

The Young in a Post Industrial Society

Alfredo M. Bonanno

1988

Contents

Class modifications	5
Loss of meaning of the old repartitions	5
Excluded and included	6
The logic of things	6
For a class analysis	7
Far from objective security	8
Life	8
Precariousness as a choice of life	9
Adaptation	10
The weak part	10
The new ghetto	11
The function of affectivity	11
Lack of identity	12
And being devoid of identity, he goes into the fray	12
Unpredictability	12
Levels of tension	13
Dominion's project	14
Going beyond the old class struggle projects	14
Revolutionary presence	15

The conditions surrounding what remains of the human being are far more bewildering for the young, those still looking towards the future not having on their back the abyss waiting to open and swallow up an old man.

I am well aware that the following considerations might move some to laughter, and I'd like to see young readers do such. What to do with an old man's words? What can they mean to those looking wide-eyed at the wonders that await them far from cataloguing a life that has seen everything?

After all, youthful hopes and strength are precisely there, almost made to be deliberately squandered when confronted with others' advice and experience.

That is the way of the world, and as I am now playing the role of talking gibberish, I might as well go the whole hog.

The text I am proposing here is an attempt to clarify the conditions I mentioned earlier, post-industrial society and its foolish servants on the one hand, young people with their still unexpressed potential on the other.

Yet it is not a given that everything will go as it is threatening to do. There is still an area of shadow, a chaotic amalgam that could always bring forth the unexpected. This unexpected thing should always be about to spring forth, especially in the heart of a young person not atrophied before their time. I illude myself that they are not, I dream that their pulsations are strong and sure, able to accelerate in the face of humiliation and abuse and the rules that society imposes on us, with which it seeks to shape and coerce our lives.

After all, the world's future lies within every young person. A single grain of sand in the repressive machinery and everything could jam, we are not fleas jumping at the tamer's commands, even less should we be so concerning the future, our future and the way we decide to live it.

Whoever bows their head and consents in the face of the abuses that keep them in line is the lowest form of person, the last reject of an aching humanity, heir of millennia of slavery. I hope that this legacy has not been received by the young people to whom I am ideally talking, and I trust that they do not want to take it right now and cash it in. Other should be the proceeds of their years to come.

Desire, creation, dreams, the remote incomprehensible stars, even this now small agonizing planet that hosts us. Inventing happiness, here's a fine task, refusing to accept levelling, not even that which helps pass the time by trivializing meaning, banalising taste. Every moment of life - a young person barely understands the importance of living this moment - is worthy of being lived, not wasted in feeling sorry for oneself, in the smallness of the needs of an administered reduction to living with moral prejudices and economic downturns.

Living a life of little insects hopping in baroque advances of survival means not looking ahead, it means always putting your hands in your pockets to count the pennies, avoiding danger and suffering, accepting the rules of a hedonism of sad well-fed clowns, content with the piece of bread that the boss throws you from time to time. There is nothing sadder and more demeaning than a young person who lives like the last man on earth. The same goes for an old man, but at least the latter has excuses on his side which, even if they do not absolve him, cover him with the cloak of pity, a shameful blanket that hides the remaining forces that could still provide him with the inspiration for a final whim, a proud outburst. But let's leave the old to their thoughts, the young, no. Strewn, no! A young reject or is either a freak of nature or an idiot.

Careful. I am not interested in orthopaedics. I don't want to straighten the dog's legs, I don't want to build the new man. I am referring to what is standing there in front of me before my

very eyes, the potential that cannot not be found in the heart of a young person, often finding a thousand muddy rivulets into which to direct an outlet that would make them explode otherwise.

Forget all guarantees, a guarantee is a ball and chain. A safe future, a guaranteed future, is a heavy anchor entangled in the shallows. And forget meagre daily happiness too, keeping others happy, one's creditors, parents with their behaviour models. The only answer to their expectations is to go beyond. What they want of you can only be a tiny crumb of your dream - after all what they want is easily satisfied - their goals should be no more than tiny steps in the long journey you have before you. What worth is riotousness, small-time rebellion? What matters is the great refusal, leading to the inversion of your essence as human beings, young people (men and women, for those who still have these distinguishing concerns), young crazy people, drunk with their own life, who do not yet want to determine themselves in this or that social manifestation, but are open to every experience of the senses, every achievement not yet established or even thought or considered to exist.

