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**Masturbation\* or Practical Consciousness–Raising?**  
**Rudi Dutschke's Way to Democracy**

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*“We can change. We are not desperate idiots of history, unable to take their destiny in their own hands. It has been told us for centuries. Many historical signs indicate that history is not an eternal circle where only the negative must triumph. Why should we renounce to this historical possibility and say: we give up, we cannot make it, sometime this world will come to an end.*

*Exactly the opposite. We can construct a world as humanity has never seen before; a world that will distinguish itself for the absence of war and hunger. And this on the whole globe. This is our historical possibility, and we should let it go? I'm not a professional politician, but we are men who do not want the world to follow this way, and for this reason we will fight, we already started to fight...”*

Rudi Dutschke (1967a)

## Contents

Introduction .....	4
1. Different paths of revolutionary practice .....	7
2. The Marcusian influence .....	12
3. Rudi Dutschke's way to democracy .....	21
Conclusion .....	25
Bibliography .....	28

## Introduction

“*S’il y avait un peuple de Dieux, il se gouvernerait démocratiquement. Un gouvernement si parfait ne convient pas à des hommes*”<sup>1</sup> affirms Rousseau (1762a: 107) in *The Social Contract* in order to clarify once for all how a perfect democratic state is not only unachievable, but also in plain contradiction with the human nature<sup>2</sup>. His conception of democracy, by comparison with Lock's one, refuses the liberal ideal based on the affirmation of individual freedom and founds itself on the natural derived principle of popular sovereignty. According to Rousseau, the people in the state of nature, in order to become part of a society, renounce to their original rights<sup>3</sup>. Thus, it is only through equality that we can establish freedom. From the first lines of the Social Contract it becomes evident that what persuaded Rousseau to undertake its writing is the feeling of a profound contradiction embedded in the human society: “*Comment ce changement s'est il fait?*” asks Rousseau at the beginning of his magnum opus after having ascertained that man is born free but is everywhere in chains; and his answer sounds more enigmatic than ever: “*Je l'ignore*”<sup>4</sup> (Rousseau 1762a: 46).

How to resolve this contradiction? Can inequalities inherent in the society be overcome through the creation of a just and even social order? Who should bring about this change? These questions have been approached by innumerable scholars of different disciplines throughout time. If, for Rousseau, it is the historical division of labor that represents the main source of inequality (Rousseau 1969: 106), for Karl Marx it is the capitalistic system which, by strengthening the antagonism between oppressing and oppressed classes, evolves in a social relation of constant pauperism where the condition of the latter “*sinks deeper and deeper below the conditions of existence of his*

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1 \* [from the title page] Dutschke uses the concept to refer to how capitalistic system reproduces itself through *maneuvers* (that involves all “domains of the social life”, starting from production to consumption), which are aimed at preventing the rise of consciousness (and thus civil/political participation in society) of human beings. (Dutschke, Rudi (1968d): *Masturbation ou prise de conscience pratique*, In: Dutschke, Rudi (1968): *Ecrits Politiques*. Evreux (Eure): Christian Bourgois éditeur).

□ “Were there a people of gods, their government would be democratic. So perfect a government is not for men.” (Rousseau 1762b: Book III, 4)

2 According to Rousseau, the people will never be able to rule themselves. Indeed, even if the *Volonté Generale* (the general will) is clearly embodied in the laws that are expression of the popular sovereignty and that are promulgated by the whole assembled population, the latter will never be able to exert the executive power. In a similar situation, in fact, the *Volonté particulière* (the particular will) would overcome the *Volonté Générale* and the situation would quickly degenerate (Rousseau 2001: 101).

3 This renunciation, anyway, does not involve a third party (as for Hobbes) but it is directed to the collectivity itself: everyone cedes its own rights in order to get them back as part of a plurality. (<http://cronologia.leonardo.it/mondo40u.htm>)

4 “How did this change come about? I do not know.” (Rousseau 1762b: Book I, 1)

*own class*”, creating thereby the premises for its inevitable self destruction and the foundation of an egalitarian democratic society (Marx 1848: 12).

The concept of “inevitability” and “historical determinism” and the political methods that should bring about such a social change have been questioned by several Marxist thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. If Lenin, on one hand, saw in the unquestionable guidance of an *eclairée* (enlightened) vanguard and in the establishment of a centralized repressive regime the only possible way to reach socialism, Rosa Luxemburg, on the other hand, believed that socialism could be successfully brought about only through democracy and freedom. Therefore, she strongly rejected the idea of communism introduced by “ukaz”, that is through the rule of a single party detaining the monopoly of wisdom (Wolfe 1961: 23).

With the consequences of the big depression it became clear to everyone that capitalism was undergoing a profound transformation. Not only the conception of the socialist revolution lost its role of immanency, but the Marxist basic assumption that sees in the private appropriation of the means of production the main contradictory aspect of capitalistic society was finally jeopardized by what Pollock called a “*capitalist planned economy*”, in which the forces of production and distribution becomes regulated by the state (Postone 2004: 172). According to Habermas (1988: 480-481), this process has evolved in a reformism whose aim is to achieve a social pacification through the establishment of the welfare state and through the absorption of all classes into the expanding state apparatus. The advanced industrial society has hidden its inner contradiction by incorporating the working class inside of its structure (Giddens 1995: 218 on H. Marcuse). According to Marcuse, however, the injustice did not disappear but became obscured (Honneth 2004: 346). Indeed, the modern society developed a system of “repressive tolerance” that allowed a restricted form of critique but repressed every attempt to a practical social change (Sandoz 1967). The individual in the collectivity loses his freedom and becomes unconsciously enslaved by a technical rationality that inculcates in the unaware subjects a set of common needs that are more a product of the system, or better of the uni-dimensional consciousness that the system established in the individual, than a real expression of human nature<sup>5</sup>.

Moreover, Habermas (1987) affirmed that Marx's theory failed in considering one of the most important aspect that is behind the development of societies: communication. It is in fact through communication, as an expression of the individual form of consciousness, that interaction based on consensual norms can be developed. It

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5 <http://www.nilalienum.it/Sezioni/Bibliografia/Filosofia/MarcuseUomoUnaDimensione.html>

is only through the establishment of a communicative action among individuals and institutions that a certain society can overcome the challenges posed by the emergence of “unresolved system problems” and thereby constitute “*new modes of normative organization*”<sup>6</sup> (Giddens 1995: 252).

It is exactly in this theoretical context that the figure of Rudi Dutschke has to be placed. Deeply influenced by Marxist and post-Marxist thinkers, the leader of the SDS (*Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund*) and his companions decided not to play the game of the “repressive tolerance”, not to lend themselves to the manipulation of a society where “*the man is condemned to live at the mercy of the blind game of history*”, but to take their destiny into their own hands and control it consciously (Dutschke 1967a). Inspired by the theories of Herbert Marcuse, who saw in those who were not absorbed by the establishment the only subjects capable of rejecting the manipulation operated by the modern society (Sandoz 1968: 27), the students of West Berlin organized themselves in a movement whose main aim was not simply a reform of the university (that according to Dutschke lost its critical essence towards society and became a mere instrument of the dominant social interests (Dutschke 1968b: 46 – 47)), but also to induce a deep democratic change of society as a whole. The refusal of the parliamentary system and the political parties as incapable of developing an interaction with the people (Dutschke 1967a); the will to start a critical dialog between the masses through a constant and independent information and the aspiration to unify the various revolutionary movements of the Third World countries in one single global opposition (Dutschke 1968a: 99) were only some of the most peculiar aspects of Dutschke's conception of a real democracy (a “human society” as Marcuse would call it) as opposed to an authoritative state submitted to the perpetuation of the status quo.

