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Violence, Repetition and Utopia in Balestrini's *Vogliamo tutto*

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In his novel *Vogliamo tutto* (1971) Nanni Balestrini utilizes both literary and psychological forms of repetition to oscillate between two seemingly opposed solutions for political crisis. Violence in the novel thrusts civilization toward the attainment of either a Utopia (underscored by the perennial repetition of the title slogan *Vogliamo tutto*) or a return to the Nothing (expressed in the antithetical slogan of *Bruciamo tutto*).

These conflicting ideas of social-political outcomes are reflected within the very psyche of the novel's protagonist, in which the struggle to build a utopian society follows the logic of what Freud refers to as the "Life Instinct:" the tendency to create and maintain ever greater unity and embrace self-preservation. The inclination to raze society, on the other hand, is prompted by the "Death Drive," a tendency towards the reduction of tensions to a zero-point where the goal is to bring the living being back to the inorganic state.¹

These two psychological tendencies correspond to different political ideologies: communism is paired to the life instinct; capitalism to the death drive. As a reader of Herbert Marcuse, Balestrini configures a uniquely powerful narrative in which he attempts to fuse Marx with Freud. According to Marcuse, capitalism tends to impede leisure and repose via labor, diminishing the will to live, heightening tensions and, consequently, the desire for complete and total repose, i.e. death. Inversely, communism ultimately seeks to end labor itself and to find a certain symbiosis between work and leisure in which neither dominates the other and where harmony and self-preservation are maintained.²

The repetition of violent acts committed by the protagonist throughout the novel shifts between to these two opposing instincts. At times the intolerable suffocation of labor fuels a violent yearning for the return to an inorganic state for both himself and civilization, while at other moments the use of brute force is justified in order to

catalyze the creation of a better society. One can only speculate toward which of these two ends society will gravitate according to Balestrini. Nevertheless, we can begin to answer the question by studying how Balestrini deploys repetition in an attempt to heal the ills of the protagonist and the societal conflicts which he embodies. Balestrini seems to model the actions of his protagonist on another Freudian theory, that of "Remembering, Repeating and Working Through." The novel's protagonist, who remains nameless throughout the novel, deliberately places himself in distressing situations in order to break from the cyclical form that his life has taken. In other words, both the repetition of the protagonist's actions and the aesthetic form of the novel ultimately serve as a means for eliminating repetition itself, striving for the realization of a more evolved society and a more complex literary mode.

This article will explore how violence in *Vogliamo tutto*, serves either as a drive towards death or a will to live, propelling existence, or perhaps the civilization that defines existence, into a state of precariousness. In Balestrini's narrative, violence is a vehicle to create a better society, but also dangerously carries the possibility of overstepping its intended goal. In betraying its role as would be healer of society's ills, violence threatens to destroy society altogether, ironically achieving a utopia in the Pascalian sense: a non-place, a Nothing, an inorganic state in which civilization also ceases to exist, in turn posing the question of whether or not the utopian perfection may be only realized in death.

PSYCHOLOGICAL REPETITION

According to Laplanche, the compulsion to repeat "is an ungovernable process originating in the unconscious. As a result of its action, the subject deliberately places himself in distressing situations, thereby repeating an old experience, but he does not recall this prototype; on the contrary, he has the strong impression that the situation is fully determined by the circumstances of the moment."³ Balestrini's protagonist is deliberately repeating violent experiences but, rather than being unconscious of the reasons that compel him to act, he is fully aware of the origin from which his behavior derives. In fact, it is possible to divide Balestrini's novel temporally into three distinct psychological stages similar to what Freud called *Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through*. It is the first stage of this psychological healing process⁴ which defines the protagonist at the outset of Balestrini's novel. The initial chapters serve as a retrospective account of the protagonist's life in which the traumatic

experience from his past (the coercion to work) responsible for his repetitive compulsion in the present, is, as we shall see, unveiled to the reader. The trauma of his invitation into labor is an experience that he implicitly hopes to work through, but, in the end, such a resolution will remain elusive. Only retrospectively will the protagonist grasp this: "Io queste cose qua che erano successe non le sapevo ancora allora. Me le sono imparate poi nelle discussioni coi compagni. Dopo che l'avevo piantata lì per sempre col lavoro. Dopo il casino che avevo quel giorno lì a Mirafiori."⁵ These lines function as an anaphora, pointing to a second stage in the text in which Balestrini's character becomes conscious of what stands between him and liberty in the present:

