Anonymous, Mickael Tempête
Mario Mieli embraces Jacques Camatte
2024

Retrieved on 31st October 2025 from
https://trounoir.org/Mario-Mieli-embraces-Jacques-Camatte
The following text appeared in the first print issue of TROU NOIR magazine, May 2022. TROU NOIR magazine has set itself the task of bringing together scattered fragments dealing with the forces of desire and how they work on bodies, ideas and sexualities. Not a new grand theory, but a constellation of differences capable of contributing to the emergence of an emancipatory politics. Translation: Eloi Halloran

Mario Mieli embraces Jacques Camatte

Anonymous, Mickael Tempête

2024

Contents

community without understanding that we must not live in another time, another space, but bring them together (it is for not having faced this that all communities were unable to avoid the trap of despotism) and that this rested on love andeternity, that without love it was impossible to envisage a new dynamic of life. Yes,I love passionately and it is from the space-time of this passion with which I am invaded and which I integrate into my life and into all those which precede me and which succeed me and which will succeed me (the *Gemeinwesen*) that I speak to you carnally, to you whom I loved from the moment you wrote to me from your hospital bed in London. So I think you will understand!

Shortly before his death, Mieli affirmed, in the Dutch introductory note to the *Elements*, that "the only and immense force capable of opposing capital is love". It can only be fully thought of as freed from the normative frameworks of the bourgeois family,and emancipated from the age-old repressions which prevent its real deployment. This love, as Camatte says in this letter, is therefore not only that of another individual, but also that of the entire human community. This human community, which is capable of so much richness and beauty, nevertheless seems to subscribe to an unprecedented collective death drive, and to doom itself to irremediable suicide. The ever-increasing threat of nuclear war implies that for the first time in its history, humanity has created a weapon to possibly annihilate itself for good. But even in the face of the most serious risk, there is still time to freely create one's own history,to move away from predicted disasters, and to take control of the measure and needs of human existence. Fags, dykes and trans have a leading role in this fight to the death against capital, who'll continue its work of destruction as long as human beings repress their desires. Conversely, we have nothing to expect, and nothing to ask, from bourgeois progressives. Every place must burn to experience from now on another geography of passion, another language, another love.

Generally speaking, if we wish to carry out a critique of connections between homosexuality and capital, it is crucial to carefully observe the internal contradictions of the homosexual movement which already formulate this critique[9]. Mario Mieli himself formulated this problem in these terms: "Capital liberalises desire while channeling it into a consumerist outlet. Far from being genuinely liberated, homosexuality thus plays a key role in the totalitarian capitalist spectacle. Nowadays, there is no commercial 'artistic' expression which does not take into account, to a greater or lesser extent, the homoerotic content of desire."

The liberalisation of homosexuality, that is to say its domestication (its "channeling it into a consumerist outlet") constitutes for Mieli the counter-revolution of power in the face of the threat of a dissident homosexual desire coming to remove the mask of innocence of naturalized heterosexuality.

*

I mentioned at the beginning of this text that it was necessary to look under Camatte's critique of Mieli's theses to see what our two Marxists share in common. You literally have to look under the critique, that is to say in the footnotes. Camatte sensed the burden of his critique. He attaches an extract from a letter he sent to Mieli:

And now I plead guilty. It is clear that all this, which is not a critique but an affirmation of what I am in my yearning towards you, starts from my exalted heterosexual affirmation, since I am madly in love, excessively, anachronistically, with a woman who is as beautiful as eternity and who made me feel deeply that time is an invention of men incapable of loving. And, at the moment when this intuition became an invasive perception, I realized that it was not possible to conceive of

[9] Cf. The Adam rencontre Adam section of Race d'Ep! by Guy Hocquenghem, where we see described the emergence of a capitalizable gay aesthetic.