How does Dutschke's idea of democracy distinguish itself from the Leninist theory? Dictatorship of a minority or democratic representation of the majority? What role did Herbert Marcuse play in shaping Rudi's revolutionary conception of society? And again, what is the inheritance of Dutschke's thoughts and actions today? This study will try to give at least a partial answer to some of these entangled questions and, at the same time, it will help to shed light on one of the most fascinating character of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, someone who, in the words of Habermas (1980), was able “*to link the force of a visionary with the sense for concreteness.*”

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6 Communicative action assumes for Habermas the meaning of interaction based on binding consensual norms which takes place between at least two subjects. It is opposed to the concept of purposive-rational action, which is referred to instrumental oriented action based on a relation of power among the subjects and not on a real process of interaction (Giddens 1995: 249)

## 1. Different paths of revolutionary practice

In order to better understand dilemmas that had to be faced by those 20th century Marxists, who wanted to bring practical changes in society, Rudi Dutschke being one of the most prominent among them, it is necessary to take a brief look at the discussion between Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin. Both revolutionary Marxists elaborated on different ways how to establish socialism.

Lenin's logic stems from the assumption that working class will never be able to develop the necessary consciousness it needs to fulfill the "historic mission", which was assigned to it by Marx. The spontaneous development of the workers movement (e.g. trade unions) would lead to its further subordination to bourgeois ideology, meaning ideological oppression (Lenin quoted in Wolfe 1961: 12). Since spontaneity will fail, Lenin argues, the only way to raise the class political consciousness is to bring it from outside (Lenin 1902) – someone has to tell the proletariat about their oppression and what to do about it. He proposes to create a revolutionary "vanguard" party, which would consist of a handful of dedicated revolutionary intellectuals (Bronner 1997: 50). The party should guide the proletariat and inject its doctrine into workers (Lenin quoted in Wolfe 1961: 12) and, as the principal instruments, it should use agitation and propaganda (Lenin 1902). This vanguard, since it has rights to speak for the whole working class, could appear in countries, where the proletariat (and hence the class struggle) is underdeveloped (for example, Russia in the very beginning of the 20th century). The party should need a new type of organization, similar to army (characterized by its emphasis on centralism and discipline), which, in addition, would not reject terror as means towards achieving the necessary ends (Lenin 1901). Its main organ, the Central Committee, should have "the right to form branches, dissolve them, purge them, appoint their leaders, eliminate, even exterminate, the unworthy" (Lenin quoted in Wolfe 1961: 14).

In principle, the vision of Lenin, apropos of achieving socialism, was to replace the dictatorship of bourgeoisie with the dictatorship of proletariat. In his view, democratic republic represents only freedom for the rich, so it must be replaced by the democracy for the poor (which can be achieved only through dictatorship of the proletariat). The dictatorship of the proletariat, according to Lenin, "will take *from the capitalists and hand over to the working people the landowners' mansions, the best buildings, printing presses and the stocks of newsprint.*" (Lenin 1918) (emphasis in the original)

Let us start examining views of Rosa Luxemburg from this last point of Lenin. She was aware that democracy could not be completely fulfilled under bourgeois system. Although, similarly to Lenin, Luxemburg holds that it could only be done through the dictatorship of proletariat, she stresses that this kind of dictatorship would “extend *democracy from the political into the socioeconomic realm*”. (Bronner 1997: 57) (emphasis in original) The “extension of democracy” is qualitatively different to the proposition of Lenin. The latter focuses on destruction and redistribution, while the former one stresses the creation of a qualitatively new system. She describes (Bronner 1997: 65) Lenin’s interpretation of the proletarian dictatorship as having the same characteristics of bourgeois dictatorship, which is lead by small number of politicians (due to ultra-centralism of the Party). In Luxemburg’s conception, proletarian dictatorship consists in the manner of applying democracy on the broadest level<sup>7</sup>. It must be the task of the whole working class (Bronner 1997: 65). Thus we come to the central concern of Rosa Luxemburg - her main goal and dream was to achieve the self-administration of the masses, which then would signify the true socialism.

There have to be certain preconditions, which would allow the masses to fully administer themselves. It is important to note that Rosa Luxemburg thought that democracy cannot be separated from socialism. As Bronner (1961: 28) points out “*thus, it was she who took the bourgeois concept of democracy and attempted to extend it beyond formal, political representation into the realm of civil society.*” She believed that the fundamental precondition for the rule of the broad mass of the people is conceivable only if there exist free and unrestricted press and unlimited right of association (Luxemburg 1918: 67). Luxemburg opposed Lenin’s idea that class consciousness can be artificially manufactured and eventually injected into the masses “from outside”. She believed in creative force of masses and stressed the need for people to take action and learn from their own mistakes.<sup>8</sup> One of her most famous quotes (Luxemburg 1904: 108) depicts this point: “*Let us speak plainly. Historically, the errors committed by a truly revolutionary movement are infinitely more fruitful than the infallibility of the cleverest Central Committee.*” It means that, contrary to Lenin’s view, the tactical policy of the party cannot be invented *a priori*, since it is a product of series of great creative acts of usually spontaneous class struggle seeking its way forward (Luxemburg 1904: 92). If bourgeois class rule does not require political training of the masses, then for the

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7 “(..) this dictatorship must be the work of the *class* and not of a little leading minority in the name of the class – that is, it must proceed step by step out of the active participation of the masses; it must be under their direct influence, subjected to the control of complete public activity; it must arise out of the growing political training of the mass of the people.” (Luxemburg 1918: 78)

8 This represents her employment of Marx’s dialectical method.



proletarian dictatorship political training and education is “*the life element, the very air without which it is not able to exist*” (Luxemburg 1918: 68). The task of social democratic party thus is just to provide a political leadership (Luxemburg 1906). This pedagogic role of the party is just to educate the proletariat practically about possibilities to exercise the power so that it can eventually be transferred to the masses.