E sono uscito fuori. Sono uscito fuori e c'erano lì tanti operai e studenti davanti. C'erano davanti al cancello tutti i compagni che parlavano della lotta. C'erano lì i compagni che dicevano che avevo fatto bene a menare i guardioni. Che quel giorno era stata una grossa lotta una grossa soddisfazione.⁶

This second phase of narration is characterized by the worker's attempt to break the repetitions of the past. It is within this second stage of the narrative that the protagonist in his own way begins to question, via memory, at what point the initial traumatic experience may have taken place, how long this particular incident has been contributing to his unconscious compulsion to repeat, and whether it can offer instruction on how to "work through it" in order to achieve the outcome he desires. The narration significantly lacks the third stage of the healing process; the novel concludes ambiguously and the protagonist never reaches any sort of resolution. In fact he remains trapped in the second process of repetition without having "worked through" anything. Consequently, such an ending leaves the reader with the unanswered question of whether or not the protagonist will continue to repeat this past experience forever. What is this initial traumatic experience that the protagonist looks to identify in his past with expectations of eliminating in his future?

The answer is none other than work itself. Let us consider the words of Marcuse as to better formulate this hypothesis: "This satisfaction [a certain psychological fulfillment achieved by "working through"] would be *without toil*— that is, without the rule of alienated labor over

the human condition.”⁷ That which stilts the realization of utopia, is the constant imposition of work. Due to the fact that society (or more specifically the capitalist society in which the protagonist of *Vogliamo Tutto* lives) is based on work, civilization must also change the very ethics on which it is founded. In other words, putting an end to work equates to putting an end to capitalism as a whole. Paradoxically, in order to satisfy the desire for complete liberty, and ultimately happiness, the protagonist of Balestrini’s text must completely eradicate labor as that which places him in perennial violent conflict with his surroundings. Until this traumatic experience of work ceases to dominate his existence, the repetition of violence as a means of healing this sickness will continue, a condition implied by the line “Fino a quando non otterremo tutto quanto abbiamo chiesto la lotta continua.”⁸ It is no coincidence that this statement voiced by the protagonist is not only a well-known slogan adopted by the left at the time, but also mirrors a similar one made by Freud: “The repressed instinct never ceases to strive for complete satisfaction, which would consist in the repetition of primary experience of satisfaction.”⁹ If we insert labor (as the repressor of the instinct to be free) and the repetition of violence (as a necessary vehicle to attain complete satisfaction) into this phrase, it seems without doubt that Marx, Freud and Marcuse all had a considerable influence on Balestrini.

In the mind of the protagonist work functions as a symptom based on “the very fact that it reproduces, in a more or less disguised way, certain elements of a past conflict ... [in other words] a thing which has not been understood inevitably reappears; like an unlaidd ghost, it cannot rest until the mystery has been solved and the spell broken.” In the first, retrospective phase of his novel, Balestrini provides the reader with a plethora of examples serving as what I believe to be the “unlaidd ghosts of past conflicts,” from which violence as a form of protection against the threat of work stems. For our purpose, two episodes in particular will suffice to demonstrate how labor has painfully defined the life of the *operaio*: his entry into adulthood and his attendance of trade school.

