to producing laws (either in the abstract form of particular statutes or the concrete form of penal sentences): the people must assume these tasks. For his part, the judge must stage the spectacle of the infraction; he must conduct it, direct it and, when necessary, create it; he must make violations of the law as passionate as possible. Enough glum, tedious, faultfinding trials! Enough bureaucratic, judicial inquests, conducted by paper-pushers sitting behind desks! The old *circus games*¹¹⁴ no longer satisfy the people, who want spectacles that are more lively and more passionate, that smell of "sweat and blood," to return to Jhering; they want spectacles whose stages aren't limited to the halls of justice, but fill all of society.

Moreover, the old laws appealed to particularly solemn formula and rituals so as to create a juridical life alongside real life: the trial was a dramatic representation. This might suit today's

¹¹⁰ English in original.

¹¹¹ German in original.

¹¹² *Italian to French translator*: French in original.

¹¹³ Latin in original.

¹¹⁴ Latin in original.

society, provided, of course, that the scenic effects are adopted to modern sensibilities and that the judicial drama is played out everywhere.

Consequently, the repressive apparatus must continue to exist, but not to condemn and repress (we must even change its name). It must instead represent the spectacle of the class war in the most realistic way possible.

The perspective that I've sketched out here is reinforced by the attitudes of the vast majority of young people, even among their most subversive and rebellious sectors. The youth have not ceased to think and act juridically. Their slogans, even the most radical ones, have been expressed in juridical forms. How many times have I heard the following chants? "Illegal MSI";¹¹⁵ "To kill a fascist is not a crime"; "Long live the just struggle of . . ." (doesn't "just" signify *according to the law*?).¹¹⁶ Haven't the Red Brigades expressed themselves juridically by instituting proletarian tribunals and invoking the conventions of international law?

In all these cases, political struggle has been involved, but this hasn't at all altered the necessity of the law. The content of that law has been absolutely indifferent: it has been the type of political power that has determined it. But one knows that the law is security for the citizen. What would become of the people without law? I do not dare think of it. Let us let the people give themselves their own laws, modify them as they please, and even fight to overturn the precepts. The citizen must participate directly in legislative matters because, on that terrain, as on many others, desertion cannot be tolerated.

Yes to class conflict; yes to antagonisms of interests, especially radical and violent antagonisms, provided that they are expressed in the framework of juridical conceptions. Goethe's maxim –

Laws and rights are inherited
Like a never-ending disease¹¹⁷

– is profoundly just and tolerates no exceptions.

I would like to conclude with several insights about crime and punishment. The most intelligent bourgeois jurists agree that violations of penal norms, far from constituting negations of the law or contestations of or concrete challenges to it, are in fact the law's realization and apotheosis. It is only through violations that the norms, which are abstract, generic and impersonal, are materialized through applications to concrete cases. If this is true, then we must demonstrate our profound appreciation for all our illegalists, who, through their actions, make possible the functioning of the laws and their passage from the abstract to the concrete, and thus prevent them from remaining dead letters.

Violations of juridical imperatives, when they are kept to a limited scale, are useful, dear comrade, in that they permit the judicial apparatus to go into motion and thus prevent its mummification, and violations are completely indispensable when they take place on a vast scale, because they determine the evolution of the laws and the re-creation of those laws on modern bases.

Concerning the punishment to be inflicted upon an individual who commits a crime, we must not have excessive illusions about its re-educative function, despite what the Italian

¹¹⁵ *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (Italian Social Movement), a neo-fascist organization.

¹¹⁶ Latin in original.

¹¹⁷ Spoken by Mephistopheles, *Faust I*. German in original.

Constitution says.¹¹⁸ The penal establishment must not constitute a place disposed to social vengeance nor an illusory center of reeducation. Prison must be an instrument of social defense, and the October Revolution,¹¹⁹ at least until 1934, suppressed the concept of “punishment” and replaced it with the concept of “a measure for social defense.” How should we interpret this formulation today? Assuredly in the sense that imprisonment must not be a useless affliction upon the guilty party. Beccaria¹²⁰ noted that correct penal policy must leave unchanged the distance between civil society and prison, between freedom and the deprivation of it.

Prisons must impose an austere life, but one *not too far removed* from the life that one leads in society. The goals of the “measure for social defense” are not the humiliation of the prisoner, his illusory reeducation, or the isolation of the guilty party so as to prevent him from perpetrating a new crime. The prisoner must not be set apart from society – let us note in passing that the ancient institution of banishment was certainly more effective and less costly – but he must be obligated to continue to live in society, in a particular micro-society, it is true, but one only slightly different from the normal one.

Prison must remind everyone that escape from the free society of capitalism is not possible, and it must prevent the creation, not of criminals or violators of the law, but of renegades, deserters from social conventions, absentees from political and civil commitments, abstainers from democratic participation, and people who have disappeared, who are presumed dead or who cannot be found. This is the role of prison in periods of transition, and when its function has been fulfilled, and everyone has understood that escape from capitalism is impossible, then prison will no longer be necessary.

That is the battle, dear comrade, that we must fight on the terrain of the law, a terrain that is quite neglected by the young people, blind as they are by economism and politics. But it is fortunate that these very youths persist, despite themselves and unconsciously, to represent the juridical life and act accordingly, even when they decide to take the route of armed struggle, as you have.

The time has come for this instinctive attitude to become conscious; everyone must become aware that one cannot leave the law behind, especially when one violates it, and that escape is not desirable, due to the irreversible and definitive loss of future credit that is its cost. And a man without credit is like a blocked inheritance: it will never be converted into capital.

Sixth Letter

I would like to speak to you, dear Valcarengi,¹²¹ without either malice or digressions, about the question of drugs. I only know you indirectly, through your writing and public presence, and this is enough for me. This is why I momentarily depart from your serious and rigorous tone, which the seriousness of the question imposes, reserving it for other places and other people, to allow myself to pursue the simple but not at all senseless reasoning that a father

¹¹⁸ Article 27, Section 3 states: “Punishments may not contradict humanity and must aim at reeducating the convicted.”

¹¹⁹ In Soviet Russia.

¹²⁰ Cesare Beccaria (1738-1794), an opponent of torture and capital punishment.

¹²¹ *Publisher’s note:* Andrea Valcarengi, *star* [French in original] of the *Re Nudo* journal and the group of the same name, which is on the decline today, is the ideologue in the Italian cultural spectacle for the distribution of soft drugs. He sought to work with business people at youth festivals, but was dissuaded.

often adopts with his son when he discovers that his boy is in the grip of serious but innocent forms of mental confusion. I don't want to do this.

Neither you nor I know drug addiction in its scientific dimensions. Others have better studied this distressing plague in its medical, political and moral implications. We can only speak of it, as one says, for the simple pleasure of speaking and, in our ignorance, we are only guided by our good sense. It is for the too-modest use you make of your good sense, and not for your mediocre scientific knowledge of the subject, that I feel I have the duty to reprimand you. Men of culture, even the serious ones, can allow themselves the luxury of committing a blunder because the errors that they make can only harm themselves. But you, due to the role that you play and the influence that you have had and will still have on those whom one calls young proletarians, must be guided by a more elevated sense of responsibility. Thus, avoid making wild pronouncements with an affected air of authority that exceeds the years that you have spent examining the subject in minute detail. You have spoken of drugs a great deal and for a long time, but this doesn't authorize you, dear friend, from setting yourself up as an expert.

As for myself, I will confess that I don't know shit about the question,¹²² especially in its medical and scientific aspects. To give you an example, I don't know the difference between soft drugs and hard drugs; I don't know what the word "addiction" means; I don't clearly see the real possibilities for detoxification or the therapies currently in use. Nevertheless, this ignorance suits me, not out of a taste for obscurantism, but because I think that one wastes time confronting problems of this type and misses getting an appropriate and realistic perspective on them.

Therefore I believe – and few would dare to say so – that poison (just like electricity, culture and television) has entered modern life through the ground floor and has acquired a solid freedom of movement that no philanthropic effort will deprive it of. I don't know whether this is good or bad: let us leave such a fruitless question to the propagandists and moralists. We realists must examine the problem that the flood of drugs poses by taking stock of the facts that drugs exist, that they are widely used, and that no force will be able to suppress them; and we should do this without claiming to eradicate or apologize for them.

These preliminary considerations will allow us to see that the distribution of drugs does not harm the development of the productive forces. It will be quite clear that I do not intend to deplore the loss of productivity that drug addiction might occasion. This happens, but the fact that it does will only be unfortunate for those who care about full employment, which is an objective that the most qualified economists (and we ourselves) have long regarded as secondary, if not dangerous.

It would not be a great loss if a certain percentage of the population, even if that percentage exceeds current unemployment rates, deserted production and devoted itself to artificial paradises, because such a desertion would not take place in reality. On the contrary, it would, quite simply, be a transfer of manpower to a *unique*¹²³ sector of production that is of the greatest social utility: the production of spectacle.

Today, it is obvious to everyone who is slightly familiar with drug addicts, and even those who only know them through *news reports*,¹²⁴ that the spectacle of junkies isn't truly what one would call "a pretty picture." Moral degradation, loss of faculties, monoideism, etc. is what constitutes the pretty tawdriness in which addicts are adorned. In what sense is it possible to

¹²² The French here, *ne pas saisir pet de la question*, literally means "can't grasp a fart of the question."

¹²³ Latin in original.

¹²⁴ *Italian to French translator*: French in original.

affirm that drug addiction is the real *circus*¹²⁵ of modern society, the supreme degree of the people's passivity that only religion has been able to guarantee in the past and, more recently, certain conflicts of a strong ideological coloration?

Drug addiction, dear friend, offers a violent spectacle: it has its deaths, its disabled victims, its prison guards and its judges, and the little people, as everyone knows, need pathos to become impassioned. Moreover – and this is the real modernity of the spectacle of drugs, which, due to its grandeur, links it to religious rites – the scenic representation of drugs not only implicates the naïve observer, but also the wretched actor, the drug addict, who offers himself to the gaze of a morbid public.