Because the Social Democratic movement recognizes direct and independent action of masses, Luxemburg insists (Luxemburg 1904: 86) that the party needs entirely different organizing structure when compared to revolutionary movements that adhere to methods of Jacobins or Blanqui<sup>9</sup>. Since the socialist system should be and can only be a historical product (Luxemburg 1918: 70), and since the influence of the party is not constant (it fluctuates with ups and downs through the time, when the organizational capacity is created and grows (Luxemburg 1904: 88)), there can be no ready-made methods for the transformation to socialism and, more importantly, the party cannot have centralized, bureaucratic structure with an omnipotent main organ at its helm, as seconded by Lenin. She refutes Lenin’s centralism by saying (1904: 85) that the “*Central Committee would be the only thinking element in the party. All other groupings would be its executive limbs.*” Lenin, on the other hand, rejects this critique<sup>10</sup> by describing (Lenin 1904: “The New *Iskra*. Opportunism In Questions Of Organisation“) his opponents to be followers of the logic of tail-ism. It denotes such tactics of the party that takes into account the will of masses, thus leaving the party without tight control of events. Lenin claims that the proletariat is not afraid of organization and discipline, which actually is its main weapon and advantage over bourgeoisie. “*The discipline and organisation which come so hard to the bourgeois intellectual are very easily acquired by the proletariat just because of this factory ‘schooling’.*” (Lenin 1904: “The New *Iskra*..”)“ Rosa Luxemburg disagrees (1904: 90) with Lenin on his point that a factory has an educative influence on the working class by saying that one has to distinguish between two interpretations of discipline. On the one hand, the discipline can mean the absence of thought and will, which praises automatic action by its objects. On the other hand, it can be “*spontaneous co-ordination of the conscious, political acts of a body of men*” (Luxemburg 1904: 90). Lenin talks about discipline in the first sense (the same as

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9 French socialist Louis-Auguste Blanqui (1805-1881) worked out a theory, which stated that capitalist regimes should be overthrown by a revolutionary coup d’etat, carried out by an elite of dedicated revolutionaries. After the coup the elite would introduce a regime based on equality (Politicsprofessor.com). Luxemburg held (1904: 87) that Lenin was an adherent to Blanquism.

10 The centralism was already criticized by a group of Russian Social Democratic Labor Party’s members during the Second Congress of the party. During this meeting the party split in Mensheviks (described by Lenin as “opportunists”) and Bolsheviks (Lenin 1904). The latter were lead by Lenin and eventually became the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

in army or centralized bourgeois state), which cannot lead to socialism. The working class should acquire the second, freely assumed self-discipline, which is not a result of “*the discipline imposed on it by the capitalist state, but by extirpating, to the last root, its old habits of obedience and servility.*” (Luxemburg 1904: 90)

It is worth mentioning the differing strategies that Lenin and Luxemburg have, when it comes to treating “elements” outside the proletariat (e.g. petty bourgeoisie, *Lumpenproletariat*<sup>11</sup>, intellectuals, declassed elements etc.). Lenin opts for elimination and terror. For example, intellectuals who are raised within bourgeoisie are individualists who will not obey the absolute authority of the Central Committee (Luxemburg 1904: 96). Rosa Luxemburg tries not to see everything in a binary mode (good-bad), but approaches the question more pragmatically. She argues that in the first place there is a need for politically educated, class-conscious proletarian nucleus that would be able to pull along with them both petty bourgeois and declassed elements. What concerns intellectuals, then they should be given a chance to join the revolution. In short, Social Democracy must assimilate those who are willing to come to it (Luxemburg 1904:105). Another question is apropos of *Lumpenproletariat*. Lenin’s terror will not help to get rid of these elements, because they are inevitably present in every society. Violence would only make the problem worse. The only remedy for these elements of society is the “kindling of revolutionary idealism” (Luxemburg 1918: 74), i.e., persuading them by the example and by spreading information.

When both Marxists are analyzed from today’s perspective, one must admit that most of Luxemburg’s critique over Lenin’s approach has come true. At the same time, we must recognize that Lenin still managed to persuade (or brainwash?) the masses to follow his approach. In short, Rosa Luxemburg wanted the party to be an organization that helps the proletariat raise its consciousness, but it also must be receptive to the opinion of the working class. The direction of the socialist revolution cannot be set *a priori*; it must be the result of public debates (within masses, as well as between masses and the party), democratic decision-making and dialectic movement towards the goal. The main subject of the revolution remains the masses, and the main tactics – taking action and making decisions by themselves and learning from mistakes, which eventually help the movement to adjust and prepare for the next step.

Rudi Dutschke’s views were influenced directly and indirectly from these two authors. The indirect impact comes from those Marxists who continued the debate,

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11 Roughly translatable as *slum proletariat*, which denotes the degenerated and submerged elements of (every industrial) society, for example, beggars, prostitutes, gangsters, criminals, chronic unemployed etc. (Luxemburg 1918: 73)

which was initiated by both Lenin and Luxemburg. Here one should mention the Frankfurt School and Herbert Marcuse as the seminal intellectual influencing Dutschke. Although the context of revolution had altered (class struggle lost its significance, since workers' condition had been relieved), the tactics still remained to be the topic of discussion. The system still had to be changed.

## 2. The Marcusian influence

The comprehension of Dutschke's view vis à vis the development of a free democratic society cannot abstract from the analysis of the philosopher whose theses, quoting Dutschke's words, “*revealed us our malaise with regard to the permanence of a discussion that does not lead to any practical consequence*”<sup>12</sup> (Sandoz 1968: 23-24). Herbert Marcuse, the German-American professor who directly inspired an entire generation through his revolutionary writings, became a real guru among the protest movements of the 60's and the 70's. His book “*The One-Dimensional Man*” was welcome as a Bible by numerous students in the US and, particularly, in Germany, where, in 1967, the philosopher was invited as keynote speaker to the famous “Vietnam-Kongress” co-organized also by Rudi Dutschke (Lanzke 2009). The relation between the two became so strong that, as Habermas writes in 1980, after Bachmann's attempt on Dutschke's life in April 1968, Marcuse, on the bedside of “Rudi the Red”<sup>13</sup>, exhorted him to keep on fighting: “*weitermachen*”. And this is exactly what he did, taking constant inspiration from the German philosopher and sometimes even influencing him through the actions of the SDS<sup>14</sup> and the student movement, to the point that, in an interview for the German magazine “Der Spiegel”, Marcuse openly accepted every practical implication of his theories as a step towards the overcoming of the manipulatory system erected by what he calls a “formal democracy” (Sandoz 1968: 32-33). The next paragraphs will try to shed light on these revolutionary conceptions that aroused such a widespread support.

According to Herbert Marcuse (1972: 42-43), every revolutionary movement, in order to be considered as such, needs the support of a revolutionary consciousness, a

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12 In this sentence Dutschke refers to the Marcusian concept of “repressive tolerance”. In his article “*Repressive Tolerance*” (1965), Marcuse explains how the neo-capitalism, highly technologized, produces a rationality which is common to every domain and cooperates in the process of the individual integration: the technology itself becomes an instrument for the political domination and the social control (Sandoz 1968: 22). In this context, the system manifests some sort of tolerance that allows intellectuals, students and, more generally, critical people to express their skepticism towards the system as long as this notions do not jeopardize the system itself. This tolerance becomes repressive once the stage of the discussion turns to that of the action and the system appeals to its military machine in order to perpetuate itself and repress every opposition (Dutschke 1968h:62-63).

13 “Rudi the Red” was one of the nicknames addressed to Rudi Dutschke, together with “Rudi Mao”, “The man of the permanent revolution”... (Sandoz 1968: 7).

