



CONSPIRACY AND SOCIAL STRUGGLE

ILL WILL

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The following interview was based on questions sent by Federica Matteoni of the German magazine *Jungle World* during the first week of October, 2021. It was then revised and expanded by the authors in early November for publication in *Ill Will*.

Jungle World: A big demonstration against the Green Pass took place in Rome on October 8th, resulting in an assault on the national headquarters of the CGIL, the largest trade union in Italy. In the eyes of the political establishment and the mainstream media this seemed to confirm that dissent against the Green Pass was exclusively fascist. And it was undeniable that the far right had gained space in the mobilization against the political management of the pandemic. Then, suddenly, things changed. But before you tell us about that, can you explain why you think the description of an essentially fascist anti-Green Pass movement is misleading?

Wu Ming: Since the Spring of 2020, we warned that social anger was growing and would explode once the fear of the virus subsided. We said that the lack of criticism of the pandemic emergency would turn the upcoming, inevitable protests into something very confused and ambiguous, something exploitable by the far right and various conspiracist subcultures. We harshly criticized the majority of the grassroots left [*sinistra di movimento*] for expressing a “virocentric” vision, that is, for focusing any talk exclusively on the virus and the risk of infection, while saying very little about the government managing the pandemic in irrational, unjust, hypocritical and even criminal ways.¹

During the summer, when the mobilization against the Green Pass broke out, we expressed our opinion for the umpteenth time, criticizing the haughty posture of many comrades, the ease with which they applied labels, and their implicit adherence to Mario Draghi's *pandemic social peace* out of the fear of "saying the same things as far-right politicians" such as Matteo Salvini and Giorgia Meloni, who were criticizing the Green Pass for tactical and opportunistic reasons. Clearly the squares gradually filled up *also* with semiotic and ideological garbage. Also, but *not only*, and this is precisely the point.

In *any* mass mobilization we could've heard a little bit of everything. Without necessarily bringing up the Russian revolution of 1905, which in its early phase was led by Father Gapon, we should remember that we *also* heard antisemitic conspiracy fantasies coming from Tahrir Square, we *also* heard nationalist conspiracy fantasies based on Kemalist ideology coming from Gezi Park etc. Would it have been right to dismiss those struggles on the basis of those utterances? No, and it makes no sense to do so for the ongoing struggles, the post-pandemic ones, which are contradictory but unavoidable.²

Faced with street protests against the pass—but which are actually directed against the entire management of the pandemic by the past two governments—the neoliberal mainstream immediately resorted to the *reductio ad Hitlerum*, and a certain Left, even an avowedly radical one, instantly followed suit. In the end, it's a perfectly traditional pattern: the rhetorical operation of comparing potentially anything to Nazism and potentially anyone to the Nazis—and more generally of using the terms "fascism" and "fascists" indiscriminately—dates back to the Komintern of the 1930s and the Kominform of the 1940s. Stalinists described Trotskyists as "trotsko-nazis," Social Democrats as "Social-Fascists," and later Yugoslav Communists as "Tito-Fascists." All of us have heard comrades compare more or less any unpleasant politician to Hitler, call more or less any unwelcome tendency "fascism," and use "fascist" as a generic insult. As a consequence, the concept was trivialized and became increasingly vague. In this early post-pandemic phase such *reductio ad Hitlerum* in fact plays to the favor of neofascists, by exaggerating their role. In many anti-pass rallies, fascists are absent or irrelevant, in others they're present and obviously they try to do their dirty maneuvers. Maybe only in Rome do they

have any influence of note; in any case, the mobilization around these issues is wild and defies every interpretative parameter. So far no political force has managed to secure any real hegemony.

It didn't take us by surprise that those demonstrations expressed hostility towards "the Left." By now, to many Italians, "the Left" means the Democratic Party, that is, a neoliberal party which the popular masses rightly recognize as an enemy. It isn't by chance that PD is nicknamed the "party of ZTLs" [Limited Traffic Zones]: it is voted mainly in the urban historic centers which have become the living rooms of the bourgeoisie, or in the posh neighborhoods such as Parioli in Rome. That's where you can find the Party's constituency: a pretentious and hypocritical upper middle class flaunting the remnants of an old "intellectual" status and an increasingly moderate *leftish* identity. In actual reality, they're disgustingly elitist, they're enthusiastic about classism in all its manifestations, they admire a banker like Draghi and root for more technocracy and more inequality—which they describe respectively as "innovation" and "meritocracy."

One needn't be a fascist to hate this "Left." And we can't even blame those who don't see a different one, after a years-long low tide for movements, and given that many self-described "radicals" share with the mainstream Left a whole lot of its flaws: a bourgeois background, elitism, cultural arrogance, distance from the problems that most people struggle with, etc.