Throw your ability to go beyond in the face of the whole world, spit on all the accommodating winks coming from all sides. School, emptied of content. Culture, managed ridiculously by sycophants. Politics, in the hands of clowns. Society, organized by police go-betweens. Fun, codified by economics graduates. You cannot baptize your future in the name of appearance, exteriority, representation, the uniform of the latest fashion.

If you want to live you have to fight against this continuous festering, rotting passed off as something flowering and joyful. And may this fight be life and death, merciless, spit in the face of the constructors of compliance, the manufacturers of death in the name of everlasting peace, the paid fabricators of guaranteed opinions, the weavers of tawdry cheating and tricks. And may this spit not be that of some superior wisdom claiming to teach something to the teachers by trade, but sarcastic contempt for all compromise, falsity, legality that heals and illegalities claiming to confer a status of diversity based on the penal code. Not circumventing one's position, but a frontal collision.

And prepare yourselves, prepare yourselves for revenge. Accumulate day by day your anger - this yes - and make it explode at the right moment. In front of you is the most shameful and vile garbage heap in history, the sum of the sums of every wickedness, there is no danger of making mistakes about where to hit, the target is so vast that even if you were blind from birth you would be able to centre it all the same.

Trieste, 29 November 2008

Alfredo M. Bonanno

* * * * *

We can destroy everything because we can build it all again as we are the ones who made everything.

(Motto attributed to Buenaventura Durruti)

We must destroy everything because we could never use what the bosses are building today to guarantee their domination in a liberatory way, which we will never know if we remain within a class dimension like the present.

(Updated motto)

The present restructuring of capital and the State is redefining class relations through new perspectives. Those who have the technological instruments today and even more so in the future,

will also have power and the capacity to manage consensus. They will be the 'included' in a reality of dominion. The rest will be 'excluded', condemned to a 'passive' use of technology. The perfectionment of this process passes through the reduction of what the class of excluded possess: in the first place their own culture. The strata being subjected to this pressure are the young. It is here that the future included and excluded are to be found. Certainly the selection is still based on belonging, but new elements are appearing on the horizon. The following piece is an attempt to look at these new elements of class selection a little more closely.

Class modifications

The readjustment of dominion in a society undergoing violent restructuring such as the present one is resulting in a new definition of class relations. The panorama is breaking up but not for that is it losing its vision of the clash. On the one hand there are the privileged, on the other, those who have nothing.

A lot could be said about the nature of these privileges. We can no longer speak simply in terms of lack, so much as of possession of something *d i f f e r e n t*. That's it, today's privileged possess something, or at least the hope of something that the disinherited not only do not possess, but do not even *u n d e r s t a n d*, because they are not aware of it, or are about to lose what little knowledge they have.

A redefining of class relations must, in my opinion, be seen through this process of progressive loss of knowledge, the mastery of something once also indispensable to the exploiters themselves. The latter are now at the point of reconstructing a different set-up of social conditions (as a whole) so different as to no longer require the exploited to have what they once possessed (in the first place labour power). That is why the new class set-up is based on innovative processes of technology, far more than in the past, in a way that is radically different.

The new revolutionary motto, "if we destroy we are also capable of building. We built the palaces and the cities. The workers can build them again, and better ones; we are not afraid of ruins, we have a new world here in our hearts", attributed to Durruti, but which however circulated (and circulates) within the traditional working class (which still persists as a class in some ways, in the defence of wages if nothing else) is no longer correct. Today we could substitute it with another such as: 'We must destroy everything because we will never be able to use in a libertarian way what the bosses are building to guarantee their dominion and because it is a question of something that we could never know by remaining within a class dimension such as that of today.'

In the past, destruction might have been an 'accident', not serious in any case, because from the ruins we could have rebuilt a world of freedom. Today it becomes a necessary road, because only through the destruction of all that the bosses are building, starting from the use of post-industrial technologies onwards, will we be able to build the free society of tomorrow.

Loss of meaning of the old repartitions

The violent and rapid processes of transformation of the social set-up have reduced the importance and meaning of the old class manifestations.

In the narrow sense, to speak of 'proletariat' and 'lumpen proletariat' had an extremely reductive meaning. The same could be said of the term 'working class', which bears considerable weight in revolutionary decisions. In the same way, new problems have appeared concerning definitions of the dominant mass: capitalists, politicals, rentiers, employees, cadres, managers, etc. The old concept of 'bourgeoisie' has been shattered for ever.