The orchestra section is packed, the spectators are impatient, and the actors – like all the great wandering minstrels – are making everyone wait. Their delay, unlike the delays of the traditional hams (a simple trick) is not calculated. They have actually lost their sense of time and must await the poisons they consume to tell them (thanks to their own delivery dates) when the time has come. Finally, the supply runs out, and the show can begin. The framework is always the same: the protagonist wanders in the seedy parts of some town, comes into contact with disreputable people, suffers humiliation and commit a few acts of bravado, and then makes *the deal*¹²⁶ with the repugnant partner, the drug dealer.

At this point, the audience, which has been quiet, becomes animated: its members know that the show has reached its acme. In a sordid place, the protagonist, in the throes of withdrawal and visibly gasping for breath, introduces the poisonous substance into his body.

Unlike the prologue, which is always the same, the epilogue is more lively and contains more dramatic turns: most often there are spurts of blood, projectile vomiting and idiotic ecstasy, but, in the most fortunate of cases, there are cardio-vascular collapses that do or do not cause death or (delicious rarity) the arrival of the police just before the introduction of the poison into the junkie's body, accompanied by unspeakable convulsions and engorgements.

The epilogue is changeable but well defined, as you can see. The work is nevertheless directed in accordance with the most modern artistic practices. It is a real “open-ended work” since the audience, far from being satisfied, will prolong the situation and endlessly wonder: Will the drug addict ever become healthy? For palates that prefer lighter genres, such as vaudeville or [Disneyland] attractions, it is perfectly possible to furnish happier spectacles. Just change the ingredient: soft drugs instead of hard drugs.

So far, one has stayed within the ordinary practices of the spectacle: the actors perform and the spectators watch. But there's more.

Following the example of the spectacle of religion, the spectacle of drugs allows the actors to contemplate themselves passionately, to delight in the admiration of an impersonal “self” that functions as the simple receptacle for the substance – the poison – that brings it to life. As in religious alienation, where the body is the instrument that catches the rays of the divinity, and it is precisely this collecting that gives birth to the ecstatic experience, the drug addict sees his body as the vessel in which the *substance*¹²⁷ flourishes and without which (as Seneca would say) it is impossible for it to exist. The vein – or the nostril, the epithelium, or the respiratory or nervous system – serves as the altar at which one performs (by way of sacrifice) the ritualized consumption of all terrestrial things. And the drug addict – [who abuses] hard or soft drugs, [who uses them] occasionally or regularly – walks to the scaffold with a light heart, convinced that he

¹²⁵ English in original.

¹²⁶ Latin in original.

¹²⁷ Latin in original.

is, in fact, approaching an altar. That it is an altar or a guillotine has the least importance. The immolation will take place either way, and it doesn't fall to the victim, but to his victimhood, to decide the time for it. We should not forget the words of Maistre, that great enemy of progress, to whom we should pay attention on this occasion: "The scaffold is an altar; it can only be erected or moved by the authorities; and its delays, even when excessive, are only proofs of our superiority, even if they have their blind detractors."¹²⁸

The similarity between drug addiction and religion that I want to establish goes even further than this. As you probably know, religion postulates the existence of a class – even better: a caste – that gathers together and concentrates in itself the most elevated qualities: this is the caste of the ministers of the cult (though they may call themselves something else). And the basest qualities must also be incarnated in a particular caste: the most universally scorned and pitied people: the junkies. They incarnate insensitivity, venality, cowardice, betrayal, idiocy and so on. The ministers of this upside-down cult also exercise an irreplaceable function for civil order.

And so, let us be frank: is the fate of the drug addict so lamentable? No doubt it is, but it is, nevertheless, not deprived of positive compensations. To quote Burroughs, who is an execrable writer but a remarkable expert in drug-related matters, the drug addict "is immune to boredom. He can look at his shoe for hours or simply stay in bed. He needs no sexual outlet, no social contacts, no work, no diversion, no exercise."¹²⁹ Great advantages, as you can see, over the common man, who today is constantly bored and always unsatisfied with his own actions, whether they are successful or failures.

And if some flash of lucidity comes to the drug addict, accompanied by painful sensations of powerlessness, inaptitude and laziness, it is always possible for him to unload the weight of his *failures*¹³⁰ on an external element: [here] the drug [figures] as wound inflicted by a society that has not understood him. He can then confidently expect that society (the true guilty party in his eyes) will regenerate itself, will model itself on his own miserable habits. And this illusion is not granted to the ordinary citizen.

I would like to point out a final particularity, and I ask you to give it the greatest attention, because it allows us to consider decisively the figure of the junky as irreplaceable in our society. He is immunized, even vaccinated, against all vexations. Torments, injustices and wrongs leave him indifferent. He is disposed to tolerate everything; he has a total incapacity to hate. Yet it is true that one often sees him yelling, boasting and sometimes fighting. But the noise he makes does not exceed the ruckus of the pub, nor does it have serious consequences for the social order. A participant in the injured class by way of *antonomasia*, he loses the notion of the overall wrongs that are done to him and he disperses his reactions in a myriad of insignificant street scuffles. Wary of encounters with the police and pharmacists – his particular tormentors – he looks with sympathy on judges, doctors, psychologists and priests, provided that they are democratic and intend to help him. Last of the naïve people, he believes that he can be cured, that he can successfully detoxify himself, and so he clings to the first person who promises him a "good" therapy. Everyone hides from him the fact that detoxification, far from being the period of convalescence that precedes recovery, is in fact a simple rest for the organism, a phase in the complete cycle of the illness, in the same way that, in certain diseases (such as paludal fever), the

¹²⁸ *Italian to French translator*: French in original. [Joseph Marie, Count of Maistre (1753-1821), *Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg, ou Entretiens sur le gouvernement temporel de la Providence.*]

¹²⁹ William S. Burroughs, "Letter From a Master Addict to Dangerous Drugs," 1956. English in original.

¹³⁰ *Italian to French translator*: French in original.

disappearance of the fevered state announces the surge of a more acute phase and not, as one might imagine, the arrival of health.

Things must remain as they are, dear Valcarengi, even if one must give the people the impression that we are doing something to vanquish this scourge. The citizens, intoxicated or straight, must believe that other people are thinking and acting on their behalf, that we are modifying the laws, that we are instituting several centers for rehabilitation, and that the failures of these efforts can only be attributed to insufficient means. But drug addiction will in no case be curbed.

Is it truly important to be preoccupied with the problem of drug addiction? I would say “No.” What counts is having it believed that the community or, better still, the law, is concerned with it. Moreover, if one casts a glance at the past of our country, has it ever been preoccupied with the problems that tarantula bites cause social utility? It doesn’t seem so to me. And, for good or bad, our pre-industrial society accommodated tarantula bites, which have never constituted a specific problem. Let us leave the junkies in peace, and they will leave the State in peace! This would be the best solution, but we cannot say so openly. On the contrary, it falls to us to proclaim a vigorous activity, to constitute rehabilitation centers, to promote legislative innovations, etc., even if we know that they don’t accomplish anything.

Moreover, is it the fault of the public authorities that science still hasn’t come up with an appropriate therapy that suppresses the appetite for drugs? Frankly, no. There could in truth be such a therapy, if one could define it as such, but to practice it would involve a social upheaval that is quite simply difficult for me to imagine. One would have to create the conditions in which all the junkies – who, let us not forget, are also men with small vices and passions, though they are numbed by a sad monoideism – could give free reign to their inclinations, even the most secret ones. The reveler would then be able to live perpetually in a sumptuous expenditure; the nudist on an uncontaminated beach; the disgusting fat-man behind the scenes of a spectacle of varieties; and so on. If by chance some individual had accumulated several inclinations, well, he would have complete leisure to fly from one to another without interruption. The utopianist Fourier described something of this type by fantasizing about a society organized into phalansteries, as he called them.¹³¹

Such an impossibility represents the only way to solve the problem of drug addiction, given that the appetite for poison will never be eliminated. But as you can see, I have entered the kingdom of the imagination. Since we must, on the contrary, accept this society as it is, at least in its fundamental structures, and keeping in mind that we desire it just as it is,¹³² we cannot dream of effacing the figure of the junky as it will not be possible to replace him as a living object for contemplation by any another.

Always keep this in mind, my dear friend.

¹³¹ François Marie Charles Fourier (1772-1837).

¹³² Cf. censor, “Preface,” *Truthful Report on the Last Chances to Save Capitalism in Italy*: “With all the cold veracity that we have adopted for all the other affirmations contained in this *Report*, we say that *this society suits us because it exists* and we want to maintain it to maintain our power over it.”

Seventh Letter

Very dear Antonio,¹³³

They tell me that, for a while now, you have fished in troubled waters, and I am quite comfortable with this. You are too intelligent to take literally the anathema that the [Italian Communist] Party hurls against the adventurous initiatives taken by the young people whom you inspire, those whom one calls the *autonomes*, because these invectives, which have become ritualized, must on the contrary be understood as incitements that take aim at the vivid forces of society so that they feel themselves pushed to intervene through new and creative actions that prevent the sclerosis of the entire country.

One knows it well: praise and applause encourage the conformists to remain certain about being right and to retain the strength to take the lead, just as rebels need calumny and hissing, which they attract according to their intensity, for the very same reasons. Our insults thus serve you as a stimulant, and if we address them to you insistently, this is because we in the Party have understood that entreaties and demands, even the most extreme ones, are destined to furnish (over time) a rich material for positive political interventions by the apparatus that exercises command. Thus, the ostracism with which we have struck you is only apparently real, and you have perfectly understood this.

According to the warning of Comrade Togliatti, “power creates nothing, it recuperates,”¹³⁴ that is to say, power engages itself on all the routes that revolutionaries and social troubles point out to it. Without them, power would be reduced to a *vacuum*,¹³⁵ forced into inaction and decline. Without the food provided by revolutionaries, a dynamic power such as capitalism would die; it is opposition that allows it to live – certainly not parliamentary opposition, which is a pure simulacrum – but the living, spontaneous and perpetually surpassed opposition that is proper to the most inflamed extremists.