The extension of the Green Pass obligation to every working sector is provoking an increasing number of inconsistencies and contradictions. It becomes more evident every day that the Pass is just a way for the Draghi government—which continuously legitimizes itself with a "war on the virus" framework—to offload all responsibilities on the population while pursuing its policy of social butchery. While we fix our gaze on the virus, the government and the bosses are slaughtering us. This growing awareness is provoking outbursts of anger among various social ranks. Only ideological prejudice can prevent one from realizing this is a "hot autumn".³ This is a wave of conflict defying description and prediction, but without a doubt a real awakening of the social body after two years in a coma.

"Why right now?" and "Why, of all reasons, the Green Pass?" are two important questions, but they become futile if we pose them in the resent-

ful, dismissive way that the snobbish Left does. To put it simply, the Green Pass was experienced as the straw that broke the camel's back, after two years that ravaged the lives of many people.⁴

It also makes little sense to philosophize on the alleged misuse of the term “freedom” by many demonstrators. Epithets such as “right-wing libertarian” or “anarcho-capitalist” that certain intellectuals applied to the mobilization completely miss the mark, as do the comparisons with Trump and Bolsonaro. More often than not, those people are not really just talking about “freedom”: they’re talking about their own *proletarianization*. Most members of the precarized, impoverished, frightened middle class never mastered the language of social struggle, they aren’t heirs to political traditions with established vocabularies, and this has a lot to do with why they articulate their anger at their own social downgrading in terms of “freedom,” or the injustice they feel they’ve suffered over of the way the pandemic was handled.

In their eagerness to distance themselves from the squares, certain “leftist” milieus that spend their time predominantly on social media expressed utter disdain for “personal freedoms,” which they consider “bourgeois” freedoms. Again, nothing new: there are traditional strands of the left in which freedom has always been talked about with sufficiency and contempt. Eventually, they will lead us to the gulag. We must be careful about which terms we decide to use in a derogatory way. Individualism and egoism are one thing, the sphere of autonomy that each human being must enjoy is another. There’s an existential *habeas corpus* without which life is not life anymore. Those who abandon this distinction fall into a terrible confusion and end up espousing authoritarianism, moreover authoritarianism *under capitalism*, without even the excuse of the “dictatorship of the proletariat.”

Above all, it’s important to say that the capitalist management of the pandemic attacked the entire collective dimension, sociality, relationships between people, etc. In this context, “freedom” may also mean the *freedom to be together*, to act collectively, to demonstrate. To dismiss all this as simply “fascist” is at the very least a sign of ideological obtuseness.

JW: In the past few days, however, the Italian media switched to the opposite alarm, the alarm concerning the “radical left,” “anarchists,” the

“black bloc” and even “the Red Brigades,” and their alleged role in the mobilization. From Germany, where only the extreme right and conspiracists have taken to the streets against the management of the pandemic, these rapid transformations are very difficult to understand.

WM: As the Invisible Committee rightly observed,

“Events have a hard time crossing borders... And if they do manage to slip across all the same, it’s only after having endured such mutilation and distortion as to be unrecognizable on arrival. [...] It’s as if an invisible customs checkpoint functioned to ensure that existentially and politically dangerous content gets turned around at the border, while exacting its quota of meaning from anything else that passes through.”⁵

The Invisible Committee was talking about the difficulty of narrating French struggles in Italy and Italian struggles in France, but in our opinion this is even more valid for the relationship between Italy and Germany. There is a historical incommunicability between the “scenes” of our two countries, a state of things partly hidden by a superficial mutual fascination, which makes things even worse. When reporting an Italian struggle to a German audience or the other way around, the risk of misunderstanding is enormous. Urban legends, exaggerations and mythologies can spread. However, the core is mutual ignorance. For example, the Italian scene is totally uninformed about the Ende Gelände movement⁶, and the German scene knows nothing about the No-TAV movement, which celebrates its thirtieth anniversary this year.⁷ The little that Italian radical circles have heard about a phenomenon like the *Antideutsche*⁸ provoked reactions of astonishment and horror: how was it possible that a part of the German radical left could come to support such positions? We have little in the way of context or proper genealogy.

When we talk about post-pandemic movements in Italy and Germany we must take another element into consideration: in the two countries the political management of the pandemic had certain traits in common, but also marked differences. Our contexts are very different. Finally: the situation here is unusually complicated even as seen from Italy, let alone from Berlin or Hamburg!