In order to orientate oneself better I think we need to be more concrete and avoid putting new ideological formulae in place of the old ones. I realise that many comrades often carefully avoid pronouncing and referring to concepts such as 'proletariat' and 'bourgeoisie' and, from their embarrassment I am aware of the profound changes we have been living through over the past few years. But simply banning words is not enough, it is necessary into the thing if one wants to avoid the risk of a new word ending up taking place of the old to allow us to carry on undisturbed by 'dreaming' the thing instead of taking possession of it.

Excluded and included

Some time ago I proposed a distinction based on these two concepts. On the one hand the included, closed up inside their teutonic castle and, so, dominators; on the other hand the excluded, destined to a passive use of technology, dispossessed of anything that will ever be more than their aim of 'work' and, precisely because of that, dominated.

I have explained as well as I can that this distinction adapts itself well (just as a model of reasoning) to post-industrial reality. Today's technology is wealth, far beyond simple 'financial capital', which will diminish more and more. It will be impossible for this technology to be shared by all. Many will only have the skills for a passive use of it and will not understand anything beyond simply pressing buttons. The few (the included) will carry out research and manage power through possession, which is exclusive to them.

To guarantee the net and final separation and prevent the excluded from being able to take possession of this technology, a precise wall needs to be built, a far more efficient one than the old walls of the past, safes, prisons and asylums: this will be the wall of lack of interest. One cannot be interested in what one doesn't know, one cannot struggle to have what is 'other' than oneself, that we do not wish to possess because we do not know it. And the more we are cut out from technology, the more we will end up losing interest (also, and principally, in the destructive sense), and this process of disinterest will run parallel to the growth in our ignorance, our progressive distance, the lowering of our intellectual capacity.

The logic of things

The lowering of content that the life of the excluded will undergo is not the result of an operation programmed by the included. The process of class resystemisation is in the logic of things i.e. in the logic of the restructuring of production.

Passing from an industrial structure based on huge fixed investments and programming to the post-industrial structure—realised through the intervention of the State by entering the economic process itself—a structure based on the flexibility of production consented by the new technologies, the problem of a reduction of some capacities of the individual and the increase of others had to be faced.

That has led to profound modifications, brought about by school, the media, the spectacle, free time, etc. In this way a new person is being built, capable of adapting, a malleable being, with modest capabilities, neither too low nor too high, with a tendency towards group work, without a broad culture and with no career prospects or social mobility. The almost totality of the young are gradually being addressed towards these perspectives. On average they are smarter, more dexterous (but not all that much), educationally inferior with wider but more superficial knowledge in the various sectors. They know less in depth, but know more things.

For a class analysis

To go over all the elements of a class analysis today would require putting together again all the pieces of a panorama that has been upset by the acceleration imprinted on to the normal processes of restructuring of capital by the new technologies.

From there, the phase in which capital called the State into the rescue project, let's say around the beginning of the 80s, we have seen how legitimisation no longer passes through control and repression but primarily through consensus.

Once the phase of adjustment was over, the State having transformed itself from capital's cashier into its banker, one realised that there was not all that much difference between capital and the State and that the socialisation of capital was going hand in hand with the upturned mercantilisation of so-called State capitalism. With the fading of the supporting ideologies the two great historically opposing sides are getting closer on the practical level. The management of public affairs now differs less and less from that of the private.

We cannot identify the exact confines of the class clash, at least not with mathematical precision. But that was not possible before either, so we need to go looking for them, by attempts.

We see this as the reduction of what the class of excluded possess. The reduction no longer passes through the classical appropriation [by the bosses] of what this class produces. From primitive to advanced, capitalist accumulation has always been based on extortion. Following a parenthesis of 'participation' we are now moving back towards exclusion. Technology is increasingly guaranteeing a productive system where the excluded will only contribute marginally, through simplified procedures—and production—that will not allow any reconstitution of the productive situation beyond the universe of the included. Technology will belong exclusively to the latter, the former will only be allowed a passive utilisation. This use will not allow technological mastery and, the way things and projects of 'reduction' are being set out, not even a desire or need for this mastery.