14 The Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund (Socialist German Student Association) was established in 1946 after the foundation of the Freie Universitaet in West Berlin in order to accord to the students a direct representation in the decisional institutions of the university. During the 60's the association, of which Rudi Dutschke became a member of the policy advisory board in 1965, led the protest for the democratization of the academic institutions in the country and organized a strong opposition against the political establishment of the nation (the SDS was expelled from the Social Democratic Party – SPD in 1961 after having accused it of class-collaboration ).

counter-consciousness opposed to the actual consumer society, capable of penetrating it and realize the profoundest intellectual and moral needs of man: “*only a qualitative change is a change, and only a new quality of life can call a halt to the long series of societies based on exploitation*”<sup>15</sup>.

In advanced capitalistic countries individual needs have become strictly anti-revolutionary and anti-socialist. The structural integration of the working class in the capitalistic society, which started in the period between the two world conflicts, deeply enhanced the life conditions of the lowest class, rendering not only unlikely but also unnecessary all resorts to revolution as “tool of change”<sup>16</sup> (Marcuse 1972: 12-14). In other words, the Marxist contradiction typical of liberal capitalism (namely, the separation between labor and property of the production means) has been apparently overcome through the realization of a consumer society, which managed to support the capitalistic relations of production and to guarantee a basis of popular support towards the system. As stressed by Rudi Dutschke (1968f: 77-78), the 1929 crisis broke the unity of the working class by augmenting the human and political distance between employed and unemployed labor forces. This degenerated in a lack of solidarity among “proletarians” and in the consequent acquisition of power operated by fascist groups. This consequence, therefore, can be seen more as a socialist defeat in understanding the ongoing situation than as a real victory of fascist ideals.

The basic condition for the new-established “state-capitalism” has been achieved by integrating the proletarian class into the sphere of consumption. This integration has been extended to every aspect of social life: not only to the working process, where the increase of salaries has enhanced the purchasing power of workers (Marcuse 1972: 17), but also to the leisure time and the cultural sphere, whose direct control by the system became a necessary instrument in order to guarantee its perpetuation (Marcuse 1964: 17) (1972: 22).

The maintenance of the existent establishment rests on the global domination it exerts on people's needs through a well structured political and military apparatus that

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15 Translated by authors.

16 The end of the liberal capitalism has been identified with the 1929 Great Depression. According to another critical theorist, F. Pollock, this data corresponds to the rise of a new stage of capitalism (defined by Marcuse as the late capitalism) based on a central planned economy marked by a private ownership of the means of production. This new form of capitalism distinguish itself from socialism where the latter are subjected to the social ownership. This new form of capitalism, where a state regulation replaced the previous free market economy, is defined by Pollock as state-capitalism. At this stage, the political sphere incorporated the economic one becoming in this way the new determinant of social life (production and distribution are now balanced by the state). In this context, according to Pollock, the introduction of socialism loses its immanency and the system tends to perpetuate itself through mass psychological manipulation and terror (Postone 2004: 171-175).

permits to overcome, or at least to postpone, the inner contradiction typical of a consumer society (Marcuse 1972: 17-18). Indeed, considering that the latter, in order to reproduce itself, has as its first goal the constant generation of new needs in people and their fulfillment through large scale market production, it has primarily to standardize individual needs through a process of consciousness' manipulation. This postulates a control of the system over the consciousness of individuals, which takes place through the internalization of “fake needs” or, in other words, of systemic needs perceived as suitable by the subjects, but that are actually induced by society.

The fake consciousness is, therefore, imposed to the individual (in a process of atomization) who represses his true consciousness: “*Most of the prevailing needs to relax, to have fun, to behave and consume in accordance with the advertisements, to love and hate what others love and hate, belong to this category of false needs*” (Marcuse 1964: 19). According to Dutschke, this systemic manipulation can be seen as the highest expression of a power oriented reason which, through a state subvention system and a public regulation of production, contributes to the substitution of the former class polarization (dangerous for the system itself) into a “*system of concessions of the dominants to the dominates*” (Dutschke 1968f: 83).

In this sense the modern society tends to present itself as a totalitarian regime, whose repression is hidden behind an apparent democratic and libertarian façade (apparent democracy)<sup>17</sup>. In fact, as stressed by Marcuse (1964: 21), it is not the sphere of the available choices that determines the grade of individual freedom, but rather “*what can be chosen and what is chosen by this individual*”. Therefore, even the political organization, that in Germany takes the form of a parliamentary system, becomes a big container of private interests (Dutschke 1968b: 57-58) aimed to the maintenance of the system; a tool for the stabilization of the existing order, incapable or unwilling of constructing a critical dialog with the population (Dutschke 1967a). In this situation, indeed, even the slightest essay of political mobilization would hide the possibility of an individual consciousness-raising dangerous for the system itself (Dutschke 1968: 100f).

There is of course an apparent conjunction between citizens and political

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17 The expression “totalitarian” in this case should not be confused with that of “fascist” as intended by Marcuse. Indeed, the actual situation of the US and the western world is relatively free, in the sense that there is still the possibility of using the media in an anti-systemic sense: underground movements, public campaigns against the government... Only a complete suppression of these liberties by a menaced ruling class would correspond to the installation of a fascist regime, which is, according to Marcuse, a possible occurrence in the actual situation where the presence of a “protofascist syndrome” is growing up among part of the American population (Marcuse 1972: 34-35).

institutions in the actual western democracies. This relation, that in Germany takes the form of free periodical elections, implies however a previously-established consensus towards the existent political parties (Dutschke 1968g: 101). The citizen, in other words, is allowed to exert his choice within pre-established systemic boundaries for the maintenance of the current political apparatus. In this situation, there is no room for any bottom-up changing force and every electoral result represents nothing more than a confirmation of the existing order. The democratic status of a similar nation is therefore only apparent, it hides the expression of a repressive and deeply undemocratic society in which subjects “*play the game*” in a framework of “repressive tolerance” applied by the governments through a democracy that is only formal (Sandoz 1968: 23).

In this context, according to Dutschke (1968g: 101), the term democracy needs to be re-conceptualized as the conscious faculty of individuals living in the society to exert a permanent control on the society itself: “*the essential requirement of democracy is the conscious and creative man, a man with radical new needs and interests, with an anti-authoritarian behavioral structure, with the permanent capacity of considering society as something made by him and dominated by him*”. This view radically excludes any possible cohabitation with capitalism *per definitionem* (Dutschke 1968g: 101). Democracy, thus, can be achieved only as the result of a bottom-up process derived from the autonomy of people, from their conscious ability of controlling and modifying the political institutions at every moment (Dutschke 1968g: 102). It is for this reason that Rudi Dutschke (1967a) declared in several occasions his skepticism towards the German parliamentary system, considered as useless and inadequate for the conduction of that emancipation process necessary to achieve a real democratic order (1968e: 143). Every possibility of a profitable communicative action<sup>18</sup> is, hence, prevented by the actual authoritarian and centralist political structure<sup>19</sup>.

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18 Communicative action is a Habermasian concept that is indirectly adopted by Dutschke (1968a: 95) in his conception of the necessity of a new critical dialog between people and institutions. According to Habermas (Giddens 1995: 249), communicative action reflects an interaction between at least two subjects (implying also institutions) “*governed by binding consensual norms*”, which are the expression of mutual expectations and which are based on the reciprocal understanding of a certain language and of certain social symbols. It excludes, therefore, the presence of any power boundaries or instrumental oriented actions between subjects.