Mario Mieli is a rare species in the revolutionary world. In writings such as Elements of a Homosexual Critique*,* La gaia critica *or* La traviata norma*, he deploys a gay communist affirmation both theoretically and aesthetically. The following text bets that Mieli is right in his political exuberances and that we must not only take them seriously but live them and make them live continually. One way to update their substance is to deepen the links between his thought and that of a heretical Marxist like Jacques Camatte, from whom he repeatedly borrows the concept of "human community".*

> "The struggle to liberate desire, the 'underneath', is a struggle for the (re)conquest of life, a struggle to overcome the anxious, role-bound and ever threatened survival that we are forced into, to put an end to the neurotic and grotesque spectacle in which we are trapped, all more or less, by being negated, separated from one another and from ourselves. It is not a question of redeeming the noble savage (which is itself a bourgeois myth), but of releasing our aesthetic and communist potential, our desire for community and for pleasure that has grown latently over millennia. 'The cultivation of the five senses is the work of all previous history' (Marx)."
>
> Mario Mieli, Elements of a Homosexual Critique

> "Bury me, bury me under your waste, your spittle and your impotent delirium, for know this, like the shamans, Zalmoxis, Pythagoras, Christ, I will draw from mother earth the infinite vital power, and I will resurface full of wisdom, joy and of an exuberant life which will allow me to reach this human community from which will have disappeared the infernal stupidity that marks you, the Manichean narrowness that ossifies you, the

> terrorist rage that torments you periodically, as wellasthat the impotence to be without defaming, vilifying others. I would have left your world and resurrected."
>
> Jacques Camatte, Scatologie et résurrection.

Up to this day, when left-wing revolutionaries *speak* about homosexuality as a topic, it's to underline its arrangements with capital or better, actually worse, to denounce it as a vanguard of capital. Other left-wing revolutionaries, more comprehensive but just as conservative, consider that sexual liberation struggles can converge towards a more global struggle against capital, provided that they do not fulfill a utilitarian function, that is to say they only constitute the first step of a more general process of politicization. Between total rejection and anguished tolerance, between *phallocratic aggression* and *paternalist protection* as Mieli would say, all that remained for homosexual movements was autonomous organization in theory and practice towards a revolutionary path.

The 1970s were a period of unprecedented intellectual and activist ferment for the post-May 68 anti-carceral, feminist, homosexual, student movements… What they all had in common is that they did not fit into the framework of the class struggle and therefore could not be considered revolutionary from the viewpoint of communist groups founded on the doxa of the theory of the proletariat.

Yet, Mieli's perspective on homosexuality, unlike that developed in the same years by Guy Hocquenghem in France, is deeply influenced by Marxist thought. Having read Freud and Marcuse, Norman O'Brown and Hans-Jürgen Krahl, Mieli understood that homosexual desire, far from a particularity to be claimed on the market of identities, constitutes a universal tension as concrete and fundamental as fiercely repressed. This analysis is also influenced by the "bordigist left communist" French author Jacques Camatte's particularly innovative inter-

> submission to capital of the whole of human life." Mieli knows very well that the formation of the homosexual movement towards a construction based on identity and not desire can only extend its arms to capital. This is also the reason for its break with the FUORI in 74. Certainly, liberalism lifted prohibitions to be able to capture both the normal and the abnormal, but only from the moment when dissident sexualities could be domesticated following the heterosexual model: couple, sex within four walls, procreation, consumption and inheritance.

The debate opened by Camatte from Mieli's theses, namely whether the empowerment of sexuality would or not offer humanity on a silver platter to capital, is entirely up to date. The problem, I believe, is to draw the conclusion that homosexuality would be a "major operator of the capitalization of activities", to use the words of the anti-Mieli Camattian reader. Indeed, this conclusion reproduces in its terms the separation made by capital between the homosexuality on which everyone has an opinion, and the heterosexuality rendered silent.

Mario Mieli has the courage to say that a desire must be assumed, it must be defended, and that it is the role of fags and dykes to crack the membrane, which we could call "civilization", of the homosexual latency present in each of us.

And to the heterosexual complainants, he responds in his *Elements*: "We need men, who are today so obtusely phallocratic, to accept that they too are pregnant with a life that is not to be aborted, a 'femininity' that must not be crushed by the deadly destiny of this male-dominated society. They also must – but this is a gay 'must' – come to establish new relations both with women and with other men, and finally to understand and uncover in themselves the half that they have always repressed, coming to express and communicate to others a new mode of being and to become gay, conscious, open and anti-capitalist."

cially differentiated to an undifferentiated "transsexual", but, above all, a critical crossing of these differences to get back on the path to the human community. This fear of the undifferentiated or the absence of limits to desire is just another avatar of anti-homosexual paranoia and the avoidance of any politics of experience. What is limitless is not desire, which always ends up encountering bodies, but rather the void hollowed out in each of us by the fear that a practice of freedom arouses. The entire paragraph is as follows: "Mieli's speech can be sympathetic: "The real revolutionaries are lovers", but it is immediatist and performative. When it becomes more concrete, Mieli puts forward suffering bodies and the desire for liberation from external constraints. Mieli deals with the current sexual combinatorics without saying a word about the intervention of this combinatorics in capitalist operationality. However, homosexuality and sexual combinatorics have become major operators in the capitalization of human activities."