The place where this process of reduction is happening more visibly, is among the young. This social area constitutes the reservoir for the identification of the included and excluded in the future. The selection is still based on the original conditions of belonging, but these conditions are appaiate from a more accentuated social capillarity. Every now and again one individual's exceptional ability and intelligence might emerge giving them an entrance ticket. The needs of the included will always be dictated by those of a restricted number of technocrats and in the future these will not necessarily correspond to the present day holders of economic fortunes.

Far from objective security

A perspective of production based on flexibility requires an ideological support proposing behaviour models far from stability, certainty and security.

Rather than a discourse on 'secure' employment, now almost mythical and archeological anyway, the young are being told about opportunity which, in fact, has increased. There are more possibilities for experience, various (limited) kinds of knowledge, fluidity of values, disengagement, individualism. The young person is urged to build a flexible life model capable of adapting to the changed conditions of not only the labour market, but of reality as a whole.

This is the consequence of a certain failure (in terms of the change in productive relationships), but it has also contributed to this failure. Young people's move away from public and political interests is certainly a failure, but only of a way of seeing politics in authoritarian terms (the party). In this sense, the collapse of traditional values (the family) has included that of traditional political values. It could not be otherwise.

To propose a "traditional" discourse to young people, let's say that of the "revolutionary" union, would be quite out of this world.

Young people have certainly not been diverted from the myth of security (work, career, stability, family, party) in order to turn them into revolutionaries so we should not believe that capital is working against itself. If anything, it is the other way round. This is why our criticism of the party in the past always went right to the end, to the very party within us, not be confused with the new State's (apparent) criticism that wants to offer a new order given the apparent lack of order that now exists. In fact, their lack of security (flexibility) is nothing but the search (already realized in some ways) for greater more significant security (therefore, control).

Life

This is at the centre of young people's interests. Living an acceptable life. It involves moving future objectives into a precarious and uncertain present. Yesterday's certainties are disappearing to make way for fashions and fluctuations passed off as "opportunities" whereas they are nothing but illusions, just as in another way yesterday's certainties were also also illusions when placed in the optic of the party or the workers' State.

And as it is easy to forget, young people do not take this into account, even as an object of criticism. All that simply does not exist. The daily sphere, personal relationships, day to day opportunities, experimentation, the (uncritical) rejection of politics, has subconsciously taken the place of the paraphernalia of the past.

The everyday becomes banal and repetitive, personal relationships drown in boredom, opportunities turn out to be fictitious, experimentation is just fashion and the refusal of politics is simply due to ignorance and not a result of critical reflection, and for the moment all this cannot undergo deeper analysis.

The response to the processes of reduction is often to turn back and look the models of the past. For example, capital is pushing towards flexibility, but those who get this message transform it into adaptability and rediscover the value of bricolage, the misery of small needs satisfied through fake autonomy, the renunciation of desires that become habit, sacrifice, an almost ascetic abstraction of need. So, in the life of young people, alongside the behaviour dictated by

modernization (rejection of work, career, social gratification, stability) the surrogate of getting by, illegal work, the pseudo-freedom of doing-nothing (which often corresponds to not-knowing-what-do) is resurrected almost as if by magic. To the past aggressiveness or, anyway, the desire to move up in society, renunciation, permissiveness, horizontality are now being opposed, in a far more permeable context. It turns out that the chances of the average individual at the beginning of their social life being able to provide themselves with a few opportunities, were greater in a context where these opportunities were less available. Today, where on the contrary there are more actual opportunities there is less subjective disposition, reflecting unconscious renunciation and abandonment to a rhythm of life that is believed to be chosen at will, whereas it is being programmed in the great laboratories of capital.

Precariousness as a choice of life

Seen in abstract, there can be no doubt that the rejection of a fixed social status, rigidity, a career, etc., is something positive. So much of the anarchist critique of the family, school, institutions, the State was aimed at the dismantling of fixed roles. But the precariousness deriving from this, its provisional nature, must be accompanied by an intimate strength, an element of the individual's consciousness capable of transforming this unstable situation into something more stable and ordered, far from the provisional prison-like order imposed by the institutions.

This is all fine. But, how much of it is actually achieved in practice? The odd encounter of our critical project for the destruction of stability with the State's project aimed at creating instability because that is the best way to reorganize the processes of exploitation, is certainly a fatal one. The two things are apparently similar, but are actually profoundly different.