Moreover, where capitalism is concerned, a country without conflict would not even be governable and, if it were without conflict, it would not merit being governed. It would be confined to second-tier countries where nothing happens and which are better known due to the *brochures*¹³⁶ issued by travel agencies than due to the dynamism of the conflicts that ravage them. Such countries, which are quite rare, only bring their governors meager satisfaction. What sense is there in having power if it is separated from its concrete exercise?

This isn't the case here in Italy, because we enjoy an enviable preeminence: our country constitutes one of the “weakest links in the imperialist chain,” as they love to say in Leninist circles. That such national renown has been merited or usurped has only limited importance. It was, in any case, a preeminence, and all eyes were fixed upon Italian events and the skill with

¹³³ *Publisher's note*: we don't know the year of Antonio Negri's birth with certainty. He was associated with the “school of the Movement,” thereafter always remaining “in contact with class reality,” sometimes even “in a laborious and wheezing manner.” He is the principal Italian representative of “being against, for and with” and he has no doubts about “the richness of his needs and desires.” He has a weakness for the “dirty proletarian who speaks [of] communism,” and it matters little to him to present himself in the traditional costume of the “dock worker” or the [contemporary] costume of the *freak* [English in original], according to his mood. Theoretical inspiration for the so-called autonomous groups. [*Translator*: Negri was born in 1933.]

¹³⁴ It wasn't Palmiro Togliatti, the leader of the Italian Communist Party, but the situationists who said this. Cf. *Internationale Situationniste* #8 (January 1963).

¹³⁵ English or Latin in original (the word is the same in both languages).

¹³⁶ *Italian to French translator*: French in original.

which our governors and institutions confronted them. A *star*¹³⁷ on the international stage of contestation, Italy was considered a difficult country to govern and, consequently, very gratifying for the politicians who intended to take the reins. Then came the stasis, which some called the post-68 ebb, and, from then on, the satisfaction decreased and the exercise of power became a tedious routine. But thank heaven, the truce was short and you autonomes appeared on the Italian political terrain, thus restoring a meaning to the difficult art of governing.

I will never stop repeating that power cannot live without the antagonism of revolutionaries (a very convenient formula to which we are now accustomed). When revolutionaries keep quiet and sink into inaction, power is reduced to a very poor “administration of things,” as is stated by an oft-repeated but badly understood formula. The logic of combat is, on the contrary, the real logic of capitalism and, when it falters, one at best falls back into pre-capitalist forms of social organization and at worst into post-capitalist forms that I prefer not to mention.

But such dangers are not present in Italy today, thanks to your appearance, which has permitted the country to recover from the dangerous absence of *combative ideology*¹³⁸ that had briefly existed. I do not wish to bore you with historical observations, my dear Antonio, and this is why I will limit myself to saying that, in this century, Italian intellectuals and politicians have given form to an ideological kernel that is solid and strongly *combative*,¹³⁹ oppositional, and *resistant*.¹⁴⁰ From Gramsci to you – by way of such intermediary stages as the editorial politics of Einaudi, at first, and then those of Feltrinelli,¹⁴¹ the activity of the CLN,¹⁴² the dissidents in the PCI in the 1960s,¹⁴³ the student protest movements led by people such as Viale and Sofri,¹⁴⁴ FUORI¹⁴⁵ and the feminist movement – there has been no break in the continuity. This combative current, a real Italian ideology, of which you are the epigones, still hasn’t found its critique, that is to say, its Marx,¹⁴⁶ who would liquidate it *en bloc*, and thus it continues to prosper. Despite its oppositional appearance, it remains an ideology of the perpetuation of power in the sense that it allows current conditions to nourish themselves with always-renewed reasons to live.

Burke remarks that “the speculative line of demarcation, where obedience ought to end, and resistance must begin, is faint, obscure and not easily defined,”¹⁴⁷ and I would add that it is impossible to determine. No individual ever knows if his comportment is situated on the terrain

¹³⁷ *Italian to French translator*: French in original.

¹³⁸ The Italian here is *di ideologia combattentistico*.

¹³⁹ The Italian here is *combattentistico*.

¹⁴⁰ *Italian to French translator*: the Italian here is *resistenziale*, a difficult word to translate. In the early 1970s, used by extreme-Left groups to pejoratively designate the anti-fascism of the Resistance, which did not fight on the terrain of anticapitalism.

¹⁴¹ Founded by Giulio Einaudi in 1933, *Giulio Einaudi Editore* was one of the most important Italian publishing houses of the 20th century. It specialized in works by anti-fascists and Communists. *Giangiaco Feltrinelli Editore* was founded in 1954 by Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, a Communist and militant political activist.

¹⁴² *Italian to French translator*: the *Comitati di Liberazione Nazionale* (the Committee of National Liberation), an organization of Socialist-Communist anti-fascists who were active in northern Italy during the last years of World War II.

¹⁴³ It was in the 1950s that dissidents in the *Partito Comunista Italiano* (PCI) came to prominence.

¹⁴⁴ *Italian to French translator*: Guido Viale and Adriano Sofri were the most prominent members of the workerist and populist group *Lotta continua*.

¹⁴⁵ See letter to Angelo Pezzana.

¹⁴⁶ A reference to Marx’s book, *The German Ideology*.

¹⁴⁷ Edmund Burke (1729-1797), *Reflections on the French Revolution*. English in original.

of obedience or that of revolt, but – despite this insurmountable speculative impossibility – the great majority of the Italian people are convinced they should act in opposition [to the established order] and, guided by the ideologues who “know the world,” they are completely disposed to head to the streets to transform it. The greatest terror for an Italian, who is indolent and servile by historical heritage and thus a little boastful, is that he might appear docile and resigned. As a result, if he encounters leaders who push him to go into action, to become disobedient and to put himself forward, he follows them, believing that he redeems himself by doing so.

Thus, as Macrobius says, to the leader “nothing is more suitable than to be thoughtful.”¹⁴⁸ Using this privileged slogan, the Italian ideologues of the last fifty years (obviously I’m referring to the progressives and revolutionaries)¹⁴⁹ have done everything to diffuse the belief that, after it has been made known, the world must be transformed. This was originally a Christian idea, formulated by the Bible, which encouraged mankind – due to its resemblance to God – to rule over the earth, and today it is the presumptuous pretention of capitalism that mankind must master its own destiny and transform the world. This is an extravagant principle, but it underlies every combative ideology, yours included.

The leaders think that the world must be transformed, and his subordinates are tasked with doing so. But in any effective collectivity, those who lead must, to a certain extent, also be disposed to follow by resigning themselves to the tastes, abilities and dispositions of the troops. The important thing is that the leading concept is not discussed. In this case, it is a good thing that one abandons the modalities of the transformation of the world for the inclinations of the executives of the renewal, on the condition that no one takes it into his head to see the world rot in tranquility or other, even more attractive conditions.

It is unavoidable that one encounters tranquil or other more impassioned attitudes among the masses. The essential thing is that all of them aim at regenerating the current state of things, with or without a revolution. You autonomes are precisely the most relentless in demanding immediate improvements. The behaviors that you put into action, inspired by an old tradition of illegal mass practices and by the more recent theoretical suggestions that are oriented towards criminal activity, are the most expeditious means to make this society flower again. You attack the supermarkets, which are the granaries of our times, in the same way that, in the past, the lower classes had recourse to this exasperated form of struggle in the name of a real distributive justice; you occupy buildings, thus stimulating the construction industry, particularly in the public sector; you demand free culture as the plebeians did with the *circuses*¹⁵⁰ and, when you contest culture, you obtain an unproven renewal of its quality.

I wonder: is this really opposition? There is no point in invoking the criminal and illegal components of your behavior, because violations of the law have nothing to do with putting capitalist society into question.¹⁵¹ Laws are only the passing emanations of capitalism, which is quick to annul [or repeal] them (and replace them with others, naturally) as soon as social forces demand it. Thus bad laws, violated by subversives, are no more eternal juridical manifestations of capitalism than the spaces opened up by the actions of men through these violations are anticipations of the “islands of socialism,” which is something I am sometimes obligated to

¹⁴⁸ Macrobius Ambrosius Theodosius (Fifth Century, CE), author of *Saturnalia*. Note that the author has dropped out the words *ratus magno duci* (“considered a great leader”). Latin in original.

¹⁴⁹ But not the fascists.

¹⁵⁰ Latin in original.

¹⁵¹ See the letter to the partisan of armed struggle.

declare, under protest, to some tribunal. More modestly, these are spaces that are ready to receive new pieces of legislation that are more in conformity with the exigencies of capitalist development.

Thus, the traditional Marxist thesis that it is the judge who creates the criminal, and the Christian fundamentalist thesis that, on the contrary, it is the criminal who – with his own hands – erects the gallows mutually complete each other and say a single thing: capitalism's negation of the rules of conduct is its only healthy aspect. Since capitalism, deprived of infractions, is condemned, the legislator creates the crook by enunciating certain norms, which the hoodlum violates in his turn to solidly install himself on the operational terrain that was reserved for him: the veritable hunting ground that the law strictly delimited for him. To say it in terms accessible to you: the robber steals that which one no longer desires and leaves for him to steal.

Understand me well: I nourish no animosity for criminals. Thieves, looters, bandits, fare dodgers and home invaders have always existed, with the choice of profession deriving from each person's circumstances of birth and inclinations. Nor is it new that one sometimes seeks to furnish these crimes with political justifications, which is most often done to exert pressure for a change of regime. On the other hand, what leaves me perplexed is the fact that you justify your illegal actions by invoking an enormity such as the advent of communism. Or perhaps you believe that communism can be summarized as the instauration of a new social accounting that allows those poor devils access to the commodities in the supermarkets, to popular dwellings and cultural spectacles? If that's what you think, our political lines do not diverge, and you would do well to dye all the crooks red.¹⁵² Distracted by the crumbs that the present offers them in the name of the ideal of communism, these hoodlums will never know that there is better in life, and their (presumed) vitality will resolve itself into *routine*¹⁵³ or self-destruction. Consequently, the human imagination will never escape from the pincers of consent and violation.

