

Sergio Mamino came from Mondovì. He was passionate about art, and to study art at that time you had to enroll in the faculty of letters and philosophy. He had discovered that his president was openly gay, and he wanted to meet me. He had also discovered that I lived up on the hill and had sent me a postcard at Valsalice from a vacation spot. I couldn't figure out who this Sergio was who was writing me.

Then in Turin he showed up in person. Meanwhile Gianpiero and I had moved to the attic in Via Mazzini. Sergio lived nearby. And at a certain point he said, "I want to move in with you two."

I immediately said no, in the name of monogamy, I suppose. So-called casual encounters were one thing, Sergio's request another. Naturally, Gianpiero was a little put out, too; he couldn't figure out what was going on.

But my instinctive refusal gradually yielded to the idea, which gradually grew stronger and more fascinating, of a species of commune, maybe a bit complicated from the sentimental point of view, but a realization of the '68 communal dream.

And then, I was traveling a lot. I was glad to leave these two boys together (Sergio was twenty years younger than I was). Better for them not to be alone, I thought, so they don't wind up running risks or getting themselves into trouble.

And with the certainty that they were fond of me, and I was fond of them.

It was the period when the Brigade Rosse, the Red Brigades, were killing people at the rate of one per day. Someone would wake up in the morning and . . . bang. The mayor, Diego Novelli, and the president of the Piedmont region, Aldo Viglione, were doing nothing but attending funerals.

It was at Turin that the first trial of the BR was going to be “celebrated,” to use the curious Italian idiom: the historic nucleus of the BR, Curcio and Franceschini.

On November 16, 1977, they killed Carlo Casalegno.

On March 8, 1978, the trial started.

I was still president of the faculty of letters and philosophy.

On March 9, day two of the trial, I was presiding at a faculty council. At a certain point the secretary, Signora Gianonne, came in and said, “Professor, the Red Brigades have telephoned. They say they want to kill you.”

Naturally, it shakes you up. I left the council immediately (“Sorry, have to go”), went to the president’s office, and the first thing I did was phone home. They had called there too, and uttered the same threat. Gianpiero, like me, was half-dead with fright.

We were really concerned. I was known as a left-wing faculty president, and some of my friends who knew people who knew the Brigatisti told me, “Look, this is no joke. They have a list of those

on the left who aren't with them, and they plan to blow them away. Norberto Bobbio heads it, but you're on it too." Oh, okay.

The police told me, "We'll put men outside your apartment, but you won't notice anything." Sure, how would I? The first thing the concierge said to me was "Look, there's a car parked outside with four heavies inside . . . they're either *caramba* (Carabinieri) or Brigatisti."

In any case, we moved in the same day with Angela and Mario, in Via Vespucci. And immediately word arrives—from friends of friends again—that they plan to burn our apartment that night. Gianpiero, defying danger, went back home to get the cat. He said, "Never shall the Siamese puss be the only one to suffer in all this."

At just this time Gianpiero had been invited to a festival of visual poetry at Verona. After spending a night at Angela's, Gianpiero, Sergio, and I left for Verona. We stayed at a small hotel; we moved around with great circumspection, and the day after, we left for Tuscany. We took refuge with the rich sister of a Turinese friend of mine (Anna Cataldi, who was then married to Giorgio Falck), who had a beautiful country place at Bolgheri.

We got there and shut ourselves in. When supplies ran out, we were forced to go out and do a bit of shopping, but always with great caution.

After a week we were starting to say, "Well, we can't stay here forever, let's go back to Turin."

We got everything organized, got the car ready, and just as we were about to leave, the radio informed us that Aldo Moro had been kidnapped. It was March 16, 1978.

We barricaded ourselves in the house once more. There were helicopters flying overhead all day. I said, "In a Diane with a Turin license plate, I don't know what might happen." At the time the Diane was a typically left-wing car, highly suspect.

We stayed a few more days, I don't remember how many, then for good or ill we had to go back to Turin.

But I began getting around exclusively by taxi. From the apartment to the university. From the university to the apartment.

Above all, being the real target, I went to live for a while in the apartment of the mother of Marziano Guglielminetti, in Corso Duca degli Abruzzi. She was at the seaside, and the place was empty.

One afternoon a colonel of the Carabinieri whom I knew because he wanted to get his university degree (he was later put in charge of the mounted Carabinieri as punishment for having been found in the P2 files), came to speak with me. He had been in command of the platoon of Carabinieri that guarded the trial of the Brigatisti, but at this point the trial was finished. Who knows what's on his mind, I thought. But it turned out he wanted me to let him off some examinations. And he was asking me to supervise his thesis. I dug in my heels a bit, and told him, "Go ask Nicola Tranfaglia" (if Nicola found out he'd throw a punch at me, and he might not be entirely wrong). The colonel shot back, "But Tranfaglia is one of our suspects." And indeed they had just searched Nicola's place because he was rumored to have known the supposed mastermind of the BR, Gianbattista Lazagna. "Better not, certainly, in that case," I said.