“Però vostro figlio può andare alle scuole professionali così poi potrà avere un posto in fabbrica.”¹⁰ The decision to attend trade school was not a choice made by the protagonist out of his free will rather, it was forced upon him; more so by the society in which he lived, than by his misled parents who were also compelled to send their son to such a school because they financially and culturally lacked the means to choose otherwise. It is during his attendance of trade school (an

institution whose only real effect is to discipline and punish, while providing no real skill) that the worker begins to develop his view of labor as an obstacle between himself and happiness, as something that has been oppressively imposed upon his identity and from which he strives to break free. Consequently, he unconsciously attempts to resolve this conflict by committing acts of violence: "Io e un mio amico di Pontecagnano preferimmo affrontare direttamente questo problema. Facemmo a botte direttamente con quelli di Salerno."¹¹ It can be said that the real problem to confront, the trade school and its suffocating influence on the identity of the young protagonist, has been inadvertently substituted by his classmates. Therefore, violence, performing as a means for the attainment of satisfaction, is projected upon others who, acting as scapegoats in a sort of sacrificial manner, absorb the blows dealt by the protagonist. These childish acts provide him with a temporary sense of relief and a false sense of security in having gained some ground in regards to the true source of his discontent.¹²

Do the violent acts committed by the protagonist in *Vogliamo tutto* reflect an inborn disposition of human beings in general? By examining the continuity of violence throughout the artistic production of Balestrini, one could infer that, in his opinion, as long as labor acts as "a shorter detour on the path towards death" so will violence serve as a testament of humanity's will to live. "La vita operosa di Milano è stata sconvolta ieri pomeriggio da una ventata improvvisa di violenza e di furore senza precedenti anche nelle ore più buie della storia più recente della città."¹³ The exercising of oppression through labor by one strata of society upon another is nothing new or recent; it has stained the history of humanity since the dawn of the industrial age and, similar to the recounting of history itself, it passes from one generation to another. After such a long existence, violence, as oppression's combatant, might have become ingrained in the human psyche as resolution of conflict, making a transition from a survival tool to a survival instinct.¹⁴ Therefore the protagonist not only struggles for himself but, in a certain sense, he continues a struggle intrinsic to history itself. He inherits his aversion to work from his father: "...il lavoro è brutto e pesante. Per questo devi pensarci bene. Io non ti dico vai a scuola o vai a lavorare. Ti dico solo una cosa. Il lavoro è brutto cerca di evitarti il lavoro."¹⁵ I am not hypothesizing that it is the father who plants any seed of violence in the mind of his son. Instead, I believe that it plays a part in his instinctual being because of the simple fact that he is human. Nevertheless, the idea of

work as an affliction is made apparent to him through his father's advice and the revolt against work is what triggers violence in the first place. Here, the youth inherits the pains of his father; he continues to bear the torch of struggle that his father has passed off.

Yet Balestrini's protagonist is not simply someone who instinctively desires not to be exploited by work but he is a young man fighting for his life, ultimately discovering that this fight must be political. To quote Marcuse:

The intellectual refusal may find support in another catalyst, the instinctual refusal among the youth in protest. It is their lives which are at stake, and if not their lives, their mental health and their capacity to function as unmutated humans. Their protest will continue because it is a biological necessity. "By nature," the young are in the forefront of those who live and fight for Eros against Death, and against a civilization which strives to find the "detour to death" while controlling the means for lengthening the detour. But in the administered society, the biological necessity does not immediately issue action; organization demands counter-organization. Today the fight for life, the fight for Eros, is the *political* fight.¹⁶

Balestrini's protagonist personifies this theory proposed by Marcuse; a youth in which the instinctual fight of Eros as biological necessity (i.e. the will to live) is inextricably intertwined with political struggle. His problem is not a mental one, to be cured personally, rather it requires treatment on the level of society as a whole.