That each person follows his own flights of fancy, trying to give them reality through conduct that is so foreign to the current models that one cannot classify them as illegal or legal – that is the terrible danger that we must always conjure away.

The quandary of a judge who is called upon to make a ruling on behavior that is so incongruous that it isn't vigorously foreseen by legislation would be the terrifying sign that things have reached the stage mentioned above. I do not know if cases of this type have already been observed, but, in the goal of better confronting the danger and knowing how to keep it at bay, I task myself with furnishing you a few possible examples, chosen from the fields of morality, environmental protection and [economic] production, respectively.

Let us ask in what fashion the governmental apparatus would be able to intervene against the following hypothetical events.

a) The undertaking of this suggestion by Sade: "Different sites, sound, vast, properly furnished and solid on all points, will be erected in the towns; at them, all the genders, all the ages and all the creatures will be offered to the caprices of the libertines who will enjoy them, and the most complete subordination will be the rule of the individuals so presented."¹⁵⁴ It is probable that the [criminal] accusation here would be a trifle with respect to the grandeur of the project.

¹⁵² That is, see them all as Communists.

¹⁵³ *Italian to French translator*: French in original.

¹⁵⁴ *Italian to French translator*: French in original. [From "One More Effort, Frenchmen, If You Would Be Republicans," in *Philosophy in the Bedroom*.]

b) The rise of a movement against urbanism that is dedicated to the demolition of all ugliness, such as dormitory cities, factories, religious edifices, stadiums, museums, etc.; to the suppression of doors and locks in all places; and to the creation of permanent, natural boundaries where automobile traffic is most fluid. The charges would concern the damage done and erection of barricades: mere peccadilloes for such an ambitious task.

c) As assembly of workers who question the meaning of their respective jobs (apart from the obvious collection of a salary), formulate the traditional questions in the manuals of political economy (what, how and for whom to produce?), and, once they have verified the insignificance of the jobs to which they are assigned, decide to commit themselves to the realization of artistic sensations or other similar pleasures. Such people would obviously be guilty of insubordination, and the government inspector would, with the support of the union, validate their dismissals [by management] for “good reason.” But one might wonder what sense there would be in having dismissals after the fact, when, in reality, it was the old world that had been dismissed.

These are only poor examples, the fruits of the sterile imagination of a Secretary of the [Communist] Party, but I am not deprived of the knowledge that any individual would, unfortunately, be able to weave much more tasty machinations. It would be best to hang a prudent veil over such activities, which are neither new nor old and, at bottom, are only moderately illicit (beyond the norm, one might say), and, instead of them, accept the delinquency that manifests itself in canonical forms and even more so, as I have said, if they are justified politically. Everyone must see the impossibility of the “qualitative leap” and thus the necessity of getting used to earning a salary or stealing one.

The political activity that you, the autonomes, conduct will certainly be successful. The idea that work in all its forms is harmful, which is an idea that has already been the prerogative of the property-owning classes, is in the process of being popularized. The young people who live as deliberate parasites, unemployed by choice and not by necessity; who steal, who scrounge right and left; who recycle garbage; who produce handmade garbage; and who deal drugs – they are always more numerous today.

The ranks of this army grow with time but, even if the entire population was finally persuaded of the noxious character of work and thus abstained from it, capitalist society would not be supplanted. Capitalism does not live upon current work; it is enough for it that past work is valorized in one way or another. And what better means to revalorize past work than the behavior of revolutionaries who, by stealing merchandise and by occupying hovels, create a social demand for products that one would prefer to see perish? Without the always increasing demand of the modern parasitical sectors – the contemporary revolutionaries who reject work – capitalist expansion would be impossible, which is what Malthus noted about the parasites of his times.

Upon closer examination, the revolutionary of today is an individual who wants something for *free*.¹⁵⁵ This is his *idée fixe*, and all of his behavior is oriented towards obtaining

¹⁵⁵ This critique bears a strong resemblance to the one that Guy Debord would subsequently make of the ex-situationist Raoul Vaneigem in a letter to Paolo Salvadori dated 30 November 1979: “To enjoy everything, it is necessary and sufficient that it is free (waiting for it, he nevertheless confesses to work ‘a little’ for his survival, and one knows how). As there remains for him one or two free pleasures – spouting off [*pisser*] is one of his examples – he slides to the affirmation that he enjoys every moment, exactly like the poor women whom he has known. This simulator, here imitating – without avowing it – the ideological excesses of Professor [Jean-François] Lyotard of Vincennes, rallies himself against the sad lies of all the consumers who proclaim themselves to be happy, with the important difference that here it is free (...) Elsewhere, his conception of the free is only opposed to the commodity by the faraway memory of his youth. In fact, he is opposed – with a quite understandable terror – to all value

goods and services without paying his share in days at work; he prefers to have recourse to theft. But whether it is through the use of money or not, the revolutionary wants exactly *what exists*; it doesn't enter his mind that he might want something that doesn't exist yet or he doesn't desire to see what already exists disappear (which amounts to the same thing). He limits himself to wanting a different social compatibility, another way of appropriating commodities, and all of his activity is mono-maniacally devoted to this objective. Therefore, as Marx remarked, "commodities are things and, consequently, they do not offer any resistance to man. If they lack will, one can employ force, in other words, seize them."¹⁵⁶ But it is precisely still a question of commodities, whatever the manner one has of procuring them.

The credibility of the revolutionary derives from the reiteration of his actions. Incapable of doing anything other than not paying for the goods and services that the market offers, he obstinately specializes in this conduct and acquires a certain credit for the future. Thus he manages to float his little boat, collecting tithes from his neophyte comrades and *tips*¹⁵⁷ from his family, which is resigned to what he "has made thus." At this point, his credibility is over and he can finally extinguish and abandon his incessant activism, which permits a period of crisis or reflection, and even an escapade in the East, but not for too long, because fickleness that is prolonged for too long would definitely cost him his credit, which, in this particular sector, is very difficult to reconquer once one is in one's thirties. Thus, he periodically reappears in public, always putting forward the same recycled ideas, now become putrid, and clings to his livelihood like a usurer, only offering his own continuity as a revolutionary, which no one sees, except capitalism itself.

Lombroso would say that the political criminal, that is to say, the revolutionary, is the victim of a frightened attraction to novelties. This is why Lombroso calls him a "neophyte," which is a label that is perfectly applicable to you, the autonomes, who ceaselessly seek novelties that are capable of bringing oxygen to a society that can only asphyxiate when deprived of the repeated emergences of conditions to surpass. Fortunately, those who pose as revolutionaries haven't ceased wondering "what is to be done?" and responding with some innovative discovery, *a priori* excluding the terrifying hypothesis of their own disappearance, which would be the only real, incommensurable damage to capitalism, which would thus be deprived of its principal innovative agents. The real danger for current society will arise when the revolutionary, without thinking about anyone else, will in his heart of hearts answer Lenin's question with this response: "I'm going to take care of my balls."

One could object that, by choosing this route, the revolutionary moves from the frying pan into the fire, and that, emerging from the philoneist madness revealed by Lombroso, he ends up in the madness of "the perfect separation of the individual from his gender," a danger described by Hegel.¹⁵⁸ It would be too easy to reply that *gender*,¹⁵⁹ as everyone knows, no longer has any characteristics of the human community, which has been reduced to the pure community of capitalism, and that there is no reason to abandon it and shut oneself away in solitude or small groups, as Boccaccio's group did to avoid the plague.

judgments about someone or something, like a dialogue or the least reciprocity. And this world of the 'free,' in the neo-Vaneigemist sense, is precisely the pure world of the modern commodity, to which he has rallied, but not without making his fortune: *there is no choice and nothing is worth anything.*"

¹⁵⁶ Karl Marx, Chapter Two, *Capital, Volume I*.

¹⁵⁷ *Italian to French translator*: French in original.

¹⁵⁸ *Über die Reichsverfassung* ("About the Constitution"). German in original.

¹⁵⁹ German in original.

Fortunately, this exodus from vulgar appetites hasn't taken place, and the revolutionary, perceiving the triviality and insignificance of his desires that are, all in all, similar to those of the common man, proclaims bluntly that the vulgarity of one's appetites is a right.

As for me, dear Antonio, advanced in age and immersed in the bureaucratic practices of the secretariat of a party that is always at the limit of fossilization when it isn't stimulated by waves of social subversion, I certainly cannot openly support you, but if I were thirty years younger, I would surely be on your side, if not to fuck shit up in the streets, then at least to give my intellectual contribution to the socialization of the desires of the masses that you would like to satisfy. And nothing would please me more.

Eighth Letter

My dear Indians,¹⁶⁰

First, the Neapolitan germs,¹⁶¹ then Seveso,¹⁶² and finally your *living pictures*¹⁶³ in rich colors have gained the attention of the responsible authorities concerning the frightening degradation of the environment in which we are plunged and of which the inactivity of the government and an anarchic and competitive form of economic development have been the criminal agents.

In truth, scientists of all countries have long denounced in dramatic fashion the risks of catastrophe that mankind and nature have run in the short term if we do not apply the brakes to an economic model that is founded on the hyper-development of certain industrialized countries and the imperialist looting of the weakest States. Such authoritative appeals and the empirical proofs that have documented their claims could not go unperceived for long. Public opinion – for which you, the Metropolitan Indians, express the malaise through bizarre and radical behavior – today begins to become sensitive to such ecological problems as pollution, the noxiousness of certain foodstuffs and pharmaceuticals, the degradation of the countryside, the impoverishment of the flora and fauna, the waste of sources of energy, and so on.

But despite a certain sensitivity on the part of the population, the inertia of the government has been and remains absolute, at least in Italy. The successive governments since the [post-WWII] reconstruction haven't known how nor have wanted to put any kind of halt to the ecological degradation that we know today. When it comes to the sacking of the country, the politicians have systematically given free rein to private entrepreneurs, and even entrepreneurs in the public sector, and so Italy has become the enormous garbage dump that it is today.