2. It is wrong to suggest that Mieli puts aside the interference between sexuality and capital. To quote him : "With its real domination, capital seeks to take possession of even the unconscious, that 'human essence' whose manifest expressions could not but be condemned to death by the systems of repression that preceded it. It may be successful, either because it is more difficult today for the unconscious to explode in an uncontrolled fashion, given the efficiency of conditioning, or because, by way of repressive desublimation, capital enables the unconscious to 'emerge' in alienated forms, in order to subsume it, to deprive men and women of it, and to deprive women and men of themselves. The logic of money and profit that determines the liberalisation of the so-called 'perversions' is not simply an economic fact: it promotes the

pretation of Marx. Starting from a reading of Chapter VI of *Capital*, he asserts that, with the rapid progress of automation, capital has reached a phase of real domination over society. This means that it is no longer just labor that is dominated, exploited and transformed by the demands of capital, which now also shapes *human society* as a whole. With the support of cybernetics and its new techniques of information management and population control, capital even colonizes the brains of human beings. From then on, there is no longer any exteriority to its empire and it can constitute itself as a "material community" in which the old class antagonisms are deactivated. Proletariat and bourgeoisie, formerly antagonists, are now part of a whole which does not tolerate any secession. By this dissolution of all previous community forms, the capital-community completely reshapes society and man in its image.

These analyzes will exert a great influence on Mario Mieli's thought. In return, the reading of the *Elements of a Homosexual Critique*[1] will inspire Camatte a critical response to Mieli's theses, in the form of a fairly long text: "Love or sexual combinatorics"[2]. The latter is often used by readers of Camatte to assert that there is a fatal contradiction between Camatte and Mieli. And in fact, this article seems to replay the debate between sexual liberation movements and its distrust by Marxists – including the most heretics. Here's how it starts : "This book [by Mario Mieli] is of great interest because it expresses with clarity and without dogmatism a certain number of theses on sexuality, which allows, by confronting them, to operate an approach to this question, adding immediately that for me the essential question is not sexuality but love. The fact that the first has become autonomous expresses in a powerful way the decline to which Western humanity has reached." This is

[1] Mario Mieli, Towards a Gay Communism. Elements of Homosexual Critique, London, Pluto, 2018 (1977).

[2] Jacques Camatte, Amour ou combinatoire sexuelle, Invariance, 1978.

something that comes up regularly in the critique of feminist and homosexual movements: the fragmentation of the human being into gender or sexuality, which is today very vulgarly called on both right and left as "identity politics".

Yet, when reading the texts of Camatte and Mieli, it seemed to me that this opposition was only held too feverishly. *Under* the opportunist caricatures that can be drawn from it, that is *under* the heterosexual fear that bending over will allow capital to come from behind, and *under* the homosexuality no longer willing to let go of its small niche of capitalizable identity, complex and touching correspondences are hidden.

Mario Mieli was one of the founders of the Fronte Unitario Omosessuale Rivoluzionario Italiano (Italian Revolutionary Homosexual Unitary Front), whose acronym FUORI means "outside". As with the FHAR in France or the GAY LIBERATION FRONT in England andthe United States, post-68 homosexual groups were created in reaction to the anti-homosexual paranoia of Marxist and communist groups, who lacked the capacity of a critique of the heterosexual regime's role in the reproduction of capital.

Published in Italy in 1977 (and only in 2008 in France), his thesis entitled *Elements of a Homosexual Critique* reveals the profusion of his thought. He is also at the origin of *Traviata norma*, a collective play in which the social norm is disguised and distorted so that homosexuality becomes the rule and heterosexuality the deviance.