The representation of anti-pass demonstrations as controlled by fascists was dominant until three weeks ago, then there was a drastic change in perception. The media started pointing fingers at “leftist extremism,” the danger of a return of the “Black Bloc” and even Red Brigadists!⁹ Of course, the rhetorical framework is that of *opposti estremismi* [opposite extremisms], as was in the 1970s: liberal democracy must defend itself from both the far right and the far left, blah blah blah. Of course the far left is always depicted as more dangerous. Anyway, something has changed. What happened?

An increasing amount of the criticism of the green pass has come from the left and from the anticapitalist world: all the *sindacati di base* [grass-roots unions]—Cobas, USB, USI, CUB, SOA—and even the largest Italian mainstream trade union, the CGIL, which was once communist but is now more or less social-democratic, have declared their opposition.¹⁰ Many radical collectives, either of anarchist or marxist origins, have also criticized the pass, describing it as the synthesis of the neoliberal and technocratic logic with which the pandemic has been managed, and as a discriminatory apparatus used by the bosses for tightening their control over the labor force. The example of what played out in France was also important: all the left-wing parties on the other side of the Alps—France Insoumise, the French Communist Party, Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste, and Lutte Ouvrière—as well as all the unions took up positions against Macron’s health pass.

On October 11th, 2021, there was a general strike in Italy called for by all the grassroots unions, and among the items on the agenda was opposition to the green pass. Meanwhile, the situation in Trieste exploded.

JW: The rhetoric surrounding the anti-pass demonstrations underwent a decisive shift after the blockade of the port of Trieste. The latter occurred in the context of a local mobilization that went in a completely different direction from the one taking place in Rome the same day (the situations in Milan and Turin were also quite different). In an intervention on your blog you described the Trieste situation in terms of “class solidarity.” Can you say more?

WM: Mass mobilization in Trieste started in August and is still going on. In a city of 200,000 inhabitants, roughly 20,000 took to the streets several times. Among them, and playing a leading role, are workers of all the main factories and working sectors of Trieste, especially port workers. On October 15th a picket line of *portuali* blocked one of the main entrances to the harbor and received the solidarity of large chunks of the population. On October 18th the police attacked and dispersed the crowd using water cannons and tear gas. Those cops were sent by the most pro-corporate and neoliberal government in Italian history, a government presided over by the former head of the European Central Bank, one of the men who orchestrated the strangulation of Greek society.

An important role in the Trieste events has been played by a group of comrades who carry out political work and *inchiesta militante* [militant research] in the midst of the struggle. They directly contributed to the formation of the Coordinamento No Green Pass Trieste and have been living for months immersed in a situation that is certainly contradictory and difficult to manage, but is also tumultuous, rich, and vital. The case of Trieste proves that there were spaces to intervene right from the start, that it would have been possible to delimit the common ground with clarity and prevent the protest against the pass from going off the rails.

Obviously, once the struggle gained national attention fascists and conspiracist gurus of the QAnon type converged upon Trieste from several parts of Italy. They tried to win space, and the media did all they can to help them, interviewing them all the time even if they had no relevance and no history in the town. For the moment it seems that these attempts to parasitize the struggle have failed. Of course this doesn't mean that you wouldn't hear any conspiracy fantasies or pseudoscientific blathering at demonstrations. It's obvious you could *also* hear that.

JW: You wrote that what's happening with the anti-pass demonstrations gives us an idea of what future mobilizations will be like, as well as the kind of problems that these movements will have to face and solve in the post-pandemic phase of late capitalism—that is, if they aren't content to remain irrelevant “opinion” movements. What do you mean by that?

WM: Especially—though not only—in Europe, future uprisings will be increasingly “impure” and startling, at least at their inception. This was already clear to anyone who observed the Yellow Vests in France in 2018. Things will remain like that so long as capital, in a dizzying acceleration of its *reelle Subsumtion*, devours more and more lives, jeopardizing even the existence of previously guaranteed strata of the middle class. Struggles will be impure because the subjects who will start them lack the background we’re at ease with: memory of the workers’ struggles and social movements, class consciousness, a tradition of social conflict in the family, etc. Paradoxically, however, lack of memory will also exempt those struggles from following pre-established patterns. This is something that Toni Negri himself, in one of the different phases of his elaboration, sensed in a vague way. He wrote about this in a 1981 article titled *Erkenntnistheorie: praise of the absence of memory*.¹¹

The protagonists of the next waves of social conflict will often be “bi-conceptual,” i.e. split in half between their new proletarian—and even precarious—condition, and a residual bourgeois mentality. At first, precisely because of the shock of downgrading, they will try to cultivate the petty-bourgeois values of yore, the remnants of their previous status.