Thus, the Leftist political parties have inherited an extremely serious situation where the environment is concerned. This is why it is necessary to have clear ideas concerning the goals

¹⁶⁰ *Publisher's note:* the author wrote this letter to the informally constituted movement recently known by the name "Metropolitan Indians," who are particularly sensitive to ecological purification. The text nevertheless remained unsent, because this movement hasn't yet produced any stable organization nor any *leader* [English in original] of caliber. Thus this letter remains without any particular addressee. This is why its author seized the occasion that this collection offered him to make known his thoughts to the young people, in the hope of starting a fertile dialogue with them.

¹⁶¹ *Italian to French translator:* signifies the "virulent" working-class anger that erupted several times in Naples over the course of the 1970s. [Literally speaking, a pathogenic microorganism.]

¹⁶² The location of a catastrophic industrial accident on 10 July 1976.

¹⁶³ *Italian to French translator:* French in original. [The Metropolitan Indians were known, among other things, for painting their faces.]

and modalities of your and our interventions. To attain such clarity, I address myself to you, but where you are concerned – who are hardly docile – I will only and very soberly use the privilege that elders possess when they give advice to their young friends.

These interventions must be articulated on two levels. Above all, we must rigorously plan the development of economic production – the quality and quantity of consumer goods – in such a way that the two moments of the economic cycle do not compromise the biopsychic health of mankind. Parsimony is good for one’s health, and the program that pertains to it, which is called *austerity*,¹⁶⁴ is a step in the right direction. The fact that young revolutionaries have enthusiastically welcomed parsimony seems worthy of interest to me. The sensational proclamations made against “sacrifice” by a few little groups should not deceive us, because these are refusals on the intellectual plane, in other words in words only. Instead, let us consider the morals of the young people at the margins: the students, the feminists, the militants, the “pigs with wings,”¹⁶⁵ to use a fortunate expression that is valid for all of them. Over-cooked frozen food; makeshift clothing; hovels; macrobiotic cuisine: such is the catalogue of poverties of the most impoverished milieu,¹⁶⁶ which is intellectually impoverished as well, because it dares to use various pretexts to justify the parsimony to which it is constrained in everyday life.

The primary level of improvement in the health of the people must be confronted with solid political will. Politics must be placed at the service of the suggestions made by the scientific sectors that are competent in environmental protection (in accord with the beliefs of the general population), and not at the service of profit and speculation, which is the case today.

The secondary level of our intervention is certainly more complex, and it can be summarized by this formula: we must create a popular ecological consciousness that is compatible with economic production. The instrument with which we will obtain this result is the use of overt and covert propaganda. And it is precisely on the content of this ecological propaganda that I would like to dwell.

As you well know, in certain irrational milieus, ecological preoccupations tend to be transformed into a kind of millenarianist ideology of catastrophe. This ideology results from a preconceived refusal of economic development (this refusal represents a convergence of obscurantist tendencies and destructive extremism). In this ideology, economic development is sometimes considered as a cause of degeneration from an allegedly lost paradise, and other times as the last obstacle to the construction of a finally reclaimed paradise. You yourselves fall into similar states of mind. Such ideological aberrations must be pounded down, not due to their immediate danger to society, but because they constitute a fertile *ground*¹⁶⁷ in which the rejection of man as the master of nature and the world can germinate. And if man – as a species, of course – ceases to consider himself as the owner of nature, this would immediately lead to the irreversible stoppage of economic development.

But neither refutations in words nor anathema will be enough to effectively combat these irrational tendencies. On the contrary, using both words and actions, we must introduce into all the pores of the population certain attitudes – positive ideologies, we might say – that will be

¹⁶⁴ English in original.

¹⁶⁵ *Italian to French translator: Porci con le ali* (1976) is the title of a “sexual-political” novel written by Marco Lombardo Radice and Lidia Ravera under the pseudonyms Rocco and Antonia. Employed here to designate the young protester scene of the 1970s.

¹⁶⁶ Unlike the Italian original, which speaks of the *pitocco* (“skinflint”) and the *ceto* (“class”), the French translation of this text uses words that echo the Situationist International’s famous pamphlet *De la misère en milieu étudiant* (“On the Poverty of Student Life”), which was published in 1966. We have chosen to follow the French rendering.

¹⁶⁷ Latin in original.

better welcomed and accepted if they are set out as the only solutions to the inconveniences that derive from ecological degradation.

If it is true that “our homeland is the entire world,” as an old anarchist song proclaims,¹⁶⁸ then we must take particular care of it and demand that each person acts as if it belongs to him alone. The *home*¹⁶⁹ of the human species is the world and we must create the *laws*¹⁷⁰ that regulate it. The passage is steep and crossing it will require balance, but it is the only practicable route, or at least we must have it believed that it is the only one. We must arouse in each person the conviction that nature is the property of the species, that it is the unique capital of a capitalist collective – men, precisely – and that nature must be fashioned in the image and likeness of the human collectivity. Today, economic development is only possible to the extent that this condition is adopted by the masses and inspires their desires.

We must convince our inferiors that the only alternatives are ecological catastrophe or the transformation of nature as the capital of a single capitalist collective. Let us abandon the first option to the nihilists and act to convince the population that the rational subjugation of the world must finally be completed.

But how should we reeducate the population, which has been perverted by centuries of competitive individualism to accept collective ownership? By popularizing certain values, formerly the prerogatives of the dominant classes, that capitalist development has denied the inferior classes until now. Traditionally excluded from all terrestrial bliss, the inferior classes will, for the very first time, understand that quantities and artificiality – the only sustenance that capitalism has offered them – are almost nothing when compared to the pleasures of qualities and authenticity that nature (once it has become collective property) will be able to provide them. Thus they will forget – perhaps for several decades – that “the commodity does not satisfy man,” to quote an aphorism by a utopianist whose name escapes me.¹⁷¹

Thus, the construction of a more authentic and qualitatively refined “me” must, in my opinion, be accompanied by the proposition of three different categories of natural values.

First, we must remind everyone that nature itself is delightfully harmonious and that man can only enjoy this admirable equilibrium if nature is not contaminated. Man must see nature as something external to him to be able to look at it and enjoy it. This estranged relationship to nature – who is a cruel mother¹⁷² when man is an integral part of her, but becomes benevolent when he contemplates her with an ecstatic air – appears at first sight to be disinterested in and distant from all ideas of profit. The nature-lover doesn’t harm his biological patrimony, nor does he exploit it for his personal use. The pure and simple contemplation of the world, and the satisfaction that follows from it, appear exempt from all intentions to valorize the object that is observed. But in fact they are not. Although nature (when simply contemplated) is not capital, it becomes capital in the observing subject who, in the course of this process, valorizes nature, ennobles it, and refines it, following a progression that – starting from an initial simplicity – can attain [the complexity of] the search for the unusual, the ephemeral, the naturally rotten.

Thus nature ceases to constitute private capital and instead becomes the subject who observes it. But for this to happen, one must have a nature that has been reconstructed *for this*

¹⁶⁸ *Stornelli d’esilio* (“Songs of Exile”), written by Pietro Gori in 1895.

¹⁶⁹ Greek in original.

¹⁷⁰ Greek in original.

¹⁷¹ This aphorism would seem to be a garbled version of a remark that might appear in Karl Marx’s *Das Kapital*.

¹⁷² Here and in what follows, it is important to remember that, in both Italian and French, the noun “nature” is feminine.

purpose:¹⁷³ a natural park that covers the whole planet, and not a nature that could result from an economic disaster. One can only derive satisfaction from the contemplation of nature if it has first been valorized, transformed into a national park, an ecological preserve, a window display for biology, a museum of the future. Upon closer inspection, nature allowed to be itself would not be particularly interesting nor would it establish a process in which the individual was valorized. On the contrary, nature must be revalorized and brought into fruition: it is only in such conditions that it would be gratifying. Reverting nature, as one reverts an industrial complex, will be a gigantic enterprise. What would the social costs of such an operation be? They wouldn't be high and would be limited to preventive action and ecological propaganda. One would only have to create a quarantine line – better still: a screen – between man and nature, one that would prevent her from being assaulted.¹⁷⁴

For these reasons, the appeals that you, the Metropolitan Indians, make with picturesque imagination in the name of a regenerated nature cannot leave us indifferent, because we are completely disposed to recognize the legitimacy of your appeals. Of course, we would have to temper your maximalism. Instead of ensuring each person of one square kilometer of green space, as you have demanded – not unlike the proponents of the well-established English tradition of *allotment gardens*¹⁷⁵ – we would support Comrade Novelli,¹⁷⁶ the Mayor of Turin, who offers each city-dweller a single shrub, that is to say, enough leaves to make a salad. But beyond these disagreements about mere details, the Italian Communist Party is sensitive to your appeals and hopes they do not fall upon deaf ears.

It is certain that the plan for the reconstruction of nature will divert several productive energies from traditional sectors, and it will be necessary, here and there, to destroy several factories, which is damage that will be amply recovered by the fact that the law of value will finally dispense its beneficial effects (even in the domain of biology) by assigning a price to nature itself and, what is more important, to those who enjoy it. Thus capitalism will have achieved its masterpiece: the production of the relations between men and between men and the world. The capitalist project would be reduced to almost nothing if it was limited to the mere production of commodities: its plan is much more ambitious and wishes to produce nature herself and, in her, man, too.¹⁷⁷ This would be a man with a slightly *Hippocratic face*:¹⁷⁸ it would be demagogic to seek to hide it, and such is not our style. If this man would be alive in the clinical sense of the term, what will keep him alive is the conviction that he is fighting for the regeneration of nature and the annihilation of the evil that has perverted it until now.

Thank heaven, you young Metropolitan Indians will give us a push in the right direction by making it believed the evil resides in the pollution of nature when it has already moved into the project of nature's regeneration. Swift's warning is, fortunately, unknown to you, and it is good that no one else knows it, either: "Seldom have two ages the same fashion in their pretexts

¹⁷³ Latin in original.