If the protagonist has discovered the source of his anguish, if work has been pinpointed as the sickness from which both body and mind need rid themselves, then why does he continue to work, repeatedly placing himself in the distressing environment of the factory? Could he simply walk away from labor altogether? According to Freud the answer may lie within the psychological framework of the individual:

The fact is that when what are clearly unpleasant experiences are repeated, it is hard to see at a first glance just what agency of the mind could attain satisfaction by this means as the fulfillment of a repressed wish [...] What is unpleasure

for one agency of the psychical apparatus is pleasure for another one. As a result, one must postulate the existence of such a compulsion as being divided between the repetition of needs and the need for repetition.¹⁷

Recurrence is a double-edged sword: one must repeat a horrible experience pending the complete resolution of that which ails him. Such is the case with work for our protagonist. His repressed wish for liberty drives him to replicate the unpleasant experience of work until its role as subjugator, over both mind and body, has been eradicated. The *operaio* travels to Brescia, Torino, Milano, and finally back to Torino, holding a number of jobs but is unable to find a suitable compromise between his desire for free time and whatever position he temporarily holds. A capitalist society based on alienating and repetitive work never permits the full attainment of liberty for an individual; one must work to survive and consequently survival equates to dedicating the majority of one's life to labor. If the protagonist continually exposes himself to the disease of work, it is to find its cure. It becomes evident in the novel that for Balestrini this cure will remain out of reach until civilization has restructured its capitalistic foundations. The protagonist's actions hold a dualistic function: his need to repeat also entails the repeated expression of his needs. Balestrini develops a rhythm of repetition in his novel to show the absurdities of repetition itself. In other words, he uses repetition as a means for ending repetition.

LITERARY REPETITION

According to J. Hillis Miller a "long work like a novel is interpreted, by whatever sort of reader, in part through the identification of recurrences and of meanings generated through recurrences."¹⁸ Having already explored some of the repetitive modes that are contextually apparent in *Vogliamo tutto*, it is helpful to examine how the very form of this novel visually and narratologically underscores the psychological and the social recurrences that the protagonist endures. By simply flipping through the pages of the text itself, without even reading a page, the aesthetic composition of this work immediately transmits a sensation of repetition. Each paragraph is roughly the same length, every sentence ends with the same punctuation (either a period or an question mark, not one exclamation point to be found), and within these sentences, the syntax is devoid of commas. It is as if the text mimics the rhythm and sequence

of the factory line. Each paragraph is uniformly “boxed” similar to any product which is mass produced: identical to the one that came before and after it, devoid of identification and individuality.

This aesthetic choice seems atypical of an author who participated in *Gruppo 63*. The avant-garde found in Sanguineti or in a Futurist text is replaced by a much more subtle rhetorical operation.¹⁹ If Marinetti provoked the sensation of war by formulating the shape of the text itself in the form of a bomb and Sanguineti tears his lines to shreds, Balestrini evokes a sense of repetition through visual banality and comma-less phrases that give the reader little time to pause and breathe. Balestrini “gives the reader the information necessary not only to understand the way the characters dwell in illusions, but also to know why his reading of the story he tells has taken the form it has taken.”²⁰ Throughout the second stage of this novel, the protagonist dwells in one illusion in particular. Despite the constant flux between labor and free time, he still believes that work will provide some sort of financial gain, in turn freeing his identity from the disagreeable label of “*operaio*” (a promised made by *il mito della Fiat*). The endured repetition of factory work leads only to further repetition and, consequently, the entrapment of identity there within. Similar to a needle that skips on a record, rather than moving forward, the worker is continually locked in a groove. Balestrini’s text mirrors the struggle of the worker to break the repetitive rhythm of labor itself: “È la lotta contro i ritmi di lavoro che gli operai vogliono.”²¹

Veloce trrrr trrrr due bulloni e tutto andava via mentre un altro motore arrivava. Venti secondi ci dovevo mettere. Dovevo fare il ritmo. I primi giorni non riuscivo e mi aiutava il fuorilinea. Per tre giorni mi aiutò... Alla linea Fiat non è una questione di imparare ma di abituarti la muscolatura. Di abituarla allo sforzo con quei movimenti con quel ritmo. Dovere mettere un coso di quelli ogni venti secondi che dovevi avere movimenti più veloci del battito del cuore.²²