Capital (and with it the State) has widened possibilities to a maximum, horizontally proposing a scenario that used to resemble a pyramid. But it is also possible to insert an insurmountable limit within the horizontal line, all the more insidious the less visible and comprehensible it is. The fascination for precariousness involves nearly all young people now, but it is very different from the choice of precariousness that some of us made in our lives in other times. Compulsory precariousness is a status as rigid as what existed before.

The swindle concealed behind this propaganda of the widening of possibilities provided by post-industrial society is better understood by looking at the comparison often made with a bohemian way of life. Precariousness as an artistic or intellectual choice of taste. Now, is it possible to imagine such a mindset reaching mass level, at the level of every possible job? Of course not. At least not in terms of creativity. Because the equation precariousness equals creativity is incorrect when it is imposed by a routine that, rightly or wrongly, is always the same (a few buttons more or less, what changes is just the time and place for pressing them). Creativity lacking—and this is missing by definition, as everyone can see—the possibility of upsetting the routine is also lacking, so the possibility of upsetting status which, in this way, crystallizes itself is also lacking.

Creativity cannot exist in the absence of a consolidated identity, in the absence of a strong volitive personality. We need a sense of security that allows us to move at ease within ourselves, even with all the sometimes lancinating contradictions of such a journey, or in conditions of absolute precariousness and extreme difficulty at the very level of survival. In fact, a lot could be said about creativity in coercive conditions, such as those of the situation that is now widespread among young people. Even the stimuli for sociality, for the horizontality of decisions, the collec-

tivity of experiences, are positive elements but first they need to be filtered to become elements of the individual's consciousness in order to be able to emerge as stimuli for creativity. As long as they remain as they are today, at least in general terms, impulses of the general conditions of the system, processes of fashion and unconditional acceptance, the time for their transformation into creative elements is still far away.

Adaptation

Young people adapt. That is reality. And the interests and strategies of the ruling class are pushing in that direction. At the moment it cannot be said that there are precise programs in this sense, i.e., of a clear reduction in terms of time and means employed of young people's abilities, but there is a trend in the interests of production (first of all, the labour market) and a general rejection that has affected the very ability to orientate itself autonomously.

Induced precarity is making young people avoid making an effort to transform this into chosen precarity. Moreover, after a while even the possibility of distinguishing between the two is lost. You are in a precarious situation and try to get by. The absence of consolidated reference points (something desirable as a level of the social ladder), which once led to struggle and when revolutionary awareness was acquired also to incrementing the class struggle in terms of direct action and attack, now pushes—we are still thinking in general terms—to find a solution for the problems of everyday life. And this solution can only be sought at a lower level. One looks around and accepts them seemingly inevitable models of compromise in the short term in the optic of an individual or, at most, a ghetto vision. Potentials are immersed in the vast sea of possibilities and end up drowning in the glass of water of compromise with oneself and the environment.

Lost identity is no longer sought in terms of conflict and personal suffering —something that once pushed towards research and, why not, towards utopia—but is sought in generalized indecisiveness. One finds uncertainty, partiality, what's available, the tangible. The amount of "common sense" to be found in youth circles is disconcerting: low-end pragmatism (which has been exchanged, think!, for nihilism) that completely cuts off relations with medium and long-term projectuality, the big questions of life, the social upheavals that could come about, voluntarism if not revolutionary, at least radical.

Precisely at a time when power is speaking of expanding to infinite possibilities, young people, grasping the profound meaning of this response, are closing themselves up in minimal satisfaction, fatalism, daily realism, reduced and half-reduced tension, in the ghetto where it is possible to survive.

The weak part

The larger quantity is the weak part, that which has problems of realization. In a situation of a generalized emptying of school both in content and at the level of access to the labour market, only a small minority, economically stronger and socially closer to the centres of power management, can programme themselves, within certain limits, and gain access to post-school education levels, the only ones that guarantee entry into the world of the included.

For the weak part there are substitutes that have deliberately been cut out of the old values "against" once supported by revolutionaries. Do you remember "quality of life"? This example is enough to see what we are talking about.