¹⁷⁴ Note the similarity to the letter sent to Adele Faccio: "One could say that Socialism would place each person under a glass enclosure, in absolute sensory isolation: this would be the most radical means to obtain mutual respect. Molestation during moments of shared thrills and compliments in bad taste would finally be vanquished. The planet would be transformed into a living museum, museums being the places where everything is respected in the extreme: sanctuaries in which one can look but not touch."

¹⁷⁵ English in original.

¹⁷⁶ Diego Novelli (born 1931) is called "Comrade" because he was a member of the Italian Communist Party.

¹⁷⁷ A monstrous image: capitalism wishes to impregnate the nature that it has "regenerated" and thus produce the "new man," who would only be alive "in the clinical sense of the term."

¹⁷⁸ Latin in original.

and the same modes of mischief. Wickedness is a little more inventive. Whilst you are discussing fashion, the fashion is gone by. The very same vice assumes a new body. The spirit transmigrates; and, far from losing its principle of life by the change of its appearance, it is renovated in its new organs with a fresh vigor of a juvenile activity. It walks abroad, it continues its ravages, whilst you are gibbeting the carcass or demolishing the tomb.”¹⁷⁹

Now I would invite you, my excellent friends, to consider the fact that the reconversion of nature into a mutated appearance will cost us nothing at all. By letting it spontaneously accomplish its work, it will reconvert itself by its own means. Unlike the intervention of the traditional capitalist, which presents itself as an *action* that is oriented towards valorization, our intervention in this domain will be limited to an *abstention*. But the goal will be the same, of course.

We can obtain the results that I have described with the collaboration of the people, and we will only get their collaboration if we succeed in sowing in each person a real and proper garden-worshipping cult. But for worship to exist, its object must be outside of the adept. Thus we must combat any indifference, insensitivity or coarseness with respect to the natural pleasures that we will offer.

It is absolutely indispensable that we extirpate (or, even better, not allow the growth of) the convictions that man has no business valorizing nature and that any valorization would be fatal to anyone who is a part of nature. Put into practice, such convictions take the form of desires to withdraw from the world, its economic machinery and its mechanisms of valorization, and also lead certain particularly delirious people to imagine an insurrection of nature in its entirety, and not just the human species, against the totality of capitalism. They see the symptoms of such an insurrection in the abnormal proliferation of certain natural species, and they go as far as advocating a kind of aesthetics in which the entire economic system is left to its own [self-destructive] devices, thus prefiguring the end of capitalism. Here one might think of the extinct civilizations whose vestiges can be seen in certain Asian cities that have been conquered by the jungle. I would respond to these people with the words of the great Thomas Paine: “I do not like to see anything destroyed; any void produced in society; any ruin on the face of the land.”¹⁸⁰

Another value (or, even better, a faculty) that must be rediscovered by the proletariat is memory. For a long time, its use by the people has been prohibited because capitalism needs people who are moveable and uprooted from all community; in short, deprived of memories. But a condition of generalized lability is only socially desirable when the present doesn’t regret the past nor arouse hopes for a better future. Unfortunately, such is not the case today. Thus it is indispensable to rediscover the past, its authenticity, its rustic pleasures and its natural simplicity, because it seems clear to me that ideas about the perfectibility of progress and the advent of Socialism have lost all credibility and so must be replaced.

Our propaganda has always concerned the future, “the rising sun of the future,” and this was opportune because we were addressing ourselves to men who had no memories of the past. But today, this lability has become dangerous because life during such a miserable present demands some kind of refuge if it is going to continue, and that refuge is memory.

¹⁷⁹ Not authored by Jonathan Swift, but by Edmund Burke (“Reflections on the French Revolution”). English in original.

¹⁸⁰ Not authored by Thomas Paine, but by Edmund Burke (“Reflections on the French Revolution”). English in original.

We can no longer reject the creation and widespread use of memories among the proletariat. But memories need images and ideas to be illuminated. What could be sweeter than the vision of a nature that has hardly been touched by industry and that yields simple and vigorous products and authentic delights? The proletariat has never experienced such pleasures, nor will it ever. What's important is that the proletariat appropriates memories that aren't its own; memories that others have been able to enjoy thanks to it.

But who will create memories for the people?¹⁸¹ Marxist-Leninist culture is hardly qualified for this type of thing. Gramsci appealed to tradition, but we haven't been equal to his teachings, and have only offered exhumations of folklore and pavilions of regional cuisine at our working-class festivals. On the other hand, certain fringes of serious conservative culture – for the most part: isolated individuals who are buried in disdainful scorn for the era – have done much better than we have when it comes to the great task of creating proletarian memory.

Nevertheless, we must give them room to operate by assuring publicity for their studies, the foundations of their thinking, their tastes and even their lifestyles. Aesthetes, specialists in the sacred, apologists for obscure ages, people nostalgic for barnyard humor, metaphysicians, the hedonists of thought – these are the experts we must have. Well-calibrated flattery will bring them out of the isolation in which they languish and will put them into action. They will agree to popularize their doctrines and sell copies of their exquisite interiority.

Lenin sought to keep engineers and technicians in Russia by offering them high salaries. Whatever the costs, we must keep specialists in the quality of life on our side. If the memory of quality is irremediably lost, no one will be able to reconstitute it. And a people without memory, a people for whom recollections of the past do not serve as auspices for the construction of the future, cannot be governed for long. Indeed, such a condition is caused by an indolent attitude towards all value, a disdainful scorn for possible pleasures, the taste for the ephemeral and the unique, and the rejection of dominating the future, frenetic activity and the conviction that *time is money*.¹⁸²

Finally, we must introduce into the social body a third belief: that a reconstructed nature would, in itself, be therapeutic.

Industrial development and the ways of life that it involves, once fraudulently presented as beneficial for man, are today revealed to be fatal for the health of the species. They cause an increase in illnesses and the intensification of a silent and diffuse illness from which no one can escape. And the therapies that capitalism offers for the illnesses that capitalism itself has created have lost all credibility because they are the products of a now-exposed vicious circle: the creation of a *surplus*¹⁸³ produces disabled people, and from them one obtains a subsequent *surplus*¹⁸⁴ by selling them therapies.

Thus it is urgent that we take up the question at its roots by proposing a therapeutic solution that is able to get very large numbers of people to adapt to tolerably pathological conditions. And we can certainly obtain resignation to pain, but only if very large numbers of people accept the idea that illness is the product of a badly made society, of an exasperated industrialism – in short, that pain has a social genesis. This is in fact a commonplace for a number of people; thus we will not have difficulty suggesting that the remedy is the simple abandonment of the conditions that constrain people to live in an unnatural manner.

¹⁸¹ Cf. Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), translated into Italian in 1971.

¹⁸² English in original.

¹⁸³ English in original.

¹⁸⁴ English in original.

By presenting nature as a universal therapy, we will be able to obtain two notable results. On the one hand, we will convince the people that the harmful agents are external to them, and we will breathe into them the vivid hope of being cured by fighting the cause of their illness. They are in fact sicker than the people who despair of being cured: they will become victims of the plague, dangerous nihilists who are ready to live day by day. On the other hand, we will need to have it believed that the illness is elsewhere, not in the human species, which is reputed to be genetically healthy, but located in certain degenerated economic systems that have been put into operation by dark forces, which in truth exist as natural components of capitalism, but whose weight is out of proportion to the other component that is constituted by the workers.

The organism of capitalism is sick, but it is a question of making it believed that the illness is exclusively propagated from certain central points that, when removed, will allow the healthy cells to survive in a form identical to their original archetype. This is the meaning of our repeated appeals to the “healthy forces of the nation”: it would be unfortunate if the belief that the workers of Italy are nothing other than a troop of disabled people, incapable and powerless, should happen to spread. By definition, the workers must be healthy and the illness must be situated elsewhere. And the only therapy that is indicated for this comatose social organism is precisely regenerated nature. If we fail to intervene on this plane, we will see the victory of the convictions that the entire society is condemned to death and that its atrocious agony has only been postponed thanks to the cells that are still living: the workers and their paladins. The rats will leave the sinking ship and, after a short period of drifting, it will go down.

It is by divulging the ideas that I have expounded here and by implanting them in the great working-class masses that we will perceptibly reduce the distance between propaganda and practical politics. Ideology will thus cease to appear as conceptual baggage that is foreign to the real exigencies of the people and will materialize in the nature that has been intentionally reconstructed; this is where ideology will find its proper consistency, as one says today. On that glorious day, ideas will, for the first time, move the world by impregnating it.

The epoch of crude leveling is over. We Communists must now become the prophets of the authentic, the qualitative, and the natural. But the forces of our Party will be insufficient. We must have the collaboration of individuals who have kept alive the little flame of quality, unceasingly cultivating their “me,” lovingly taking care of their individuality, and refusing to think or feel in a gregarious way. This collaboration will be with intellectuals, for the most part, but they will be intellectuals of quality. They must leave behind the solitary acrimony in which they have kept themselves and in which the vulgarity of politics has long confined them, so that they can finally take a leadership role in society.

Moreover, my very amiable Indians, a renewal at the top of society is unavoidable. We traditional politicians, even though we have always had clean hands,¹⁸⁵ are irremediably out of bounds. Specialists in quality are the only legitimate candidates for the power that visibly slips from our hands. Well, let us transmit to them this power, gradually but without regrets. The interests of the collectivity, as well as our own interests, demand it.

¹⁸⁵ The Italian Communist Party referred to itself as “the party of clean hands.”

Publisher's Blurb on Back Cover

These letters from Enrico Berlinguer to several leaders of the new Italian Left propose for public debate the possible modalities of the management of power in the reality of current Italy.

At a time when the country's economic and social conflicts tend to lead towards disintegration, and the centers of power tend to multiply potentially to infinity, Berlinguer interprets this state of affairs as necessary in the perspective that managing this reality should no longer be based on commands but on consent or, to be more precise, on the prefabrication of dissent.

Contingent political antagonisms can thus be seen as dialectical moments in an administration of power that continuously moves towards a higher form, but cannot be neutralized if barbarism is to be avoided.