As cognitive linguist George Lakoff says¹², we can speak to “biconceptuals” by addressing the part of their mind that they have in common with us. We will have to “speak” to their suffering of the new material conditions, to their actual feelings, to their anger against the system. If we don’t, only fascists and other reactionaries will do it, addressing the other part of their mind, the rancorous nostalgia for bourgeois white privilege.

Such mobilizations and situations require more interpretative effort, more political imagination, and more patience. Only with patience, and by renouncing the impulse to immediately categorize what is happening, can we hope to trigger useful syntheses. The haste to judge that is typical of social media discussions is undoubtedly our enemy.

JW: How does the Green Pass fit into the overall management of the pandemic in Italy? How do you dismantle the pro-pass discourse from a radical perspective?

WM: It's not easy to summarize the matter for a German audience in the space of an interview. At the end of February 2020 a giant outbreak exploded in Italy's most industrialized and populated area: the province of Bergamo, in Lombardy. There are hundreds of factories of various sizes up there, employing tens of thousands of people, most of which commute every day from Bergamo and the rest of the province. Experts immediately proposed to shut down production, halt commuting and declare the area a "red zone," but Confindustria, the official organization of big bosses, pressured politicians not to let that happen. Crucial days passed in inaction, until the contagion got out of control and spread throughout Lombardy's urban sprawl, home to some eight million people. Lombardy's health care system had been devastated by two decades of cuts and privatizations and collapsed in a few days. From there, the contagion spread to the rest of Italy and even abroad.

At that point the ruling class, in order to conceal its responsibility in what was happening, put in place a series of diversions based on the most classic neoliberal ploy, a stratagem previously used for environmental and climate issues: any responsibility for contagions was offloaded onto the individual and individual behaviors. The set of heavy restrictions which Italian incorrectly call "*il* lockdown" contained a few reasonable measures next to many others that were totally meaningless and even counterproductive. The places that were most at risk of contagion—factories, logistic hubs, meat processing plants—remained open, whereas harmless behaviors such as leaving your house for a walk were prohibited and punished. Police helicopters patrolled the beaches, drones hunted for "violators" in woods and mountains!¹³ The government carried out a useless and misleading *colpevolizzazione del cittadino*, as the sociologist Andrea Miconi called it: a *guiltification* of the citizen.

Those who defended those measures "in the name of Science" actually stoked irrational fears and anti-scientific beliefs. Today it's well established—but it was already understood one year a half ago—that Sars-Cov-2 infection outdoors is unlikely. According to all studies, it ranges from highly implausible to nearly impossible. Yet all the behaviors the government and the media scapegoated were connected to staying out: jogging, "walking with no purpose," taking your dog out to pee too often, having a beer in a piazza etc. Meanwhile, outbreaks in factories dis-

appeared from view. The apotheosis came in the fall of 2020 with a mask mandate even for outdoor activities and curfew at 10pm. Both measures had no scientific basis.

Such a selective and unbalanced “lockdown” lent the impression that the government was “doing something,” while leaving the interests of Confindustria untouched. At the same time, it was an excellent opportunity to strengthen an even bigger capitalism, that of Big Tech giants like Amazon, Google, Facebook and the like.

The Green Pass continues this policy of guiltification and takes it to a new level. It further deresponsibilizes the government and feeds the scapegoat syndrome by attacking the people who the Italian media call “No Vax.” The obsessive campaign on the “No Vax danger” is perhaps the most percussive, haunting campaign since the beginning of this story.

It isn't true that the green pass was necessary to convince people to vaccinate. When the government first introduced it, the vaccination campaign was already proceeding rapidly, we were close to vaccinating 80% of the over-12 population. Among school workers that rate was close to 90%. In health care it was even higher than that. After two months of continued extension of the green pass obligation, we are still around the same percentages. Not only was there no real incentive to vaccinate, but the arrogance of the government only stiffened resistance. Millions of people who haven't done anything illegal (as the anti-Covid vaccine itself is *not* mandatory) are punished by this mandatory green pass with social isolation or the loss of employment, a device that hands the bosses unprecedented control over employees and working conditions.

In the past twenty months many “radicals”—who at times sounded and looked even more scared than the average Italian, the only difference being that “radicals” called their fear of dying “altruism”—gave up criticizing any choice made by the government. They spoke only of the virus. The virus, the virus, the virus. This is why they're now unable to criticize the green pass. Indeed, many of them defend it, adopting exactly the same position as Confindustria, Draghi and the entire ruling class. A ruling class that is truly responsible for almost 130,000 deaths and the unnecessary affliction, psychological wreckage and economic ruin of millions of lives.