The new ghetto

The young person, cut off from the start (apart from the due exceptions), no longer goes towards educational content, the only thing that could guarantee them access to the world of the included, but towards the vast field of appearances. The ghetto closes in around the weak side with the seal of dispossession. Slowly the substantial elements that once led to the use of cultural tools (also in a revolutionary sense, after becoming aware of one's class situation), are replaced by relational, inter-relational elements, contacts, the people one knows, opportunities, possibilities. Everything moves into the field of leisure, emotional relationships, friendships, everyday life practices, hobbies, a reflux of religious, mystery, esoteric, astrological, ascetic practices. Even "political" commitment, when it re-emerges through the swindle of rejection of ideologies—imposed by the administration of power itself—political commitment is directed towards pacifist and non-violent exegesis, the a priori condition of dissociative (in the sense of separate) practices, sectorial interventions.

The new ghetto is therefore closed within the walls of accommodation, daily life, escape into mystery, reduced commitment in this or that sector. The rest, society, revolutionary action, dreams of a better world is forgotten, indeed has been forgotten on the express order of the reasonableness of things.

The function of affectivity

Affectivity becomes particularly important in a situation centred on compromise and accommodation, when faced with the problem of the impossibility of building a correct personal identity but seeing oneself forced to go back to minimal positions, the only ones able to guarantee a possible balance.

Friendship, peer relationships, the love affair, frequentation of the same places, codification of gestures, attitudes, words, etc. Little by little, one gets attached to the same people, the same things, the same words, the same gestures and, while constantly changing, even the same clothes. Everything changes so that nothing changes. Affection replaces what no longer exists: ideology, organized labour, violent social differences, a pyramidal structure of society.

A vortex is created within which the enclosure of the ghetto solidifies. Reality proposes the same experiences to the subject, who cannot manage to live differently, even in some hypothetical maximum potential. So the static nature of experiences between external reality and individual is postponed. This is modeled on that and reproduces the models of this.

External reality is experienced as something distant and incomprehensible, anyway, not all that interesting. What we perceive are the terminal elements of this reality: everyday life, with its myths, common sense, commonplaces, sport, music, fashion, the symbols of beauty, possession, strength, etc. The rest, the ultimate causes of these symbols that are on our skin, in everyday life, are considered - and in fact are - far away, of little import and therefore, in essence, non-existent. And as life is still always action, not simply expectation, here it is transformed into a spectacle.

In this area, greatly enriched by power, young people can still have some influence, say what they like, find their own way, their individuality.

In the field in which they feel more "themselves", laws reign that, taken in themselves, are the realization of the old utopia: equality, fraternity, friendship, affection, love, peace, nonviolence. All cows are grey in the realm of the fictitious.

Lack of identity

We have seen that all this makes the construction of the personality difficult or at least favours conditions of adaptation that produce flexible personalities with little identity of their own.

Things could not be otherwise. In a situation in which potential opportunities increase, to avoid absolute frustration one must necessarily fall back on opportunistic, pragmatic choices (escape into illusion: drugs, religion, various mysteries, physical bodybuilding, etc.). But identity is not built on such weak bases.

Of course, even the old careerist with a "strong" identity ***faceva le sue prove nell' was proof of opportunism and a flexible back. But his was a process of decisions, a strategy, if you like ridiculous and Machiavellian, but still a strategy. The opportunism we are talking about is substance, not strategy, content not the outer skin. This opportunism is devoid of identity (any identity, even that of the exploiter, which is still identity).

And being devoid of identity, he goes into the fray

So we have it that young people can look for work but live their situation (of unemployed, illegal workers, workers) as "externals", as a transitory situation. Today here, tomorrow there, the day after tomorrow nowhere. The same for the family: they can live in it but do not share its values, as they can abandon it, but not for this acquire or rationalize the reasons for the abandonment. The same for a group: young people can belong to a group but still maintain other kinds of relationship and this surprises us compared to the strong selectivity of what it once meant to belong to the groups of political and revolutionary commitment.

It follows that young people find it difficult to recognise a scale of values in their social relationships. They no longer know what matters more, work or family, associative activity in a group or cultural engagement in another, concrete support of an institution or free choice far from party organizations.

We can - as everyone has surely experienced - see young people, even comrades, carry out a struggle with certain means, counterinformation, direct action, etc., and then suddenly propose to agree with anyone at all, the local council for example, to get some concession. This is not about contradictions or bad faith, it is a question of lack of identity.

Lack of identity leads to indeterminate unpredictable behaviour.

Unpredictability

We need to stop and think about this for a moment. The formation of the personality is not only subjective, it is also objective. The environment concurs and, certain physical components prevailing over others, leads to a certain construction of consciousness and the individual.