Enrico Berlinguer, the General Secretary of the Italian Communist Party since 1972, was born in Sassari in 1922. After the Resistance, he was the Director of the Youth Front and the General Secretary of the Communist Youth Federation from 1949 to 1956, later becoming part of the governing bodies of the Party, of which he was elected Assistant Secretary in 1969.

Forthcoming publications in the "New Polytechnic" Series:

Antonio Negri: *The protection of the workplace during social unrest: personal considerations.*

Umberto Eco: *Treatise on being able to write about anything.*

Vidali Longo: *The final solution of the anarchist question in Spain.*

Press Clippings¹⁸⁶

Gazetta del Popolo, 8 November 1977

"At this point, it is logical to wonder why and to what ends this operation was conducted. The political origin of the hoaxer seems to be the Right, but the diversion that has resulted from it could also play the game of the extra-parliamentary Left, and this would explain the reception of *Letters to the Heretics* among the alternative bookstores (another and more credible hypothesis would be that the book was *leaked* and that the bookstores have not noticed the hoax). (...) We might say that of the book that it will inaugurate a new type of 'guerilla culture' in which all attacks are permitted. (...) With *Letters to the Heretics*, we have reached a more audacious and advanced, more ambiguous and subtly corrosive stage (...) at the same time that the new attacks against goods and people are more frequent and worrisome every day."

L'Europeo, 18 November 1977

"Thus begins the hunt for the unknown author. And in certain cases, for the book itself. Once the news spread, the book became impossible to find in the space of two days. New hoaxes are added to the first one. In Milan, the special envoy of a prestigious *newsweekly* [English in original] enters a New Left bookstore murmuring the word *rhododendron* with a conspiratorial

¹⁸⁶ Reproduced on the covers of the French translation.

air. ‘What did you say?’ ‘Rhododendron,’ she insists, awkwardly winking. Then she explains that ‘rhododendron’ is the password to obtain ‘the thing.’ There’s more doubt on the subject: maybe this woman is a cop seeking drugs. But the ‘thing’ is only *Letters to the Heretics* and the password ‘rhododendron’ got mixed in because the journalist was deceived by practical jokers.

Panorama, 15 November 1977

“Dear director,

“(…) Few among those who are interested in this satire have considered that, to know the identity of the author, it is necessary to read what he has written. From this fact have come such a torrent of opposing and contradictory suppositions that they have shaken the already weakened confidence of the ones who believe that they must seek out an indicator of the truth in the only place where it can be found, that is to say, the text itself. (…)

“Balestrini? The situationists? The famous Censor, that is to say, Gianfranco Sanguinetti? (…)

I do not know, and, to tell the truth, this doesn’t interest me. The little that matters is what the book says. Not at all unseemly in its style, it is more the work of a cultured moralist than a subversive militant. The thesis is classically conservative: the heretics, the rebels, (in this particular case) the feminists, the [members of the] Radical Party, the homosexuals, the armed groups, the ecologists, etc., imagine that they are *liberating* the spontaneity and creativity of life, but in their actions they are actually collaborating with the Communist party in the perpetuation and perfecting of the existing social order. There’s nothing very new here: this is in the line of the ‘reactionary’ culture that has always hindered the advent of the ‘modern world,’ understood as the degradation and death of values (…)

“Thus the author is a sentimentalist, perhaps a cynic who has lost the revolutionary illusions of his youth (…)

“In short, he is a dilettante, in the non-pejorative sense of the term. Perhaps someone who, if not a dilettante, imagines that, today, he can expound his ideas freely and by hiding behind the refined literary ploy of anonymity? Who, if not a dilettante, would lose the thread of his ideological proclamations to ramble on in laborious digressions that betray his true convictions and break the unity and credibility of the pastiche?” (Giulio Bollati, director of *Giulio Einaudi Editore*, extract from a letter published under the title “Identikit of a Forger” in *Tuttolibri*, the literary supplement of *La Stampa* on 19 November 1977.) [See below.]

“At Einaudi, everyone is convinced that the author is a man of letters, and not a politician, cultivated but disordered to the point of allowing his readers to divine his name between the lines. This is why Giulio Bollati di Saint-Pierre, director of the *Nuovo Politecnico* collection, went over the book with a fine-toothed comb, even if, officially, *Giulio Einaudi Editore* has declared that ‘the thing leaves us perfectly indifferent.’”

La Stampa, 7 December 1977

“But in itself, concerning its contents, this ambitious satire is a poor work that doesn’t merit being taken into consideration (...) Where I am concerned, I confess that I haven’t understood it, and I feel I am right when I state that the opuscle will also remain inaccessible to the great majority of readers.”

Giulio Bollati to the Editor of *Tuttolibri*¹⁸⁷ Concerning *Letters to the Heretics*

Dear Editor,

They are all talking about it, and I’m sorry to add more words, because I am helping to magnify an episode that has so excited the small-village curiosity of some people and the neurotic suspicions of others. Both curiosity and suspicion agree in preferring an ingenious hypothesis, a satisfying invention, to a reality that is certainly quite modest. And the history of this *pamphlet*¹⁸⁸ certainly is interesting (though I don’t think there will be a lot more of it): one can see it as a sign of the rapidly growing tendency to overlook or even ignore the facts so that one can pursue the interpretations, the meanings, that are “behind” the facts themselves. In this case, few among those who are interested in this satire have considered that, to know the identity of the author, it is necessary to read what he has written. From this fact has come such a torrent of opposing and contradictory suppositions that they have shaken the already weakened confidence of the ones who believe that they must seek out an indicator of the truth in the only place where it can be found, that is to say, the text itself. Unless – and this is the chief suspect – the confusion is already in the source itself, and one is struggling with a writer who writes differently from what he actually thinks, unaware of the connection between means and ends.

[Is the writer] Balestrini? The situationists? The famous Censor, that is to say, Gianfranco Sanguinetti? An editor in Segrate? Professor Losardu? And then, is it an individual or a collective of authors? And the place: Milan, Rome, Turin? And why rule out the possibility of a woman? I do not know, and to tell you the truth, I do not care. The little that matters is what the book itself says. Not at all unseemly in its style, it is more the work of a cultured moralist than a subversive militant. The thesis is classically conservative: the heretics, the rebels, (in this particular case) the feminists, the [members of the] Radical Party, the homosexuals, the armed groups, the ecologists, etc., imagine that they are *liberating* the spontaneity and creativity of life, but in their actions they are actually collaborating with the Communist Party in the perpetuation

¹⁸⁷ This letter, published on November 19 under the title of “Identikit of a forger” by *Tuttolibri*, was preceded by the following introduction: “Enrico Berlinguer’s *Letters to the Heretics*, a satire mockingly attributed to the Secretary of the Italian Communist Party and illegally published under the name of the Einaudi publishing house, continues to provoke an indulgent curiosity. We are looking for news from “alternative” bookstores, where the book is being sold for 2200 lira, hoping to work back upstream to the distributors, in search of the real name of the unknown author or authors. We wish to establish, based upon the book’s complicated ideological-stylistic traits and disparate assumptions, all of which appear legitimate at first glance, an understanding of how much confusion Italian political life nourishes. And, as is the case of kidnappings, there have been claims of responsibility that are motivated by vanity or the spirit of parody. To raise the stakes, to pass the fake Berlinguer through other hands, we asked Giulio Bollati, the general manager of the Einaudi publishing house, to draw an ‘Identikit’ of the anonymous author for us.”

¹⁸⁸ English in original.

and perfecting of the existing social order. There's nothing very new here: this is in the line of the 'reactionary' culture that has always hindered the advent of the 'modern world,' understood as the degradation and death of values. Something along the lines of De Maistre-Ceronetti.

Therefore, the author is a sentimental person, perhaps a little disappointed by the failure of the revolutionary dreams of his youth. My guess is that he is of average age and average height. He is secluded, even if he confides in one or more friends. A man who has read widely and wildly, ranging from Macrobius to the most recent literary reviews in the *Corriere*, but lingering for a long time on Swift. Stendhal is particularly dear to him, because when quoting a passage from him, he refusing to declare his name, as if afraid to confess [his love.]

In short, he is a dilettante, in the non-pejorative sense of the term. Perhaps someone who, if not a dilettante, imagines that, today, he can expound his ideas freely and by hiding behind the refined literary ploy of anonymity? Who, if not a dilettante, would lose the thread of his ideological proclamations to ramble on in laborious digressions that betray his true convictions and break the unity and credibility of the pastiche?

He must be close to us: geographically and in direct association. He loves typography and publishing, which he knows well. He has an attentive and excellent memory, and perhaps is a collector. Books? Newspapers? I would not rule out knowledge of the law, whether he was a proper graduate or whether he threw his schoolbooks from the top of a bridge doesn't matter.

I feel like I know him, maybe I'll see him later tonight. But it is more likely that the "type" that I am describing seems familiar because he belongs to our cultural and human world, we all have a friend who resembles him a little: and his kind is not without interest for those of us who are attentive to the history of our generations.

So things are not so bad for him. If one day I come to know that I'm wrong, I can answer again if he is more careful about what he writes.

Giulio Bollati

To Mister Giulio Bollati di Saint Pierre From the Author of *Letters to the Heretics*

Even though you, in your capacity as the director of the Einaudi publishing house, have to deal with matters of great importance, you do not disdain from occupying yourself with my book, thus demonstrating that you possesses, to the highest degree, the rare virtue of not despising little things. The letter that you sent to *Tuttolibri*, and that was published on 19 November under the title "Identikit of a Forger," does justice to your scrupulous research into the identity of the author of the *Letters to the Heretics*, and, if it does not give luster to your nose, nevertheless is proof of the good will with which you fulfill the most thankless tasks in that connection.

And this generous zeal, proper to a man who is "attentive to the history of our generations," must be appreciated by Giulio Einaudi for its true worth. And so I take the opportunity to congratulate his publishing house for entrusting its direction in you.

You are actually a very outstanding person, Bollati di Saint Pierre: the elevation of your rank, your brilliant fortunes, your glorious name, and your progressive choices would be enough to support such an idea, even if you had lesser talent than what you possess. The use that you

make of these uncommon advantages could, perhaps, have been more honorable for you, but could not be more instructive for mankind.