These homosexual movements were contemporary with feminist movements and heirs of Freudo-Marxist theorists like Reich or Marcuse. One of the things that Mario Mieli was most passionate about in the feminist movement – and which the Italian homosexual movement took up – was the practice of self-awareness. It was about coming together as women or homosexuals to share experiences and difficulties. Through this relational practice, it then became clear that it was "not only society that had a problem with women" but

outside… with the advantage which fascinates immediate people, of achievable combinatorics". This article authorizes certain readers of Camatte to assert that "homosexuality and sexual combinatorics have become major operators in the capitalization of human activities."[8]

There are two problems in this analysis of Mieli's theses:

1. It puts notions that Mieli does not support to his lips: asexuation, neutrality, sexual combinatorics are not part of his vocabulary. Capital has compart mentalized not only beings but also the practices of enjoyment. Thus capital would function more by separation than by exclusion. Separation being understood as the organizing principle of society into classes, social statuses, areas of activity, etc. And more substantially, as Camatte envisages, the separation of nature and humanity produced by the exploitation of the first by the second. Mieli, by understanding Marxian naturalism from the question of desire, does not make sexuality a sphere separated from the others, but on the contrary integrates it as a necessary component of the complete discovery of the repressed potentialities of the human being. Homosexuality is a passage towards the realization of the pansexual essence in the human community. It is not a separate category, a fixed identity, but a practice of liberation which aims to be overcome in turn. Mieli does not, however, defend a dynamic which would go without transition from the so-

[8] Jacques Wajnsztejn, L'Autonomie hypostasiée, *Temps Critique*, juillet 2021. The entire paragraph is as follows: "Mieli'sspeech can be sympathetic: "The real revolutionaries are lovers", but it is immediatist and performative. When it becomes more concrete, Mieli puts forward suffering bodies and the desire for liberation from external constraints. Mieli deals with the current sexual combinatorics without saying a word about the intervention of this combinatorics in capitalist operationality. However, homosexuality and sexual combinatorics have become major operators in the capitalization of human activities."

A DEBATE WITH JACQUES CAMATTE

As we said above, Mieli was an attentive reader of Jacques Camatte[7]. He is cited several times as a reference in the development of his theses. Beyond their agreement on the developments of late capitalism, Mieli also made his own the "prophetic communism" of Camatte's texts. Following Marx, the two authors notably use the term "human community" (*Gemeinwesen*) in order to define communism. *Gemeinwesen*, literally "common essence", designates in Marx "the fundamental essence of man", which has been denied and repressed by class society and the capitalist mode of production. The realization of the human community is thus the overcoming of bourgeois society, based on the individual and society, as well as its economy, based on the transformation of use value into exchange value, that is to say about the constant conversion of human activities into mercantile activities and the incessant expansion of the commercial sphere to all dimensions of existence. It is only by overthrowing the "material community of capital", an inverted community exploiting the species, that human beings will manage to free themselves from the repression parting their communitarian and pansexual essence. The achievement of communism, Gemeinwesen, is therefore the affirmation of a mode of being in which identities are abolished in favor of a joyful and exciting intersubjectivity. This conception of communism allows Mieli to formulate a political horizon for the feminist and homosexual movements at a time of decline of the working class' historical role. Nevertheless, if Camatte agrees with Mieli on the profound polymorphism of human beings, he criticizes him for wanting to reduce "men and women to asexual particles, to neutral particles which only become sexualized by taking on a sex from the

[7] To discover the texts of this author : Jacques Camatte,Errance de l'humanité, Éditions la Tempête, 2021.

also that "women had a problem with society". Self-awareness thus made it possible to measure and explore the gap between women and homosexuals vis-à-vis the masculine and macho symbolic order on which the capitalist mode of production is built. At a distance from protest movements, conscious groups affirmed a way of doing politics which started from oneself's own experience rather than from the objectifying discourse of sociology.

Both the FHAR and the FUORI developed themselves against the institutional forms of unions and political parties and the forced identification with the proletariat, without any dogmatism and by assuming homosexuality as a sufficiently solid starting point for their contribution to revolutionary politics. Nevertheless, over time, the FUORI to which Mieli belonged moved closer to electoral reformist projects and the *Partito Radicale*. This was Mieli's moment of political rupture : it is then that he insists on the need to build an autonomous homosexual movement which does not seek to participate in the political masquerade[3]. For Mieli, homosexual desire, just like communism for Camatte, is not a new modality of production (relations) competing with heterosexual (capitalist) production, but an abandonment of the world of production itself. He thus split with the group in 1974 and founded a new collective in Milan. It is from this split – *reformism or autonomy* – that Mario Mieli developed a revolutionary theory of homosexuality through several articles and a thesis entitled *Elements of a Homosexual Critique*.