As the protagonist justly complains, labor is not only repressive of the liberty of man, it is in complete opposition to the physiological nature of his body; the rhythm of the factory exceeds the natural bodily rhythm of man, inducing the worker into a state of frenzy (which is highlighted

by the repetition of the verb *dovere* in this passage). Balestrini portrays work as if it were a drug, ever-increasing the tempo of the worker's heart rate and pushing it to the point of arrest. The onomatopoeic use of *trrr* dually functions as the explosive burst of the air gun that fires *bulloni* and the *battito* of the heart. The constant elevation in velocity of the factory line, as to mount production, is inversely equated with the natural pace of the protagonist as being quickly lead towards death; one moves forward at the cost of the other's regression. Through repetition, the very same frantic pace experienced by the protagonist contaminates the mind of the reader.

Miller places a special emphasis on the use of commas by an author as a means of drawing the reader's attention towards repetition and the possible significance inherent therein.²³ Ingeniously, Balestrini achieves the same outcome by eliminating the use of commas. A sentence without commas conveys a sense of urgency or forward propulsion in which the recurrence of statements creates an effect of dissimilar objects running together. Therefore, the differences between these objects are lost within the escalation of repetition; they become the same, imprisoning both the protagonist and the reader in a cycle: the protagonist desires to break free from his repetitive labor anxiety and, similarly, the reader desires a change in the repetition of the literary modes.

Cos'è la nevrosi. Ogni operaio Fiat ha un numero di cancello un numero di corridoio un numero di spogliatoio un numero di armadietto un numero di officina un numero di linea un numero di operazioni un numero di pezzi di macchina da fare.²⁴

Generally, commas function as a pause in which the readers can catch their breath, but the reading of this phrase evokes or repeats sentiments equal to those that the protagonist repeatedly experiences in the factory. The *nevrosi* of the worker becomes that of the reader and, through a process of emulation, the reader desires a free moment to stop and contemplate the intricacies of the phrase but is inhibited to do so by its rapid pace. Similarly, the protagonist is prohibited from freely inserting "commas" in the pace of his life because the rhythm of the factory incessantly dominates his being, even in his experience away from the production line itself.

In fact the entire chapter of *L'autonomia* is about a perennial action of striking by Fiat workers, almost prompting the reader to skip the

chapter as a whole to find relief from the pains of a cumbersome and somewhat encyclopedically written episode. But this very feeling of being burdened to the point of annoyance is what Balestrini wants to evoke, coaxing his readers to empathize with his protagonist. I believe that this entire episode can be interpreted as the need to find an alternative to the repetition of striking: a useless endeavor that succeeds in achieving only tenuous compromises rather than the full attainment of the worker's desired goals. Once again, we must return to the question of how this goal of rupturing repetition will ultimately be realized. Will repetition push the protagonist towards utopian liberty, or the destruction of civilization and himself? Or does Balestrini feel that the two are one and the same?

LIFE INSTINCT

"The tendency of the life instincts is to create and maintain ever greater unities and embrace the instincts of self-preservation."²⁵ Strangely enough, the life instinct, according to Freud, strives towards the same outcome as its antithesis, the death instinct; the two being separated only by the fact that the former, obviously, keeps us alive. How is this daunting similarity possible? It has do with energy or, rather, an overabundance of energy that binds human beings to a state of excitation and thereby interrupts a state of repose. Whereas the death instinct seeks to completely eradicate any possibility of excitation by returning to a state of complete and total repose, the life instinct aims to maintain a balance in energy suited to an existence of repose. In other words, the life instinct undergoes a sort of adjustment process of life itself until it arrives at an ideal energy level, in which excitement ceases to threaten life as that which pulls the human being away from repose. This process is equivalent to the process of labor: in the novel, labor disturbs the worker's natural tendency towards more repose and less excitement (as we have previously seen in his constant oscillation between work and free time), thus it must be removed as an obstacle on the road to the life instinct's destination.