19 Dutschke (1967a) refuses every form of institutional centralism as connected to a concept of national state, which represents an expression of the “fake consciousness” that, even if historically overcome, still needs to be erased by people's minds. Centralization is a trait typical of an authoritarian society that does not allow (or only into the limits of the repressive tolerance) the development of a critical consciousness; it perpetuates the “*alliance between dominants and dominates*” and denies the deepest essence of democracy (Dutschke 1968i: 152-153). Dutschke (1968e: 143) (1968f: 130) and Marcuse (1972: 56-57) oppose to a centralized system the decentralized organization of the society based on system of councils (soviet, Raete, avanguardia autonominata) as organisms of auto-determination and auto-government expressing the direct will of different groups of subjects (students, farmers, workers...). This status will lead to the creation of a free society only in the extent it will be the result

On the other hand, as stressed by Juergen Habermas (1969: 178-184), this conception of democracy can appear strictly Utopian and unattainable in a late capitalistic society as that of the German Federal Republic, where the existing institutions can still offer the ground for a fruitful dialog with the population. Especially if we consider that exactly these institutions are the consequence of a long historical process of emancipation that, at the present moment, does not justify any radically revolutionary actions<sup>20</sup>. According to Habermas (1988), indeed, the contemporary society has lost the revolutionary boost exerted by the French Revolution<sup>21</sup> and, in this context, every anti-institutional subversive attempt would end up in being isolated and transform itself in an avant-garde; especially considering the profound heterogeneity of the actual society in relation with that of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Habermas, in this sense, refuses the possibility of a direct democracy based on the existence of general social interests. He considers, instead, the representative democracy as the only political system capable of establishing a productive discourse between minorities and majority in the existing society (he borrows this conception from Foerbel (Habermas 1998)). In fact, in the absence of a common recognition of “truth”, only a public discussion can lead to establish a shared common knowledge (which is more the result of a compromise than of a set of recognized common values). Through a representative system based on free elections minority groups have the possibility to participate in this dialog, influence it and at the same time being influenced by it. Only through a public discourse within the existent parliamentary system a process of emancipation can be operated and the existent minorities will be able to express themselves and to accept the existing order, that otherwise they would probably reject (Habermas 1988).

Of a different opinion is Marcuse (1972: 25-26), according to whom, the existing capitalistic society, through the continuous increase in life conditions, generates automatically the germs of its destruction. This happens on a double level. The one already conceived by Marx, that is the material impoverishment of a consistent part of the population, namely the Third World countries (thesis that is confirmed also by Habermas (1969: 178-184), who recognizes the revolutionary potential embedded in Third World societies)<sup>22</sup>; and the cultural impoverishment typical of late capitalism,

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of an anti-authoritarian consciousness and not of the systemic manipulation exerted by the system. This presuppose, as we will see, a long procedure of individual emancipation that will take a long and unpredictable time (Dutschke 1967a).

20 The justification regards the Habermasian conception of the relation between theory and praxis. For a better explanation see footnote 28.

21 Habermas explains the absence of a revolutionary consciousness in the actual society by comparing it with that of the French Revolution. For a better explanation refer to: Habermas (1988).

22 As stated by Rudi Dutschke (1968e: 140), Habermas admits the historical possibility to eliminate



with regard to “*the transcendental needs that cannot be satisfied by the market economy, but only by its abolishment*”<sup>23</sup>. A revolution in the actual social conditions can be successfully achieved only if aimed at radical transformation of human needs and aspirations “*both cultural and material, of the consciousness and of the sensibility, of the working process and of the leisure time*”<sup>24</sup> (Marcuse 1972: 26).

The Marcusean concept assumes a more concrete connotation in Dutschke's words: “*We have to liberate our repressed faculties: the repressed capacity of reciprocal aid, the human ability of transforming the intellect in reason and of understanding the society we live in, without being manipulated by it*”<sup>25</sup> (Dutschke 1967a). A just society, according to both Dutschke (1967c: 94) and Marcuse (1972: 40-43), should offer to every individual the possibility of exerting all its intellectual, artistic and physical skills in a critical process aimed to the transformation of man, and not to the perpetuation of the present status. For this reason, critical organizations such as the environmental protest, the women liberation movement, the refusal of the anti-erotic and puritan view of beauty, the anti-American protest against the Vietnam War<sup>26</sup>, independently from their concrete aims, contribute actively to the consciousness-raising of individuals as long as they do not insert themselves in an elite context but become instead a “leverage of consciousness change” directed to the denunciation of system's contradictions to the majority of the population (Marcuse 1972: 41-42) (Dutschke 1968f: 117).

The concept of an internal contradiction between true and fake consciousness represents the keystone of Dutschke's conception of society. When he writes: “*making the revolutionaries revolutionaries is, therefore, the crucial precondition for the revolutionary transformation of the masses*” (Dutschke 1968f: 134) (Sandoz 1968: 34),

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hunger, war and superfluous authority as feasible. What he rejects is the possibility of a revolutionary change in the German Federal Republic, where every essay of revolutionary liberation will knock against the existent systemic boundaries. It is not the ends that he contests, but rather the means.

23 Translated by authors.

24 Translated by authors.

25 Translated by authors.

26 In this sense Dutschke (1968a: 91-101) follows Che Guevara's ideal according to which, the revolution of the Vietnamese people plays a historic role in the consciousness-raising process of the entire world. Indeed, it represents a model not only for every people fighting for freedom (Third World countries), but also for the nations belonging to the Second and the First World. If for the Second World (in particular the Soviet Union) it represents a challenge: “*either support the international revolutionary and emancipating process, or take a step into the counterrevolutionary side*”, for the nations of the Western World it constitutes an important *étape* towards the emergence of the true consciousness and the understanding of the main contradiction of a system founded on the exploitation of man over man (in the particular case over the Vietnamese people). In this frame, the role of the German Federal Republic becomes critical in light of its military alliance with the US. With regard to this aspect, it is particularly interesting to consider how Dutschke conceived the German policy during the Vietnam conflict: “*Concerning the German Federal Republic (...), the passage from an indirect support for the American intervention to a direct participation could be equal to the importation of the violent revolution...*” (Dutschke 1968a: 101).

he implies a necessary relation between the individual internal revolution, some sort of Kantian conception of freedom<sup>27</sup>, and the external revolution that should take place only once the internalization of the true consciousness has been achieved: *“If we manage to structure the process of transformation as process of self awareness of those who are part of the movement, we will have created the essential presuppositions to avoid the manipulation of the élites...”* (Dutschke 1967a); and again: *“do not fear your personal freedom – affirms Dutschke during one of Marcuse's visits at the Freie Universitaet – to live trapped in the current system is the alternative; it would bring the cynical boredom, the intellectual poverty of professional idiots and the betrayal of the unrequited hopes that we carry with us (...), hopes of overcoming the current manipulations, the repression, the war (...) and the domination of man over man and of man over nature”*<sup>28</sup> (Dutschke 1968e: 138-139). It is exactly this relation of domination that represents the highest contradiction of a society that, in order to reproduce itself, exerts a continuous violence on human nature.