A flexible set-up with no long-term projects, reduced reactions and impoverished content, inevitably leads to a state of flimsiness in young people. It also affects their ability to be constant in their orientation in the sphere of everyday life. The lack, or strong reduction, of ideals, utopias, radical ideas, engagement also leads to unpredictability in minimal behaviour. We are fed up one day, hyperactive the next. We are romantic one minute, then we become sceptical. We go from feeling insecure to showing off ostentatious independence, from tolerance to intolerance.

Unpredictability is also mirrored in other ways during the restructuring phase of the social formation. Productive processes are undergoing such a profound and "revolutionary" transformation that this is causing an equally violent transformation of values and behaviour patterns, as well as of social conditions and desires.

Young people are suffering from their unpredictability. There can be no doubt about that. In the present state of affairs they seem to be overwhelmed by a process that leaves no alternative. They have some interests, of course, but they always seem to be blurred by other possible choices that could satisfy diametrically opposed needs of equal value.

Levels of tension

The individual is pathologically contradictory and needs to find, if not a unifying outlet, at least one that unifies momentarily. One cannot remain stuck between several choices for ever. You have to decide at some point. Of course, even the absence of choice can be a choice, or, if you prefer, being put in a situation where it is impossible to choose is a choice, at least going towards one as it would only be irreversible after a certain point.

We can continue living in flimsy conditions of survival for long periods, but the consequences of uncertainty accumulate and wear the individual down. In a horizontal orientation, without any model of constructive values we either address ourselves - and fast - towards awareness, or we can easily get burned out.

And young people certainly run such a risk. Gaining awareness of one's condition of belonging to the excluded can occur in many ways, even to the point of reaching how this used to happen in the past (through alienation). However it cannot be said that this awareness alone, especially in embryonic forms, although sufficient to trigger a sense of discomfort sufficient to find an outlet, would actually lead to a project.

This is different to when once the change in personality could be reflected in quite a tangible practice, a materializable need visible for all to see. And from there it was a short step to the violent desire for re-appropriation. One was also affected by lack of dignity and could fight and even die because of it. But today it is not a question of need.

When confronted with a contradictory situation open to a number of possibilities, the individual discovers their own contradictoriness intimately. They realise that they lack a project, desire, will, and this can lead to unthinkable consequences. Unpredictable behaviour doesn't change.

The violence that surges from this accumulation of contradictions cannot be immediately translated into our code based on the production relations of the past.

Dominion's project

This is not something that is well defined, however as we have seen it is based on the indispensable criterion of flexibility. This involves risks. In the first place the unpredictability of a potential class conflict. Over the last hundred years, capital and the State, together or separately, had convinced themselves that everything could be recuperated but, after all, they never illuded themselves concerning the utopia of capital, that everyone could be satisfied, exploiters and exploited.

Now, with the radical changes that have taken place over the past decade, expectations are still cautious, although we would also tend to agree that the possibility of this double holy alliance is greater now than before. Yet these people are moving cautiously. They know that there are spaces where social conflictuality could emerge due to the impossibility of an overall social project on the one hand and the young's inability to realize projects of individual satisfaction on the other. But the dominators want to delude themselves yet again arguing that anyway there is space for personal fulfilment and contradictions can always be overcome with pragmatic attitudes.

Each one illuding himself in their own way. Even among those fighting dominion illusions of equal scale and gravity exist.

Going beyond the old class struggle projects

Aggregating forms (the party, the union, the group, federation, etc.), regardless of the different ideological and practical connotations, objectives and utopian elements, were born according to the visible need, to adjust worker resistance to the excessive power of the bosses. Faced with the monolithic nature of capital, the exploited were fragmented. Hence the primary indispensable action of uniting to defend one's rights (to survival at least, which was also threatened under certain conditions) and then to attack in order to make other conquests.

The monolithic nature of capital was visible not only as a financial force and ownership of the means of production, but also as a physical place: the factories. It was never accidental that factories were built along the same architectural models as prisons and barracks, just as it was never accidental that the old barracks were later transformed into factories, prisons or schools (as also happened for convents).

The total institutions all had the same destination, so the buildings were interchangeable. To fight under such conditions it was necessary to unite. From uniting strategies and outcomes of "counter-power" emerged, i.e., the substitution of the old power with a new one. It is not the case here to go into the tragic outcome of such perspectives. What I am interested in going into instead is the change in the monolithic condition of capital and of the State.