According to Freud, the life instinct "also seeks the establishment and the maintenance of more differentiated, more organized forms, constancy of the energy level and even widening of differences in it as between the organism and its surroundings."²⁶ How is it possible to widen these differences without an organism, in this case man, coming into conflict with his surroundings? The form at which this quote hints would have to be highly organized. It must be a mechanism so finely

tuned and balanced as to not seem mechanical at all. For Balestrini, a state in which an individual is differentiated from his or her surroundings while at the same time being in complete harmony with it, can be none other than a Marxist utopia. The worker defines both his desire for this ideal and its realization as such:

Vogliamo tutto il potere vogliamo tutta la ricchezza... Ma questa è la lotta che noi dobbiamo adesso cominciare una lotta a fondo dura e violenta. Dobbiamo lottare perché non ci sia più il lavoro. Dobbiamo lottare per la distruzione violenta del capitale. Dobbiamo lottare contro uno Stato fondato sul lavoro. Diciamo sì alla violenza operaia.²⁷

Violence serves the life instinct of the worker to eliminate labor, the entity not only responsible for his excited state but also for limiting his identity to solely that of an *operaio*. He seeks to open up his identity to a more multifaceted, or differentiated, state of being, similar to the one famously described by Marx in which man is no longer exclusively “a hunter, a herdsman, or a critical critic... but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes”²⁸ and, as a result, is able to become everything he desires, unconstrained by a capitalist society in which individuals are typically and exclusively associated with the job they do.

Consequently, the worker's life instinct, in seeking a cure for the sickness of work, becomes a struggle that incorporates that of the whole society and ultimately represents the collective yearning for utopia.²⁹ “In questo sistema dello sfruttamento continuavano a restare operai anche fuori. A vivere da operai anche fuori a essere sfruttati come operai anche fuori.”³⁰ The striving for complete satisfaction of the life instinct, through attainment of the Marxist utopia, is equated with the end of a society based on capitalism. Therefore the construction of a civilization based on liberty, repose and liberated labor must begin after the complete destruction of that which stands in the way of its realization:

Eppure avevo sta voglia di vivere di fare qualcosa...Prima volevo inserirmi poi avevo scoperto che anche inserendomi nel sistema avrei pagato un prezzo...Per cui l'unica cosa per ottenere tutto per soddisfare i bisogni e i desideri senza distruggerti era distruggere questo sistema del lavoro dei padroni.³¹

Whereas capitalism tends to impede repose via work, communism aims to create a utopian society that is wholly based on leisure and repose itself; therefore communism is in complete accordance with the instinct for life and capitalism corresponds to its antithesis, the instinct towards death.

DEATH INSTINCT

Marcuse, in his attempt to join Freudian and Marxist theories, openly admits that the title of his book expressed an

optimistic, euphemistic, even positive thought, namely, that the achievements of advanced industrial society would enable man to reverse the direction of progress, to break the fatal union of productivity and destruction, liberty and repression- in other words, to learn the gay science (*gayá sciencia*) of how to use the social wealth for shaping man's world in accordance with the Life instincts, in the concentrated struggle against the purveyors of Death.³²

Marcuse views capitalism and the progress it supposedly brings about in civilization as the very things that quicken the pace of life towards death. If we apply his logic to the pages of Balestrini's book, the two seem to share exactly the same beliefs and, furthermore, I would even go as far as to argue that Balestrini shares the same nostalgia of communist optimism expressed by Marcuse above; i.e. the idea that utopia is nothing more than a distant dream spawned from the clutches of a harsh reality.

Marcuse, Freud, and Balestrini are all in agreement that any state of repose, either Marxist utopia or death, must be achieved through a process of regression rather than progression.³³ Unchecked progress, a continual push forward, leads only to a further heightening of man's excited state, similar to that described by Balestrini via the workers heart-rate being continually increased as production rises on the factory line. This acceleration of progress disrupts the balance of energy, thrusting it towards an extreme from which the only apparent outlet is death. Rather than a gradual decrease in energy, which seems impossible in a capitalistic society, the worker seeks to expend all of it at once, as if the solution to one extreme were another. Throughout the repetitive process of work, almost every moment, in which labor in the novel pushes the *operaio* towards the zenith of excitation, is countered by an

overwhelming desire to go swimming: “Io ero rimasto sconvolto da sta pianura da sto lavoro da sta mentalità. E me ne tornai precipitosamente indietro per starmene al mare...”³⁴ Based solely on the fact that the worker wants to take a swim, the argument would seem a little tenuous, but it is the turning backwards that renders this quote altogether too Freudian. The worker desires a return to the south from Torino, which implies not only a directional regression of descent but also a backward movement towards an adolescence pre-existent to work itself. In Freud’s words,