This is extremely clear in the Third World, where the exploitation operated by the richest countries has reached an unacceptable point in which almost half of the population disposes of one sixth of the actual wealth (Dutschke 1967a). However, according to Dutschke, this process does not exclude wealthy nations and their inhabitants. The violence in this case is not manifest, it is not direct as in the Third World, it is hidden behind the veil created by the fake-consciousness that guarantees its passive and unaware acceptance by the citizens. Marx's admonition (Dutschke 1968f: 128 quoting Capital, Marx) became true: the dominant class managed to assimilate the most eminent men of the dominated class, making in this sense the domination harsher.

“Violence” becomes hence the product of a capitalistic social-economic structure. This word has to be understood, according to Dutschke (1978), as a social-economic category, the fruit of a political process that carries it as a latent force capable of shaping the everyday life of several citizens: *“is this a worker? Someone who has to wake up at 6, take the bus at 7... He is completely charged. Charged of what? He just drank his coffee, smoked a cigarette (maybe two) and he is mad, hopping mad from top*

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27 In his work “Critique of Practical Reason” (1788), the German philosopher Immanuel Kant postulates three conditions that, according to his view, are necessary in order to allow the manifestation of a universal “moral law”. Among these there is the condition of “freedom” (the other two are: god and the immortality of soul). Indeed, in order to be moral a subject should be free to chose and this can happen only if the society provides the individual with a set of norms that does not restrict his freedom of choice. The relation between this concept of freedom and the Marcusian ideal of freedom as natural necessity rests, of course, debatable (a theoretical comparison is offered by Marcuse itself in *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (1972: 88-89)).

28 Translated by authors.

to bottom! He must go once again there, to work for damn 8 hours, than back home... Maybe some TV, some food..."<sup>29</sup> (Dutschke 1978). On the same wavelength, Marcuse (1972: 32) writes: "Can't a man gain his life without this stupid, tiring work that never ends, isn't it possible to live without such a waste, fewer machines and plastic objects, but with more time and more freedom?"<sup>30</sup>. Violence is present and perceived. It expresses itself legally in a society that is built on it and that needs it in order to perpetuate itself.

As stressed by Ernst Bloch in a discussion with Rudi Dutschke (1968h: 40), this "violent situation" generates, together with a passive acceptance, also an increasing feeling of boredom towards a monotonous life whose main aim is the simple reproduction of the labor forces without any specific destination. At a certain point, continues Bloch, men do not support this situation any longer and they want a change: "Man does not live by bread alone, is not only a biblical quotation. Especially when he already has bread (..)"<sup>31</sup>. Boredom itself, however, cannot change things. It is a leverage that needs to be activated and organized into a politically productive force (Dutschke 1967a): "the individual has already said yes to this muddle, but he knows that in the end it is a muddle"<sup>32</sup>.

In this context, Dutschke's refuse (1968h: 52) of a purely Marxist view of history is evident. He does not accept the thesis of an objective dialectic of the historical process and of a predominance of reality over theory, as if the latter could not shape the first. On the contrary, and in this case his thesis is opposed to that of Habermas<sup>33</sup>, Dutschke (1968f: 131) considers as essential a theoretical boost that should operate in a constant dialectic discourse with the praxis. There were, indeed, according to Dutschke (1968h: 49-51) (1968e: 141), at least four visible contradictory elements in the Western

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29 Translated by authors.

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33 According to Habermas (1967b) (1968c: 62), a revolutionary change cannot be brought about by a boost of the theory on the praxis, especially in the late capitalism where a provocative anti-institutional action, such as that exerted by the student movement, can only perfect the existent state apparatus. On the contrary, Habermas postulates a "defensive strategy of our actual position" and a dialog within the existent institutions. Indeed, a forced mobilization of the masses based on theoretical revolutionary and anti-systemic views could end up in their final isolation and in the dangerous phenomenon of manifest counter-violence as reaction of the system to the existing protest. For this reason, Habermas defined the student protest and their actions as "left fascism" aimed to the transformation of the sublimated violence existent in the current state apparatus in a real expression of manifest violence. The Habermasian view is contested also by Marcuse who, in *The Repressive Tolerance* (Dutschke 1967b), describes the violent actions of students as a just way to interrupt the chain of violence initiated by the system. In this context, writes Marcuse, neither the educator nor the intellectual has the right to preach any forms of renounce. They know the risk and they are ready to run it.

German society that concealed a new starting point for a novel order and justified in this sense a revolutionary action. With the end of the economic miracle, the emerging economic crisis of the subvention-system, the Vietnam War and the bureaucratic pressure against a democratization that started with the end of the Second World War (Dutschke 1968h: 50-51), it became clear to an increasing part of the population, especially in West Berlin<sup>34</sup>, that the existing order could not be passively accepted as an unavoidable consequence of history, but that its conscious shaping was a concrete necessity<sup>35</sup> (1968e: 149-150): “*And now, they finally have to take history under their conscious control*” (Dutschke 1967a). In this context that a possible obstacle can emerge: can the system in its late capitalistic stage be changed? If there still is room for a revolutionary action, as Dutschke asserts, who should lead it?

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34 The situation of West Berlin was topic in this sense. Here, asserts Dutschke (1968e: 141-142), the sensation of mistrust towards the Federal government was higher than in the rest of the nation. The reduction of the economic founding and the decreasing number of presidential visits reflected, writes Dutschke, the political unwillingness of an economic reconstruction in West Berlin. This part of Germany, by comparison with the rest of the country, was not only “*ten years behind*” in the technological development, but its shrinking population (which was a peculiar characteristic of this city) reflected, affirms Dutschke, not only an economic but also a profound social stagnation.

35 The word necessity does not imply a deterministic view of history. Rather, it refers to the fact that the actual stage presented all necessary elements for a consciousness-raising and a consequent revolutionary change. However, this change was not an indispensable consequence. As Marcuse (1972: 31-35) states, the potential revolutionary basis can always become the instrument for a fascist regime if the manipulating system will not be overcome: “*we could be the first people that becomes fascist through democratic elections*”. On the same wavelength, Dutschke (1967a) affirms: “*The success will depend on the individuals' will; if we will not obtain it, it means that we lost an entire historic period. The alternative is perhaps the barbarity!*”.

### 3. Rudi Dutschke's way to democracy

As stressed by Marcuse (1972: 58-59), in order to overcome the tyranny of the system, subjects need to set themselves free from the cage in which the society forces them to live. This cannot be done spontaneously by the single subject because: “*If it is true that there will be no revolution without a previous individual liberation, it is also true that this individual liberation cannot prescind from a social liberation*”<sup>36</sup> (Marcuse 1972: 61). This presupposes the existence of someone leading the process of individual liberation, a “*guide*” capable of translating a spontaneous feeling in organized action aimed to a radical social change.

At the beginning of the 60's Marcuse saw the possibility of a social liberation as barely remote and arrogated the role of “*liberator*” to those excluded by the system: “*the substratum of the outcasts and outsiders, the exploited and persecuted of other races and other colors, the unemployed and the unemployable*”. Exactly because marginalized by the society these people, who have not been shaped by the system and who are not subjected to its rules, are in the condition to change it from outside. Their simple presence represents a contradiction inner to the system and their position is in this sense revolutionary, even if unconsciously (Marcuse 1964: 259).