Fortunately, another part of the left and the social movements shook

off its long hypnosis, and realized the logic of what the government was pursuing.

JW: Let's return to the squares: according to the mainstream narrative, "maybe not all of them are fascists, but they're all dangerous anti-vaxxers and conspiracists." The more "understanding" commenters say: "we have to convince those people, to explain the situation to them, induce them to get vaccinated and accept the pass." What's wrong with this reasoning, other than the fact that many people still don't understand—or pretend not to understand—the difference between refusing the vaccine and refusing the Green Pass?

WM: We need to distinguish between the vaccine itself and vaccine *policy*. The latter concerns how anti-Covid vaccines are produced, marketed, legitimized, and administered. We're not in a position to make specifically scientific and pharmacological discourses about the vaccine, but we can criticize aspects of the vaccination campaign, because this is a political issue. Many decisions the government made were not scientific at all, but were purely political. Often the rationale was exclusively propagandistic.

When a teenager died from a thrombosis in Genoa after the first dose of AstraZeneca, the CTS—the Technical-Scientific Committee appointed by the government—suggested that the second dose be given with another vaccine, either Pfizer or Moderna. They even declared, without any study at all on the matter, that "heterologous" vaccination was even better than the other one. Well, if it's better, then why aren't all vaccinations like that? Shortly thereafter, they changed their line and stated that the choice of which brand of vaccine to inoculate in the second shot was up to the single citizen. As if the latter was an expert in immunology.

Meanwhile, the age for being vaccinated with AstraZeneca went from "under 55" to "under 65" and finally to "over 65." Why? Because they'd carried out the clinical trial on subjects under 55, but when they observed that in that age group the vaccine could have side effects—for example, in women using hormonal contraceptives—they decided to raise the age. All this was done improvisationally, without any study on the matter.

Again: first the interval between the two inoculations of Pfizer passed from three to six weeks, against the very recommendations of the man-

ufacturer, then everything changed again: now it was up to each Italian region to establish how many days had to pass. Today in Campania they give you the second shot after 30 days, in Tuscany after 42 days.

Last example: in the beginning the Green Pass was valid for 270 days (nine months) starting from the day vaccination was completed, later they extended the validity to one year. Why? Did it turn out that vaccine immunization lasted longer than expected? Not at all. The decision was political and served to buy time. Most health care workers—doctors, nurses, clerks and hospital cleaners—were vaccinated in January and February of 2021, which means that their passes would have expired in October and November, causing an embarrassing situation.

We are pro-vaccines and received our two doses of Pfizer, but we understand why other people refuse to do so, given the schismogenic communication, the arrogance, the halo of unreliability surrounding the government outside the bourgeois bubbles where people support Draghi. By making the pass mandatory for employment and to access all kinds of services and activities, the government introduced a *de facto* vaccine mandate. The vaccine is optional, yes, but if you don't take that option the government will make your life impossible. Many people refused to obey. After all that happened, they no longer believe the authorities. There is a legitimation crisis, a generalized distrust of institutions, a disbelief in whatever politicians and the mainstream media say. In recent years almost half of the population gave up voting, they no longer give a damn about taking part in the functioning of the political machine.

Such a distrust has solid foundations, not only in the criminal management of the pandemic, but more generally in a matter of fact which comrades of ours who succumbed to the blindest *scientism*¹⁴ now deny: in a capitalist society, medicine operates according to capitalist logic. Do antivaxxers draw absurd conclusions from this premise? Yes they do, but the premise doesn't disappear because of that.

For all these reasons, we refuse to discard the views of those who don't want to vaccinate, even if we made a different choice; nor do we consider those people, as many "leftists" seem to do, our enemies any more so than the ruling class that put us all in this situation.

Obviously, when antivaxxers spew bullshit and spread fake news and conspiracy fantasies, we refute them to the extent that we're able to do so,

as Wu Ming 1 did in his book *La Q di Qomplotto* [*The Q of Qonspiracy*]. What we *won't* do is join those who incite crowds against the “No Vax” scapegoat. We oppose this hate campaign, which only serves to absolve the government and the bosses.

Once again, one needn't be against vaccines to grasp a basic fact: to focus only on the vaccine as if upon the arrival of the cavalry has contributed to repressing the structural causes of the pandemic, its impact, and its management under the sign of emergency which has for some time formed the logic of contemporary capitalist governance. Our health care system was progressively dismantled, corporatized and rendered unfit to withstand any critical situation, but when the vaccine arrived, no one spoke of reversing course on this dismantling of the system.