It would be in contradiction to the conservative nature of the instincts if the goal of life were a state of things which had never yet been attained. On the contrary, it must be an old state of things, an initial state from which the living entity has at one time or other departed and to which it is striving to return by the circuitous paths along which its development leads.³⁵

This initial state is death or the Nothing. Freud, perhaps taking his inspiration from Pascal, theorizes that life born from the Nothing seeks to return therein. Rather than speaking in more philosophical terms, Freud preferred to associate this initial state with that of the amniotic fluid of the mother’s womb in which the child “swims.” Through the act of swimming, the worker gives in to the death instinct’s search for complete and total repose, desiring to return life to the initial state from which it came.

In conclusion we must ask ourselves a pivotal question: Is this the only release from the repetition of violence? Freud seemed to think so. As long as man exists, Freud felt that he would always be discontent with civilization. The problem that both Marcuse and Balestrini investigate in their respective works is one that goes beyond the question of labor and earthly utopia. The very idea of civilization or culture will always and forever be in opposition to man and his instincts. As long as the laws of society exist, there will be someone to violently implement them and someone to violently oppose them. As Marcuse states such would be the case even in a utopia:

Left free to pursue their natural objectives, the basic instincts of man would be incompatible with all lasting associations

and preservations: they would destroy even where they unite. The uncontrolled Eros is just as fatal as his counterpart, the death instinct. Their destructive force derives from the fact that they strive for complete gratification which culture cannot grant: gratification as such and as an end itself, at any moment.³⁶

It seems that mankind is doomed to an eternal return as long as society exists. "Allora si comincia a capire che l'unica cosa è bruciare tutto,"³⁷ but who is to say that, after the demolition of an old civilization, a new one would not inevitably repeat the mistakes of the former? Is humanity so bold as to test this hypothesis? Unfortunately, it seems that death is the only perfect solution to an imperfect existence and that the utopia will always remain that non-place. Although the ending of *Vogliamo tutto* leaves the reader with the feeling that the protagonist will go on to fight another day ("Per questa volta bastava"), we must look to *La violenza illustrata* (1976) as proof that, despite the fact that human beings will incessantly strive for a better life, Balestrini may feel that utopia is inexistence.

Un gradevole aumento di tensione fisica tutto il mio corpo vibra io sono molto eccitata le sensazioni sono tutte concentrate in un unico punto è una sensazione di leggerezza una scintilla quasi fremente sento una specie di elettricità. Poi gli operai dell'Aem la Autelco la Fragas e di tantissime altre fabbriche sempre più numerosi continuano a affluire gli studenti la polizia è completamente assente da tutta la zona il centro della città è completamente in mano agli operai in un'atmosfera entusiasmante. Una sensazione di vertigine di perdere me stessa come se non esistessi come corpo ma solo come sensazione come se ogni nervo del mio corpo diventasse vivo e cominciasse a pensare la sensazione di un nodo rigido che scoppia e fluttua improvvisamente e io apprezzo molto questa sensazione e sono pieno d'amore.³⁸

Here all our points seem to coalesce: the workers obtain power, violent conflict with the police has ended, and the observer is filled with an overwhelming sensation of *Eros*, but, coincidentally, these achievements are strangely combined with the feeling that he or she no longer exists.

Notes

1. For a concise summary of these Freudian terms see J. Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*. New York: N.W. Norton, 1973.

