

LE VITE

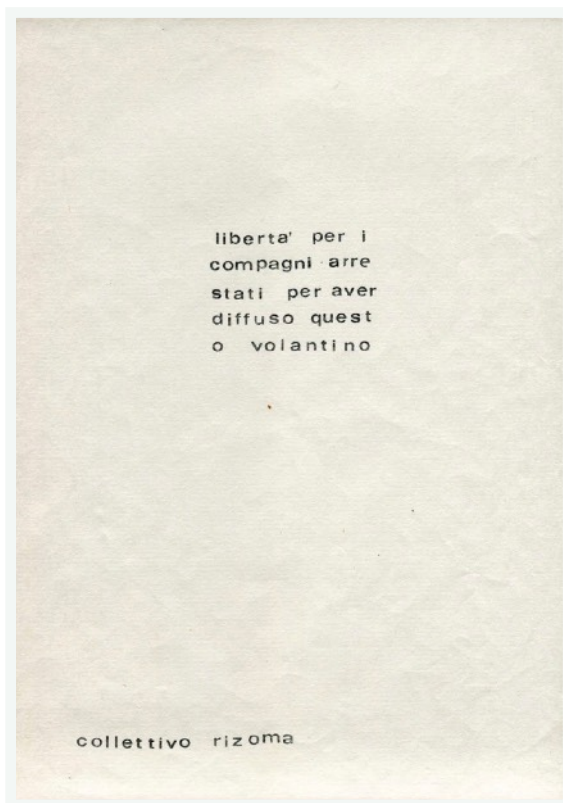
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Rome 1977, the Christian Democrats are still Italy's leading party, despite the rise of the Communist Party, which had achieved a historical record with 34% of the vote partly due to the PCI's ability to take on the legacy of the protests and libertarian impulses of 1968, and partly to the crisis of the DC, hit by scandals and internal divisions. The result of the elections a year earlier led to the formation of a single-party government led by Giulio Andreotti (in his third term), which went down in history as the "non-confidence" government, because it was based on the abstention of the PCI¹.



In the same year, Pablo Echaurren, at the time known as "Paino", and Maurizio Gabbianelli, known as "Fanale", two young friends slightly under 30, distributed a printed leaflet in the streets of the capital that stated "freedom for the comrades arrested for distributing this leaflet", affirming themselves as Collettivo Rizoma. Echaurren at that time was part of the editorial team of "Lotta Continua" where he created ironic cartoons with a melancholic vein and a serene despair. They mostly depict lizards, monstrous but peaceful creatures that seem to represent an anomaly in the evolutionary hierarchy of the species, which is why they suffer. They suffer because they are insecure, wavering in their own nature since they are not taken into consideration by Darwin's evolutionary theory.

In this period, one of the most symbolic elements in Echaurren's work appears, "the little squares" which became famous thanks to the visibility given to them by the publishing house Savelli, who put them on the covers of many of their most iconic publications. The key role that Pablo had in the aesthetics of youth counterculture in '77 and in the much discussed experience of the "Indiani Metropolitani" has since been duly noted. However, it seems that fifty years after these experiences, not all aspects have yet been exposed to light and in many posthumous analyses on the subject, everything is still overshadowed by categorizations that place it exclusively in the realm of political commitment and activism, thus simplifying its practice. Unfortunately, what is sacrificed the most in the face of these stylized interpretations, is the influence between artistic activity and life itself that a path such as this one

intends, allowing impenetrable aspects of human matter to be transformed into the most soluble substance in regard to the recollection of history.

These considerations are legitimate, and it is without doubt that these facts are the fruits of a militancy, but trying to look at things from another point of view brings out aspects that may help us to orient ourselves within the various attempts at ideological rediscovery in which we also participate.

Focusing therefore on this leaflet may be useful.

It summarizes much of that linguistic experience, but above all a warning that needs to be put on the table today.

The experience of '77 is marked by a recovery of the twentieth-century avant-garde and sinks its roots into actions of subversive manipulation, détournement, non-sense, collage, calembour, happenings, to attain a transformation of the dominant languages, considered inseparable from socio-political action.