JW: You mentioned *La Q di Qomplotto*, a book in which one of you, Wu Ming 1, dissects “conspiracism” in search of its “kernels of truth.” Can you briefly explain this concept, and how it applies to the pandemic situation?

WM: In the massive and transversal diffusion of conspiracy fantasies—including fantasies on the subject of vaccines—we identify the expression of a malaise, a discontent, a confused awareness that capitalist society is unlivable, dehumanizing, alienating. These are what we refer to as “kernels of truth,” and they're both of a more general and more specific truth.

Even QAnon has some truth at its core: the system is indeed monstrous, and the Democratic Party in the US really does serve the interests of a loathsome elite. The fact that from these premises and intuitions, rather than arriving at a consistently anticapitalist consciousness, instead generate a belief in a secret society of bloodsucking pedophile satanists who keep millions of children enslaved underground is a huge problem but, again, the kernels of truth don't disappear because of that. We could describe QAnon as an *unconscious allegory* and *unintentional parody* of anticapitalist critique.

By kernels of truth we mean general premises, truncated intuitions, vague discontent, poorly elaborated outbursts of anger brought about by the sickness of living in capitalist society. And if we can find them in QAnon, *a fortiori* we can find them in antivaccinism. They're the same kernels from which the best strands of an anticapitalist critique of medi-

cine developed in the past, from Ivan Illich to Franco Basaglia and Franca Ongaro Basaglia, from Michel Foucault to the German SPK¹⁵, from Félix Guattari to British antipsychiatry.

The subordination of medicine to the search for profit, the morbid relationship between medicine and capital, the dependence of medico-pharmaceutical research on big corporations, the increasing bureaucratization and depersonalization of care, the lack of confidence in the health care system after a long string of scandals... These are, or would be, *our* issues, anticapitalist issues, but we'll never intercept that discontent—and by extension, we'll never shift it in more sensible and fruitful directions—as long as we refuse to see it and remain content to treat those who express it as our enemies. In doing so, we reduce ourselves to gatekeepers of the system, defenders of the status quo, and we leave the field open to grifters and fascists.

Then there are kernels of an even more specific truth, those concerning the political management of the pandemic: all the lies told by the government, all the terror and sensationalism, all the blatant disinformation that accompanies the vaccination campaign.

JW: How can anticapitalists react to conspiracism without arrogance, criminalization, derision or paternalism?

WM: We oppose the typical approach to conspiracism, that is, the *idealist* (in the philosophical meaning of the term) liberal and scientistic approach. In this frame, social classes, social relations, power structures, the contradictions of the system, in short all collective dynamics disappear, which means: the *material conditions of conspiracism disappear*. In a classic *robinsonade*, as Marx used to call this kind of narrative, only the individual “conspiracy theorist” remains, a character whom, depending on my fancy, I can either debunk or invite to reason or both things simultaneously, but always in the abstract context of the “battle between ideas.” This is the approach that Wu Ming 1 harshly criticizes in *La Q di Qomplotto*.

Only new movements, new collective concatenations can prevent individual and tribal drifts into conspiracism, by reclaiming the spaces that we left empty and that conspiracy fantasies have filled.

When struggles break out and *touch the real*, that is, when they attack

the system in its real functioning, “good money drives out bad.”¹⁶ In all likelihood, those Italian workers who repeatedly went on strike, who occupied logistics warehouses and blocked the circulation of commodities alongside their migrant comrades—often discovering along the way that the latter were among the most radical and determined groups around—became much less sensitive to bullshit such as the Great Replacement and other xenophobic fantasies.

The effect of conspiracism is to divert discontent and canalize potentially revolutionary energies into places where they dissipate or, worse, end up fueling reactionary projects. This is why, as the book’s subtitle says, “conspiracy fantasies defend the system,” because they’re ultimately “diversionary narratives.”¹⁷ But they would have no success, they wouldn’t spread at all, if they didn’t form around kernels of truth.

If in these years conspiracy fantasies seem to reign supreme in many domains, this is because those domains were left empty. But when real struggles erupt, conspiracism is dethroned. It doesn’t disappear (it *never* will), but it fades into the background. Even if I cultivate a conspiracy fantasy about the Reptilians, I set it aside in favor of the concrete experience of fighting alongside people who don’t want to hear about the Reptilians but share my situation, my interests, my goals.