Let's hasten to say that today there is no longer a "heart" of capital just as there is no longer a "heart" of the State.

The big industrial centres are spreading over the international territory and becoming more and more fragmented thanks to the programming possibilities offered by electronics operating in real time. For example, already the great storage warehouses of the big industries no longer exist. The various materials are distributed throughout the territory, even at great distances even without any real logic.

When you need a part anywhere in the globe you see the nearest place to find it on the computer and get it sent by plane. The system is less expensive than it might seem as there are no longer the excessive costs of warehousing in large quantities, the management of several warehouses distributed in the territory provided with thousands of pieces and relative risks, etc. The same goes for the assembly lines which, now robotized, can easily be split in size as semi-finished products can also be transported vast distances. In any case, the monolithic nature of big industries is tending to disappear and, with it, the presence of the workers inside the factories is being drastically reduced.

As for the structure of the State, the "heart" has not existed for a long time. No component of the State mechanism is essential, all are easily replaceable both at the political level and the administrative level. From this we see the limitation of the action of authoritarian Marxists, such as the Red Brigades and so on, which set their action on old and outdated analysis, expecting impossible results. The decision-making powers of the State are being spread throughout the territory, distributing themselves horizontally, the most suitable for the post-industrial economic situation.

We must therefore consider the exploited's old models of organisation unsuited to the current situation.

What to suggest: what we have been doing for some time summarized here in a few lines. Autonomous base units, self-managed structures born according to the situation making reference to permanent conflict, self-management and attack.

For the specific organization we suggest informal groups that recognize themselves in the insurrectional methodology, i.e., in the constant practice of sensitizing the exploited to transform their instincts of rebellion and tendencies to riot, insofar as possible into insurrectional forms dotted with a minimum of self-organization and political analysis.

For the attack, now, not planned for a future when "the time is ripe", we support interventions aimed at destroying capital's and the State's realisations throughout the territory. In our opinion, minimal structures should be preferred, because the spread of capital throughout the territory (and even, though a little less, those of the State) is based precisely on these structures.

The large centres, those that persist, are now mere symbols of something that no longer exists or, if it does, which needs to be assisted by a myriad of terminal connections (cables, wires, underground pipes, pipes, telephone lines, antennas, pylons, poles, sorting centres, research centres, etc.), without which those complexes become unusable.

For these reasons, with all due respect to the deaf who insist on not hearing, we argue that the traditional aggregative structures (parties and trade unions of any kind) and specific structures (groups and federations of synthesis) belong to the past and are no longer adequate to the occurrences and ongoing modifications of reality.

Revolutionary presence

Although the moment is one of reflux and the interests of capital and the State at a generalised disengagement are going to coincide with a lack of interest of young people who are rejecting previous ideological adventures, I believe it is possible to rebuild a revolutionary presence.

I am basing this hypothesis on two arguments. First, the far from optimal situation in which great masses of young people now find themselves and will do more and more. Contradictoriness

and lack of identity will end up leading to (and in fact are already leading to) explosions of violence that are not easy to understand and even less easy to manage. Secondly, it is possible to address the mistakes of the past critically without turning them into a funereal lament for a lost revolution.

It is necessary to be present in a way that is appropriate to the new situation, i.e., with instruments that can become an element of and not an obstacle to these outbursts of violence, channeling them from discontinuity and confusion into continuity and class awareness. In other words, to transform spontaneous riots into conscious insurrections.

Will such a thing be possible? We believe so and for this to happen we indicate as indispensable: the courage to face new situations that we are not used to, the ability to understand motivations beyond one's own past experiences, clarity of propositions against all mystification, the isolation of those who just chatter, and the preparation of minority actions.

All this, with all due respect to the embalmers of corpses, we are willing to do, in fact are doing.

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Alfredo M. Bonanno
The Young in a Post Industrial Society
1988

Retrieved on January 25, 2020 from <https://archive.elephanteditions.net/library/alfredo-m-bonanno-the-young-in-a-post-industrial-society?v=1579954842>
Original title *I giovani in una società post-industriale* Anarchismo 61, 1988, pp. 1-11; Opuscoli provvisori n. 19
<https://www.edizionianarchismo.net/library/alfredo-m-bonanno-i-giovani-in-una-societa-post-industriale>

theanarchistlibrary.org