Practices that overturn the hegemony of the meaning, introduce delirium into the order of communication, and encourage desire, anger, madness, impatience and rejection to speak. This form of language was the only one adequate to an overall practice that overturns the dictatorship of the Political, that introduces appropriation, refusal of work, collectivization into behavior.

But what Calvesi and Eco noted early on in 1978 which the first defined as "avant-garde of the masses" in *Avanguardia di massa* can lead to further clarifications.

¹ Raffaella Perna, *Pablo Echaurren. Il movimento del '77 e gli indiani metropolitani*, Postmedia Books, Milano 2016

“The practice of subversive manipulation of language and behaviour had abandoned numbered editions, art galleries, cinémathèques and had made its way through the music of the Beatles, the psychedelic images of Yellow Submarine, the songs of Jannacci, the dialogues of Cochi and Renato: John Cage and Stockhausen were filtered through the fusion of rock and Indian music, the walls of the city looked more and more like a Twombly painting”².

“At the same time art was becoming a genre of mass consumption, youth activism was intertwined with the need for widespread creativity at a low level, the models of the avant-garde were taken as existential models moving in the direction of an annulment of the artwork within everyday life”³.

These words stimulate questions regarding the relationship between being and belonging, in order to clarify the ontological nature of these events.

The riots of '77 are the consequence of a consciousness of being, enlarged and standardized, that has evolved into a sense of belonging, an extended sense of belonging.

But belonging to what?

Here we enter the crux of the matter, a slippery slope that can lead to an unexpected outcome.

Precisely because of its scope, the avant-garde of the masses as it has been defined, can only take place if it is based on a belonging that does not include any particular human characteristics. It does not select its components on the basis of superstructures of being, on that something that the individual should have or demonstrate. It does not pretend and does not seek further qualifications than the ones it already has.

It was a collective experience built on the need to get away from the roles, the idea of parties, the syndrome of representation and the hierarchy induced by professionalization.

Existence assumed unrepeatable values and took over everything, so much so that it felt restricted to any form of belonging, if not to that of humankind (or even better to that of the living), to being in itself. This led to clashing with any representation of it and denying any subset of it. An eloquent example of this is the way the Indiani Metropolitani wanted to present themselves to the public in the first issue of their self-produced newspaper “Oask!”, by defining themselves through dis/aggregation, and by denying the associative characteristic and the nature to assemble in a group, as well as its possible identification within a movement.

The collective impulse therefore sprang from a need for “the unrepresentable” and “the irreducible” - the leaflet reproduced here, like many of the writings and poetic slogans that spontaneously appeared in that period is proof of this.

To overlook this exhortation and not understand it means taking away their *raison d'être*.

This was confirmed by the words of Pablo himself who, commenting on the above-mentioned leaflet, says “it was obvious that if we were distributing it we had not been arrested, it was a mockery of the rhetoric of the movement, an obvious provocation against the banality of certain rituals performed by the left, of a language emptied of meaning at this point”.

This is the warning, and it is imperative to recall it in the light of facts that seem to disregard the deforming action that the institution brings to any existence that falls within its sphere.

In the attempt to give voice to an alleged “outside” by bringing it “inside”, the act of legitimizing its existence fails because calling it to represent itself betrays its nature, immediately transforming itself into something other than itself.

It would be fair to say, using the artist's own syntax, that any representation of an alleged outsider within a so-called “cultural” system is obviously not outside, but inside.

Thus opening up a profound abyss on what the adjective “cultural” identifies, bearing in mind that what has no voice is by nature unrepresentable, but above all it is ungovernable and iconoclastic insofar as it is anarchic - in its etymological sense, which is that it does not refer to a prototype, but to an *arché*.

It may be imprudent to affirm, but what those young people fought for denies any category of law and politics, requiring us today to redefine the very idea of struggle. With caution, we could hypothesize that these young people had foreseen that by gaining ground in all spheres of life, the rule of law would continue to calcify a collective consciousness of being that is progressively more qualified and invalidates the consideration of its form as such, ultimately becoming unable to admit its existence.

² Umberto Eco, “*C'è un'altra lingua: l'italo indiano*”, L'Espresso, Rome 10 April 1977

³ Maurizio Calvesi, *Avanguardia di massa: Compagno gli indiani metropolitani*, Feltrinelli, Milan 1978