The comrades who, amidst a thousand difficulties, are intervening in the No Pass mobilization didn’t start out from an aprioristic reading, they didn’t think of solving everything with little sentences on Twitter: they began to do political work in that situation, pursuing the contradiction rather than ducking or dodging it. What those comrades are trying to do is to work on the “biconceptualism” of the people who are protesting. Several things unite them with us: the idea that the system sucks, that dominant narratives are deceptive, that the costs of the pandemic are being paid by the least powerful among us, etc. Other things *separate* them from us: the pseudo-explanations they accept for all of this, the reactionary conclusions they often come to, the scapegoats and imaginary characters they pick on (the Cabal, the Reptilians etc.). We need to find a way to speak to the *intersection* between them and us, to the “half” of their mindset that’s closest to our own. Everything else flows from there. It’s like Tai Chi Chuan: you can execute the “forms,” the long and complex sequences of movements, only if your stance is firm.

Notes

- 1 «*Virocentrism*. A set of cognitive biases and logical fallacies that distort the perception of the Covid emergency. The first impression gained in a moment of strong anxiety and fear —‘the virus will kill us all!’—persists and hardens: all thought is inexorably captured by the virus and its circulation, all reasoning revolves around the possibility of contagion, while any risk other than contagion passes into the background. In virocentric thinking: (a) The virus is not a trigger but the primary, if not the only, cause of the problems that arose during the epidemic. The virus is the supreme enemy, often described in an anthropocentric way, as if it were endowed with subjectivity and evil intentions; (b) the urgency of containing the virus overshadows all other needs and rights and justifies any and all measures, even those whose overall impact on society and collective health could prove more serious than that of the epidemic itself.” (Wu Ming 1, *La Q di Qomplotto*, Alegre, 2021, 329-330)
- 2 By “post-pandemic” we mean after the *beginning* of the pandemic, not after its end. The pandemic is not over, but the way it has been managed by governments and supranational institutions has already altered the context in which struggles take place.
- 3 In the Fall of 1969 the wave of general strikes and large demonstrations by factory workers for the renewal of their contracts was nicknamed “*l’Autunno caldo*,” the Hot Autumn. Since then, the phrase has become a shorthand for the possible outbreak of social struggles after the summer break, when workers and students return from their vacations: “There’s a risk it’s gonna be a Hot Autumn.”
- 4 The tendency to ridicule people who mobilize for the first time by asking “where were all these people when we were demonstrating against this and against that?” can be interpreted in many ways: (a) It’s an overgeneralized partial truth, since those taking action in the squares aren’t only “first-timers,” but also includes many people who took part in previous struggles, people who, if confronted with the question “where were you?,” could easily answer: “I was in the streets. Until some time ago, you were there too. Where are you *now*?”; (b) It’s an affirmation of identity and ownership: “demonstrations are traditionally *our* thing, *cosa nostra*, we were there first!”, says the “good leftist.” However, the streets aren’t anyone’s property. They belong to no one but those who take them. And the “good leftists” left them empty; (c) It’s a manifestation of snobbery in the face of a mobilization that has no “pedigree” and isn’t decipherable within the usual parameters; (d) It’s the quickest way to downplay a mobilization that confronts the “good leftist” with contradictions they have no desire (nor ability) to face; (e) It’s a way to silence one’s own bad conscience: the uncritical adhesion to the pandemic management pushed these people into total subalternity and passivity: “let’s leave it to those who save our lives.” Now the passive subject is semi-conscious that there would be good reasons to take to the streets, as Draghi’s policies are increasing inequalities, but it’s hard to shake off two years of passivity and fear, thus “good leftists” hold a grudge against themselves and against demonstrators who remind them of their passivity.
- 5 Originally published as the Introduction to the Italian edition of the Invisible Committee’s collected writings: Comitato Invisibile, *L’insurrezione che viene | Ai nostri amici | Adesso*, Not, Rome 2019. Translated into English as “Beautiful Like an Impure Insurrection.”