During the next decade, Mieli traveled around Europe to meet different homosexual groups like London's GAY LIBERATION FRONT, who had a profound impact on him[4]. It is from his hospital bed in London, where he fell ill, that he began a cor-

[3] Which earned him the famous phrase stated in his *Elements*: "No longer politicians, the real revolutionaries will be lovers."

[4] There are several accounts of these meetings in London, Berlin and Paris in *La gaie critique*, Éditions la Tempête, 2022

respondence with Jacques Camatte, whose political hypotheses he had read and studied, with a particular interest in his conception of the "human community" as going beyond the mode of capitalist production.

Mieli's thesis is a debate with psychoanalysis. He forcefully demonstrates that desire is an anarchic power coded neither by heterosexuality nor homosexuality, but that there isarepression of the power of desire, a repression produced to support the heterosexual bourgeois society. This leads to a repression of homosexual desire, which undergoes a sublimation into homosociality (family, army, school, factory, assemblies, bars, sports, seminars, camaraderie, etc.), that is to say a deactivation of sexuality compensated by an important involvement in the capitalist "material community". From psychoanalysis he takes up Freud's notion of the "polymorphous perverse" to establish, in all his certainty,that homosexual desire (and every other perversion) crosses all of us and that, therefore, there can never be a "sexual minority" defined by the laws of nature. However, what does exist is,onone hand, conscious (or overt) homosexuals and, on the other, latent homosexuals. Since, according to Freud, "our libido normally hesitates throughout life between the masculine object and the feminine object", Mieli asks: if everyone is homosexual, why only a few accept it and actually enjoy it? Freud responds by saying that "the social constructs of morality and authority" function as inhibiting powers to sexual impulses. Thus each civilization defines its own sexual behavior.

Then, although the homosexual struggle is fragmentary in the social grid, it nevertheless concerns everyone, because we are all polymorphous perverts. For Mieli, this implies a specific and revolutionary role that fags and dykes must assume, as they are the conscious face of a more general movement. And this is also one of the reasons for their harsh repression throughout the ages: fags and dykes affirm what others repress. Homosexual desire is not in the minority – it is transversal –

and it must face heteronormative propaganda so formidable that it doesn't even require repressive laws anymore to perpetuate itself. The political consequence of all of this: a gay critique is revolutionary in itself because it endangers the standardized and constructed structuring of the family which has allowed the development of capital and continues to make its reproduction and valorization possible.

Mieli, however, identifies a more specific target in the repression of homosexual desire,that is the"transexuality"at the foundation of every human being."Transexuality" allows him to escape from the psychoanalytic corset (the polymorphous perverse) and to bring it into play in the personal and political field.

"Transexuality" is the act by which the human community can come into existence, when the subject emerges from its sclerosis by crossing the limits establishing of the sexual and gender differentialism which separates the feminine from the masculine, heterosexuality from homosexuality[5]. The project of transsexuality is its own condition: the destruction of the various dispositives of sublimation or repressive desublimation of Eros which produce mutilated beings[6].

[5] In my article La paranoïa anti-homosexuelle (*Trou Noir*, october 2021), I described the existential consequences of the separation of sexualities as follows: "This production of homosexuality as a separate category introduced the *lack* in desire, this *lack* is heterosexuality (normality) – and its scene of sexual difference – which then plays a role of mirror so that homosexuality can be build as a social character in its own right. The gays were therefore ordered to come forward in front of the mirror and to define themselves from it."

[6] These notions of sublimation and repressive desublimation are borrowed from Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* (1955). Sublimation desexualizes the libido to disseminate it in the sphere of production (work, team spirit, competition, etc.), while repressive desublimation is the lifting of certain compulsive prohibitions oriented towards accumulation and consumption. Sublimation leads to productive work, while repressive desublimation closes the loop by satisfying the libido through direct consumption.