2. Marcuse's philosophy on this questions can be found in Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969.

3. Laplanche and Pontalis.

4. The scope of the three stage process of *Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through* is that of healing the traumatic wounds inflicted upon the psyche.

5. Balestrini, Nanni. *Vogliamo tutto*. Roma: DeriveApprodi, 2004. 14.

6. Ibid 65.

7. Marcuse 152.

8. Balestrini 114.

9. Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. New York: N.W. Norton, 1989. 50. This "primary experience of satisfaction" will be further explored below, in regards to violent acts committed as only offering temporary, rather than complete, satisfaction and are, therefore, incessantly repeated.

10. Balestrini 27.

11. Ibid 28.

12. Due to one's inability to correctly identify, in the mind, that with which he or she is in conflict, the death drive is initiated; thus beginning, according to Freud, a process of self-destruction that "subsequently turns (also) towards the outside world in the form of aggressive and destructive instincts" as to find temporary relief while it waits to discover the true causes of its discontent towards which it could direct its wrath.

13. Balestrini, Nanni. *La violenza illustrata*. Torino: Einaudi, 1976. From: *Deportazione*. In this somewhat confusing passage, Balestrini satirizes the media in their portrayal of violence "without precedence in history" and/or without precedence in the present. This depiction is typical of the media that tends to gloss over certain issues and becoming evermore a tantalizer than a presenter of news. In Balestrini's story the cause of violence is absent, only the spectacular remains.

14. There are of course other theories of violence which do not focus on labor itself. One of the most well-known is Rene Girard's *Violence and the sacred*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977.

15. Balestrini 31.

16. Marcuse xxv.

17. Laplanche and Pontalis 79.

18. Miller, J. Hillis. *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982. 1.

19. Ibid 15. "This form of personification, repetition, concretely presented in the lives and minds of the characters, of the basic metaphysical beliefs which have been instinctive to mankind for millennia: belief in origin, end, and underlying ground making similarities identities, belief in the literal truth of the trope of personification or prosopopeia. The latter of projects character and makes it seem real, as the ancient Greeks saw persons in every tree, river, or spring. The novel as a genre might in fact be defined as the preservation, in a skeptical age, of these primitive beliefs." *Vogliamo tutto* is an examination not only of the repetitive forms of a civilization based on work, but also a questioning of the literary forms that seem to support the very same continuum of stilted beliefs within civilization.

20. Ibid 14.

21. Balestrini 95.

22. Ibid 65.

23. Miller 1.

24. Balestrini 77.

25. Laplanche and Pontalis 241.

26. Ibid.

27. Balestrini 143.

28. Marx, Karl. *Private Property and Communism in The German Ideology*, 1845.

29. Marcuse xvii. "The revolt at home against home seems largely impulsive, its targets hard to define: nausea caused by "the way of life," revolt as a matter of physical and mental hygiene. The body against "the machine"- not against the mechanism constructed to make life safer and milder, to attenuate the cruelty of nature, but against the machine which has taken over the mechanism: the political machine..." This connection is also written into *Vogliamo tutto* by Balestrini, where the struggle of the protagonist is both literally and symbolically a plight against the machine.

30. Balestrini 111.

31. Ibid 100-101.

32. Marcuse xi. Translated into Italian circa 1951. Balestrini has confirmed that this text was influential in writing *Vogliamo tutto*.

33. Ibid xviii. "Backward peoples by their poverty and weakness may be forced to forego the aggressive and wasteful use of science and technology, to keep the productive apparatus *à la mesure de l'homme*, under his control, for the

satisfaction and development of vital individual and collective needs..."These backward peoples also play a fundamental role in *Vogliamo tutto*: "Questi qua prima non erano dei proletari come quelli in città cioè gente che non teneva un cazzo. A modo loro erano anche dei proprietari avevano la casa il porco le galline la vigna le ulive l'olio" (16).

34. Balestrini 35.

35. Ibid.

36. Freud 45.

37. Marcuse 11.

38. Balestrini 15.

39. Balestrini. *La violenza illustrata... (Dimostrazione)*.