In any other case, I have no doubt that you would have weighed carefully the consequences that could result from exposing your name and reputation to the sarcasm and malice of the world. But in this case, I presume, you thought you would lose the confidence and friendship of your boss if you delayed, even for a moment, publishing your conclusions about my book and putting aside an immediate concern for prudent reflection.

And so I cannot stop myself from admiring the courage with which you have signed your “Identikit of a Forger” and, if your letter did not demonstrate anything other than courage, I might end here, on this note of praise. But, in this case, since your daring essentially consists in publishing (in many thousands of copies) the most incredible nonsense about my *pamphlet*,¹⁸⁹ this is what must be spoken about.

To begin with, you say that *Letters to the Heretics* is more “the work of a literary moralist” than that of “a militant partisan.” Now, leaving aside the alienated expression “militant,” the very fact that I have chosen to respond to your stupidities about my book, and not to those spoken by many others, should be enough to show that I am more a partisan than a literati, and that my one-sided partisanship is irremediably hostile to the miserable attribution “moralist.”

You were wrong to boast, Bollati, when *you cannot even tell the difference between Céline and Stendhal!* This fact gives us two things: the first is a guarantee of my reputation; and the second is a guarantee that you really do represent Leftist progressive culture, the “culture” that prides itself on its ignorance of Céline, Nietzsche, Hegel, Burke and Thucydides, because their works are the hallmarks of “that ‘reactionary’ culture,” the “disorder” you generously attribute to me, and [the culture that] “always fights against the advent of the ‘modern world.’” Nothing less!

You are an imbecile, Bollati di Saint Pierre, and your orderly and progressive culture does not know Céline but, as compensation, knows Stendhal so well that it cannot distinguish him from the “reactionary” author of *Voyage au bout de la nuit*. As if culture can ontologically be “reactionary” or “progressive,” and *not the use that one makes of it!* In your hands, not only my satire, but also [Marx’s] *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* would be reactionary works, because, if you are unable to understand the former, you will find it impossible to understand the latter. Bollati, haven’t you ever wondered by what mysterious alchemy the books by Hegel and Ricardo became revolutionary in Marx’s hands? Or how it is that, in your hands, the books by Marx become waste paper and goods sold in the supermarket?

I do not mind noting in passing that – having proclaimed the author of the *Letters to the Heretics* to be a “conservative,” even a “reactionary,” someone who is “disillusioned” and “opposes the advent of the ‘modern world’” – as I say, I do not mind noting that, after hurling these pompous anathemas, Bollati the progressive candidly betrays them by adding, “he must be close to us (...) maybe I’ll see him tonight (...) he belongs to our cultural and human world.” What nice people you progressives meet in the evening! What a beautiful world! What humanity!

You claim to do my portrait, genuine Bollati? On the contrary, you made my “identikit”: well, in point of fact, *you made your own!*

Then, it takes all of your perspicacity to mention, among the possible authors, your worthy accomplice Nanni Balestrini, whom, among other things, you show an ingratitude that he

¹⁸⁹ English in original.

should hardly forgive you for, because if Balestrini did not exist, you, Bollati, would deserve the prize as the most laughable of the progressive intellectuals in Italy. Or was it simply because he arouses your envy that you did not hesitate to accuse unfortunate Balestrini, since he, for his part, had already been quick to declare to *Panorama* that he “did not share” [the perspective of] my *pamphlet*¹⁹⁰ – which no one asked him – because he considers it, as you do, to be “right-wing”? As you can see, Bollati, and despite your concerns, in your miserable “cultural and human” world, *everything holds*.¹⁹¹

Right-wing or left-wing? *That is the question!*¹⁹² Like so many diligent theology students, you pursue this malicious and recurrent metaphysical question amidst the pranks you play on reality. Anything that challenges your progressive certainties must immediately be brought back to this simplistic dilemma: “right-wing” or “left-wing”? And under the axe of your criticism without concessions, the answer, which always precedes the question, is always the same: “right-wing.” To reassure you, it must be said that it isn’t just you progressives who claim to have some semblance of reason to justify this conclusion, but you do not even care to simulate reasoning; what is important to you is the conclusion, which is: “right-wing.”

Since this magic formula is the only one that is able to reassure your false consciousness, and since your bad conscience does not demand anything but reassurance, you do not hesitate to repeat it every time reality *troubles you*. And you are right to be troubled, Bollati, at a time when disorder is not only in my culture, but also in the streets and the factories.

Anything that damages the Left, then, is “right-wing” – according to you, according to your boss, according to the Euro-Stalinist Berlinguer. For example, if a *social* revolution would break out tomorrow in Italy, it is clear that this would be detrimental to the Left (for the simple reason that the workers would hang the trade-union bureaucrats and the Stalinists alongside the capitalists and their *managers*).¹⁹³ And so, Bollati, according to your metaphysics and ontology, such a revolution would be “right-wing,” and I do not doubt that you, fearless as you are, would condemn it firmly from the gallows, saying that the workers who were carrying out this sentence were “opposed to the advent of the ‘modern world’” that men of your temperament have always favored (by having the magistracy seize copies of my “reactionary” book). Unfortunately for you and your accomplices, when the workers have reached such a point, it will be because your metaphysical logic will have lost its currency, and because the logic of the workers will have followed that of the dialectic. And the dialectic doesn’t know “Right” or “Left,” but only its own reason: the reason of history.

In fact, today, anything that harms the Right is “Left,” and anything that harms the Left is “Right,” and I think it frankly curious that, in the country of the “historic compromise,” there is still someone like you who is naïve enough to doubt it. History does not function like a [session of] parliament, Bollati, and its dialectic has nothing to do with what is known as the “parliamentary dialectic.” History is never either “right-wing” or “left-wing,” nor does it pay attention to people like you. And it is history and those who *make it* today who impartially harm both the “right-wing” and the “left-wing” of the old world, which never ceases to make the same accusations in vain, [even] while it disappears.

¹⁹⁰ English in original.

¹⁹¹ French in original.

¹⁹² English in original.

¹⁹³ English in original.

When my *pamphlet*¹⁹⁴ ridiculed your boss, Berlinguer, and all the *stars*¹⁹⁵ of the New Left, I quite simply ridiculed the spectacle of rebellion – and I certainly did not ridicule rebellion against the dominant spectacle, of which my satire is but one example among a hundred others. To understand the *Letters to the Heretics* as a subversive imposture, one need not be particularly well-versed in the affairs of global revolution: one need only be intelligent, as a few bourgeois commentators – such as Calasso at the *Corriere* – have understood.

Somewhere in your letter you complain that “few among those who are interested in this satire have considered that, to know the identity of the author, it is necessary to read what he has written.” You are right to recognize the usefulness of reading. It would be bad if people did not read, especially for you, because you would be out of a job. But you do not even suspect that *understanding* what is being read is even more useful than reading. This is a banality, Bollati, but one that, if heeded, would have easily avoided so much of what is said in “Identikit of a Forger.”

It is certainly not surprising that the head of the Einaudi publishing house does not know how to write, and, moreover, no one asks him to be able to do so. It is more peculiar that its editorial director does not even know *how to read*, as your letter to *Tuttolibri* has shown. But I didn’t find this particularly astonishing, because I know the old adage: “as things are with the master, so there are with the servant.”

But anyone who reads this long letter from me, addressed to someone who is so rightfully accused of not being able to read, will detect the implicit contradiction or inconsistency in my behavior. To this well-justified objection, I do not in truth know how to respond.

To gain the forgiveness of these other readers, I will therefore provide an easy and short summary of what I have said, Bollati, for your own private and exclusive use.

I said:

First of all, that you are an asshole, and I think I proved this without hurry or effort;

That you are an ignoramus who is convinced that everything that differs from your ignorance “opposes the advent of the modern world”;

That you are a virtuoso progressive who accuses subversives of being reactionaries, but that, “in the evening,” you willingly dine with reactionaries *without mincing words*;¹⁹⁶

That your “identikit” does not fit me, unfortunately, but that, on the other hand, it fits you perfectly;

That you are a metaphysic: that you ramble on and on, and get paid to do so, about what is “right-wing” and what is “left-wing,” as in the past they used to quibble about the gender of the angels;

And finally (and this sums up everything else) that, if abstract thinking is not your strong point, Bollati, concrete uselessness is your weakness.

To conclude, I will say that I will not satisfy your “small-town curiosity” about my identity, but I can eliminate some of your “neurotic suspicions,” to use your expressions.

I am not “the famous Censor, that is to say, Gianfranco Sanguinetti,” but I have reason to believe that Sanguinetti would not mind seeing that he is not the only one in Italy who ridicules the powerful and the imbeciles. And I find it frankly bizarre that you, and so many of your peers, are able to remember “the famous Censor” with tranquility, happily forgetting the impression he made two years ago.

¹⁹⁴ English in original.

¹⁹⁵ French in original.

¹⁹⁶ French in original.

I have never heard of “Professor Losardu.” I have never set foot in Segrate, or in any editorial office. As for the situationists, everyone knows that the Situationist International no longer exists, even if situationists are now everywhere, in the streets and in the factories in revolt.

Who did you think you could deceive, Bollati, with your ridiculous letter? Whose gratitude did you hope to earn?

These are questions that you need not respond to and, moreover, none are necessary: your private life and your public behavior have already given sufficient responses.

*Little books have their own destiny, Bollati, as do imbeciles!*¹⁹⁷

[signed]

The author of *Letters to the Heretics*

November 1977

P.S. A final word, this time not addressed to you, Bollati, but to your boss, who is a proponent of freedom of the press in Moscow, but very anxious to have books seized in his homeland. Einaudi: reading this letter addressed to your stooge, don’t believe that you’ve been spared, because *this story is about you*.¹⁹⁸ That you are a “foolish soul” has neither great importance nor need of further proof: in addition to all that you are, you employ people like Bollati.

¹⁹⁷ Latin in original.

¹⁹⁸ Latin in original.