- 6 *Ende Gelände* ["It stops here"] is a German movement known especially for organizing mass occupations of coal mines.
- 7 For information about the Italian No-TAV movement, see Wu Ming 1's book *Un viaggio che non promettiamo breve: 25 anni di lotte No Tav* (Einaudi, Turin 2016) and Wu Ming 1's speech "Ghosts in the Woods and Uncanny Entities: How to Cover the Italian No-TAV Movement", Berlin, September 20th, 2019.
- 8 Antideutschen [Anti-Germans] refers to diverse current of the German radical leftism, which is distinguished by its relentless denunciation of antisemitism in the left and in German politics in general, its occasionally staunch support for Israel (and ensuing condemnation of the Palestinian resistance), and its tendency to eulogize every military action against "Islamism" and Israel's enemies, including US invasion of Iraq in 2003.
- 9 The short-lived but pernicious narrative about the Red Brigades taking part in anti-pass demonstrations originates from the presence of Paolo Maurizio Ferrari, a 76-year-old former member of the BR, at a big demonstration in Milan. The media pointed at him saying: "Look at this guy, he used to be a red terrorist and now he demonstrates side by side with Nazis." Of course, Ferrari wasn't side by side with any Nazi, indeed he was holding a banner with the quintessentially antifascist slogan *ORA E SEMPRE RESISTENZA* [*Resistance now and forever*].
- 10 In truth, opposition to the Green Pass by CGIL was merely verbal. As to grassroots unions, their mobilization remained distinct from that of anti-pass demonstrators. However, their statements had an important role in proving that criticizing the pass wasn't "a fascist thing."
- 11 Negri's article was published on the Italian magazine *Metropoli*, Vol. 3, No. 5, Rome, June 1981, 50-53. It was later included in his's book *Fabbriche del soggetto*, XXI Secolo, 1987, new edition by Ombre Corte, Verona 2013.
- 12 Lakoff, who, unlike us, is a liberal, uses the term biconceptual to refer to "someone who is conservative on some issues and progressive on others, in many, many possible combinations." We're ill at ease with those political categories—especially "progressive"—and prefer to connote biconceptualism starting from class, status, and material conditions. Anyway, any reflection on biconceptualism in the new impure mobilizations should start from the 4th "point for future struggles" which Paul Torino and Adrian Wohlleben attached to their 2019 analysis *Memes With Force: Lessons from the Yellow Vests*: "Do not exclude 'conservatives' from the movement ideologically; rather, popularize gestures that their ideology cannot endorse..."
- 13 An account of the first year of governmental pandemic management in Italy can be read in the four chapters of *La Q di Qomplotto* collectively titled "In Viro Veritas."
- 14 We use the term "scientism" to refer, first of all, the attitude of those who appeal to the authority of science as an *ipse dixit*, repeating that "Science says" a certain thing they're defending, while having not even the slightest idea of how science, research, or internal debate

within the community of scientists works. For these people, “Science” is an empty word, and one of those pseudo-ideas that mythologist Furio Jesi calls “ideas without words,” i.e. impossible to explain, like those typical of right-wing culture (Nation, Spirit, Nature, etc.). It goes without saying that this way of using the term “Science” is the least scientific one can imagine, since it’s based on a more or less disguised act of faith. Believers in “scientism” typically confuse the provisional results of scientific research with the more established truths of science, and attribute to both the same unquestionable authority. In fact, an article on the contagiousness of asymptomatic positives to Sars-Cov-2 is one thing, while the laws of thermodynamics are quite another. A believer in “scientism” also believes that there are no limits to the extension of scientific knowledge, that everything must be explained and investigated with the scientific method, and that in this respect science—always in the singular—is superior to all other human activities that strive to understand the world. Therefore, all of these other activities must conform, or be reduced, to science. In this last connotation Henri Bergson also used the term “*scientisme*,” insisting that science should remain “scientific” and not “scientistic,” i.e., “shrouded in a metaphysics that presents itself to the ignorant, or the half-educated, under the mask of science.”

- 15 SPK: Socialist Patients Collective. This group was founded in Heidelberg in 1968 and disbanded in 1971. A collective going by the same name was founded in 1973 and has existed until today. The original SPK’s most famous text is the pamphlet *Aus der Krankheit eine Waffe machen* [*Turn Illness Into a Weapon*], originally published in 1971 with a preface by Jean-Paul Sartre.
- 16 Cf. Furio Jesi, “A Reading of Rimbaud’s ‘Drunken Boat,’” Trans. Cristina Viti, *Theory & Event*, Vol. 22, No. 4, 1004: “It is not true that the artist has taken possession of the common places and made use of them. Rather, he has opened himself to them, put herself at their disposal: they have come, they have taken possession of the creative experience and made use of it, so that at the moment of its actualization it would also become, in its totality, a common place. Bad money drives out good.” – *Ill Will*
- 17 “*Diversiory narrative*”: a representation of a political situation or social problem which, by focusing on fictitious causes and responsibilities or causes of little relevance, diverts criticism from the real workings and contradictions of capitalism, proposing false solutions often centered on scapegoats. A diversiory narrative delays real solutions, dissipates energies and blurs the picture, retroactively making the initial situation worse. Among the diversiory narratives that perform these functions, conspiracy fantasies are the most frequent and effective.» (Wu Ming 1, *La Q di Qomplotto*, 62-163).

Struggles will be impure because the subjects who will start them lack the background we're at ease with: memory of the workers' struggles and social movements, class consciousness, a tradition of social conflict in the family, etc. Paradoxically, however, lack of memory will also exempt those struggles from following pre-established patterns.