Ten years later, in light of the events that characterized the end of the 60's with the international student protest, Marcuse acknowledged the capacity inherent in the western world to overcome the process of “*commodification*” and subservience operated by the hegemonic classes in the contemporary society (Marcuse 1972: 55-57). Hence, the gap between “*The One-Dimensional Man*” and “*Counterrevolution and Revolt*” is not in the theoretical framework adopted by the author, but rather in his faith towards a future change brought about not only from outside but also from within the system. The development of a revolutionary consciousness has proved its effectiveness in the emergence of several student movements in capitalistic countries. Students represent, according to Marcuse, that avantgarde able to guide the process of liberation, which cannot, at least at the beginning, be spontaneous. They are in a favorable position that permits them to develop a critical consciousness both in theoretical and practical terms (as the campaign for an internal democratization of the academic institutions demonstrates) (Marcuse 1972: 58-68). Their protest has the task of transforming a spontaneous and individual protest in an organized action able of transcending the immediate needs of the subjects (fruit of the system) and orienting them towards a

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36 Translated by authors.

radical reconstruction of the actual society.

The role of Rudi Dutschke and the SDS took its steps from the Marcusean theory analyzed above and, in some way, influenced it, as the direct reference made by Marcuse (1972: 68) to Dutschke's theory of "*a long march through the institutions*" proves. Indeed, as postulated by Dutschke (1968f: 130) himself, a right revolutionary dialectic should not be limited to one restricted ambit (e.g. the university), on the contrary, it should exert a critical-practical activity extended to every social domain of the daily life. This operation cannot refuse the present institutions a priori, it should, instead, operate inside them through the diffusion of a "free-information" aimed to politicize the contradiction of the system and awake the true consciousness in those who have been blinded by the system (Dutschke 1968f: 130-134) (Marcuse 1972: 68).

Such an operation sees the students as privileged. In fact, as stated by Ernst Bloch (1968h: 37-39), students, even if they do not constitute a defined class as farmers or bourgeois used to do in the past, they do not belong to the system or, better, they have not been integrated yet. This condition allows students to set themselves free not only from the existing society but also from a university, whose role, writes Dutschke (1968b: 56), has become that of producing faithful servants for the socialized state<sup>37</sup>. The role of students, however, cannot be reduced to a mere instrument of the existing system, on the contrary, their access to science and culture should be conceived as a moment of self-liberation (Dutschke 1967d), as a possibility to critically change the system through an intense effort to "*transform the intelligent activity, specifically human, in an explosive reason against the actual society*"<sup>38</sup> (Dutschke 1968b: 56-57).

This temporary subversive attitude is the expression of a minority of the students<sup>39</sup>, as Dutschke (1967d) specifies, but it is starting from a minority that the majority of the population can be reached. Indeed, even if the university constitutes a privileged ground for a consciousness-raising, this does not mean that the revolutionary process can be restricted to this ambit. The basic idea is that every institutional reform cannot be independent from the macro-system in which it is taken, where even

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37 Dutschke refers to the University reform undertaken by the German Federal Republic in the 60's. The reduction of the studying period to 8 semesters, the restricted number of accepted students and the scarce quality of seminars due to the increasing bureaucratic commitments of professors, are considered by Dutschke and by part of student movement of the Freie Universitaet Berlin as measures aimed to the maintenance of the existent bourgeois society, which needs the university to support its process of economic growth and its exigences in this sense (Dutschke 1968b: 47-49).

38 Translated by authors.

39 In 1967, in an interview with Gaus, Dutschke declares that the movement was at the moment a minority of the students. 20 people working almost full time for the movement (however, not professional politicians -category that is strictly refused by Dutschke as one of the major problem of the actual political system-) and from 15 to 200 activists. Furthermore, specifies Dutschke, a number of around 4000-5000 students engaged in the emancipating process and supporting the movement.

university reflects the authoritarian and contradictory structures of the society. This society is not even the German one, on the contrary, it encloses the whole world. As stated by Dutschke (1967a), the main difference between his historical period and the precedents is based on the international historical context in which the revolution can be carried on: *“In every continent operate by now revolutionaries who want to eliminate their poverty”*<sup>40</sup>. Moreover, never before the possibility of establishing a global tie among the different revolutionary groups was so imminent as the current, in which the existence of powerful communication means plays a fundamental role.

Hence, the role of information becomes crucial on a double level: to stimulate a consciousness-raising among the population and to make a unity of action inside the vast anti-authoritarian field possible (Dutschke 1968c: 67) (Dutschke 1968a: 99 quoting Marcuse). It is in this context that the organization of sit-in and teach-in, demonstrations to support the Vietnamese resistance, together with the creation of new and free sources of information should be understood. It is because the process of subservience, operated by the existing system to every level of social life, is not completed yet, that a systematic long-term information, supported by direct actions of emancipation, can still overthrow the existing manipulatory system (Dutschke 1968d: 73-74): *“It deals with informing people impartially about what is happening in the world, to clarify problems and undertake actions oriented to the creation of a receptive public opinion capable of acknowledging the existence of conceptions different from those existent”*<sup>41</sup> (Dutschke 1968c).

In this process of democratization, that in turn implies a coordinated process of self-emancipation of individuals, Dutschke refuses the fascist structure based on the dependency of masses from a guide and their violent subordination. Instead, he defines the necessary components of this process as: *“autonomy, auto-organization, deployment of the human consciousness and human initiative with no principles of subordination”*<sup>42</sup> (Dutschke 1967a). In this context, a decentralized organization of society becomes necessary in order to guarantee a fast decisional process and a continuous direct participation of the population in it. The creation of a system based on *“Raete”*<sup>43</sup>, where leaders are constantly submitted to the free judgment of free individuals who elect them in their private *“milieus”* (enterprise, school, university, administration...), would finally create a society in which *“our interests, desires, needs and hopes become feasible*

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43 German word for: “councils”.

*through our practical and critical action*”<sup>44</sup> (Dutschke 1967a) (Dutschke 1968e: 145) without being in the hands of whatever party or government who are not representing them. In such a decentralized structure, asserts Dutschke (1967a), the process of consciousness-raising will take place as a long and complicated march in which minority groups will become an example for the formation of other groups inside the existing institutions with the final-aim of reconstructing them completely.

There is no claim to enlighten people, says Dutschke (1967a), but rather a concrete possibility to transform minority groups in a boost of the majority, especially in a moment in which international conditions are favorable (end of the “economic miracle”, Vietnam War...): *“A socialist alternative, revolutionary of the existent order, is possible only as conscious act of the majority of wage earners”* (Dutschke 1968h: 63) Only through a voluntary adhesion of an increasing majority there will be a real change. Thus, there is no space for a leading party or an enlightened ruling avant-garde as in the Leninist theory: the success will depend on the will of people and not on that of a narrowed elite. It is exactly to avoid a degeneration of the movement in an “elite-organization” that a decentralized structure with the constant possibility of revocation of representatives, who are not professional politicians, becomes indispensable (Dutschke 1967a).

In this sense, Dutschke's (1968h: 70) conception of direct democracy harks back to Rosa Luxemburg's ideal of social democracy, intended as an indissoluble relation in which socialism cannot exist apart from a free democratic society. It ensues a sharp critique of the Soviet world and of the predominance of a single party on the social and political structure: *“It (a democracy of councils) cannot be formally guaranteed by organized mechanisms. It can originate only from a constant conflict against every authoritarian-dogmatic tendency and it is subordinated to the consciousness-raising of masses. The temporary representatives of factories, schools and of the public administration should be subjected, through imperative mandates, to a constant bottom-up control”*<sup>45</sup> (Dutschke 1968g: 102). This democratic conception of socialism caused Dutschke to turn away from the so-called “soviet way” and to rethink the meaning of this term in a sense that, if not new, it was at least unconventional in a world where the Soviet model was considered as unquestionable by the great majority of the existing communist parties: *“Shouldn't we rather use the concept of free society to break with the ambivalence of the term “socialism” in this sense?”*<sup>46</sup> (Dutschke 1968h: 70).

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## Conclusion

Thirty years went by since Rudi Dutschke died from a relapse following the assassination attempt of 1968, more than forty years since the student movement reached its climax in the end of the 60's and Marcuse (1964: 259) predicted the “*chance that the historical extremes may meet again*” giving rise to a new social order. It did not happen.

Of course, it would be unfair to classify the 1968 movement as a failure and do not acknowledge its numerous achievements would not do justice to an entire generation. However, even these venerable conquests took place within the systemic boundaries as a gentle concession of that repressive tolerance characteristic of what Marcuse calls a formal democracy.

It is hard to evaluate the causes of this failure. The critique embedded in the 1968 movement never disappeared nor did its revolutionary ideals, as the assiduous activity of numerous protest groups in the actual German and European universities easily proves. However, these minorities never became a majority; on the contrary, they rather transformed themselves in those elite-movements long feared by Rudi Dutschke (1968f: 117) when he wrote: “*like temporary parasites of the system, the existent structure lavishes the students' intelligentsia with a certificate of independence and elite-security*”<sup>47</sup>. The “rebellion” has been partially tolerated, labeled as socialist deviance and associated with the failure of the Soviet ideal. This operation has been an obvious consequence fostered by those who failed to understand the real purpose of a movement whose main condition was that of being critical of itself, of being able to regenerate and expand its range by constantly putting its principles into question. It was certainly not a Leninist elite-group inspired by the Soviet model.

“*Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently*” wrote Rosa Luxemburg, and it is exactly on individual freedom that rests the concept of a permanent revolution. This freedom, says Dutschke (1967a), is not the freedom of the fascist, but rather that of conscious individuals who overcame the fake consciousness and, through a continuous critique of the existent institutions, became capable of developing that historical emancipation process, which in a complex modern society is neither a deterministic resultant nor a sudden achievement of a war of movement, but rather the result of a war of position<sup>48</sup>.

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47 Translated by authors.

48 The distinction between war of movement and war of position has been theorized by the Italian

The responsibility of the failure is therefore shared. It is unquestionable, on one hand, that the political structure, especially that part representing the socialist ideals (parties), did not understand the profoundness of a critical boost that, as predicted by Dutschke himself, was hiding behind its apparent façade the shadow of a future bloody and, in a modern society, erroneous terroristic degeneration<sup>49</sup> (Dutschke 1968f: 114-115) (1968a: 101).

On the other hand, if the “*historical chance*” indicated by Marcuse went by without even scratching that party-structure which, according to Dutschke (1967a), was at the basis of the existent repressive society, a reason can be recognized in the radical rejection of the movement to establish an inter-parliamentary dialog with the political institutions. In fact, as written by Dutschke (1968h: 70), in order to dissolve the existent apparatus a collaboration with the system and within the system was indispensable as part of what he defined “the long march through institutions”: “*we intensively collaborate with the subversive elements inside the establishment (Communist parties?) (..) and we develop in this way a double strategy that allows us to abandon our position of minority and reach, finally, that of a conscious majority*”<sup>50</sup>.

This collaboration, however, remained confined to a theoretical level and, what Habermas (1968: 181-182) foresaw as a necessary step for the extra-parliamentary student movement in order to play a role outside the academic environment and strengthen its veto power in the political arena, turned out to be a self-evident truth: “*students, unless they cooperate with politically conscious labor unions and gain resonance from the liberal sector of the press, cannot achieve anything on a long term view (..)*”<sup>51</sup>.

Transformation of the movement in elite-organization, absence of communication with the establishment, lack of critical consciousness among part of its members and deficient support by communist parties, too “Soviet oriented” to acknowledge the crucial importance of the on-going events, are different factors that are

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philosopher, as well as co-founder of the Italian Communist Party, Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937). According to him, in a society where power rests not only upon the state, but also upon an advanced and complex civil society, the communist movement cannot win through an attack aimed at the top of the state apparatus (war of movement), but only through a previous conquest of the “casemates” of the civil society (war of position). Indeed, a war of movement is a revolution that, even if it would be able to take possession of the state structure in a rapid way, it would not be able to overcome the resistance of a strong civil society that should be, for this reason, penetrated through a long and tenacious war of position (Rossanda 2007).

49 According to Dutschke, every terroristic act in the modern democratic countries would sort only negative effects. Indeed, one of the main characteristics of these societies is that their leaders are simple and replaceable masks; therefore, eliminating them cannot have any long-term revolutionary effects (Dutschke 1968f: 114-115).

50 Translated by authors.

51 Translated by authors.

worth to be analyzed in order to give an answer first of all to real existence of a revolutionary ground and, subsequently, to the right methods that should have been adopted in order to succeed. This question, however, seems to lose its explanatory power in the face of Dutschke's words (1967d): *“First of all, the aim is to create an awareness of the deficiency... We shouldn't ask now if there is an answer. Dutschke does not want to give any answers! This would be exactly the manipulating answer that I'm not ready to give! What would be the worth of a unique answer, when the entire social unconsciousness persists? This (unconsciousness) should be firstly overcome, then an answer will be given...”*<sup>52</sup>.

*“There is immaturity, incompleteness, too many contradictions!”* Said once Ernst Bloch (1968h: 73) about Rudi Dutschke, and he added: *“And where aren't they? (..) Here, a man is talking to us...”*<sup>53</sup>. A man who understood that to change the world we have to change men, that there is not a ready recipe for people who are not ready for it and that only freeing himself from the hegemonic freedom of the system means truly freedom.

On this world there will always be someone pretending to own the truth, to know the way... But not all of them will be willing to scarify their existence for it, to be honest with themselves and help someone else not simply to follow a pre-designed path, but to create his own way as they did, to be for the first time conscious shaper of his own destiny.

*“The critical theory of society possesses no concepts which could bridge the gap between the present and its future; holding no promise and showing no success, it remains negative”*, once wrote Herbert Marcuse (1964: 259), and he continued: *“Thus it wants to remain loyal to those who, without hope, have given and give their life to the Great Refusal”*. Rudi Dutschke has been, beyond a shadow of a doubt, one of those. Genosse Rudi, der Kampf geht weiter!

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52 Translated by authors.

53 Translated by authors.

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