We started arguing, and our voices rose. Me: "You cops threw Giuseppe Pinelli out the window." Him: "You people wrecked the secret services." "But Pinelli. . . ." "But the secret services. . . ." Until the doorbell rang. I wasn't expecting anyone, and the place must have looked empty. Who could it be? The colonel whispered to me to hide and went to open the door holding a revolver about a meter long. It was only a missionary looking for donations.

But that was the time of fear.

REVOLUTIONARY
MORALISM

One of my students went to jail for terrorism, too, found on some list, I believe. I don't think he'd pulled a trigger yet, but he was certainly one of the many who were semiclandestine, one of those pretending to be a worker: he would leave the house at 6:00 AM with his lunch pail, to make people think he was headed to the factory, but he didn't go there; I don't know exactly where he went.

He was drop-dead beautiful. But he had such revolutionary moralism. . . . He wrote letters from jail as though he were under a death sentence for being in the Resistance. Those in the Resistance actually did die, they were allowed some rhetoric, but him . . .

I said to myself: Is this supposed to be my new Nietzschean overman?

I was preparing a second edition of my book on Nietzsche. I wrote a new preface in which I stated that I had come to realize that the liberated man, Nietzsche's overman, could not be the professional revolutionary subject. Take power? Look how that turns out. You wind up in charge of the troops in Afghanistan . . . give me a break!

This was also the period of *Autonomia*. I was fond of the word "autonomy." Pity, then, that the *autonomi* sometimes did dreadful things. But the word itself already spoke a different notion of

politics, the one I hold now: we should just obstruct the development of the system; it's the only thing we can do.

And it contained a hint of the idea of weakening as a way of eluding power. All powers, and at all levels.

Autonomia appeared to me a nonviolent form of anarchism. I didn't want to do violent things, but I was so fed up with the system of police repression and emergency powers that I didn't know what to say any more.

Weak thought got its name, *pensiero debole*, only in autumn 1979, and it became the title of a collection of essays—it seems incredible now, when everyone is shunning it like the plague—edited by Pier Aldo Rovatti and me in 1983.

In autumn 1979, more than fifteen years after my first “debilist” reading of Heidegger, the idea of the history of Being as that of its growing lighter and more distant assumed a firm contour in my mind. And as time went on, so did all that it entailed, and was still to yield in the years ahead.

I was increasingly excited by the idea of interpreting Heidegger from the viewpoint of weakening, rather than that of the wait for a new apparition of Being. And a host of other things went into it: my preference for a nonaggressive ethics, ecology. Even Arthur Schopenhauer became, along with Heidegger and Nietzsche, one of the components of this “interpretation.” And my personal rereading of Christianity and religion was also taking shape.

In a little art gallery in Salerno I gave a paper entitled “Dialettica, differenza, pensiero debole” (Dialectic, difference, weak thought), which became the first essay in the edited collection of 1983.

What did Pier Aldo and I write in the introduction? For example, “Italian discourse on the crisis of reason still has too much nostalgia for metaphysics. And it fails to assume the full brunt of

the experience of the forgetting of Being, or of the ‘death of God,’ which Heidegger and Nietzsche have announced to our culture.” We backed all this up, and we expressed our hope for “a thought capable of articulating itself in the half-light” (one of my interpretations of Heidegger), a path forward that doesn’t try to “rediscover the originary, true Being that metaphysics has forgotten, in its scientific, technological success,” but rather “a way to encounter Being once more as trace, recall, a Being used up and weakened, and on that account alone, worthy of attention,” *an ethic of weakness* that we knew to be “not simple, much more costly, less reassuring.” And again: “a difficult balance between contemplating the abyss of negativity and the cancellation of every origin.” He and I were aware that we were speaking about a “metaphor, and in a certain way a paradox.” But the conclusion was upbeat because “the price paid by potent reason strikingly limits the objects than can be seen and of which it is possible to speak.” Amen.

Technology is relieving social relations of their weight, making them lighter, less heavy. The idea behind weak thought was to turn that to advantage, to the point of realizing a form of liberation. Emancipation through inflation: if you receive just one television channel, whatever it tells you seems like gospel truth; if you have twenty, you take it or leave it. And postmodernity, the end of rationalized society, that is, of society with central rationality—this is a serious development, an advance, in the crisis of reason.

A few years later, in 1989, when I published *La società trasparente* (The transparent society), I realized that once again I was using an oxymoronic title. Because in reality, it’s anything but transparent: a society that has all the means for becoming transparent becomes in reality more confusional. But it’s precisely in confusion that you’re obliged to become an autonomous subject. It’s what Nietzsche is saying when he writes that in accomplished nihilism,

one either becomes an overman or one is lost. Paradoxically, it's in mass society that it becomes necessary to be an overman, because you have to become an autonomous interpreter. If you are hearing too many voices without inventing one of your own amid the rest, well, you're lost, you are no more, you disappear.

So weak thought was a strong theory, a strong philosophical proposal. And—it seemed to us—very civil too, very “reasonable,” very “dialogic,” very unarrogant, especially given that a predilection for a nonaggressive ethics did and does form part of weak thought.

Instead there was an uproar.

Years later, in a set of lectures delivered at Bologna at the invitation of Umberto Eco that became my book *Oltre l'interpretazione* (*Beyond Interpretation: The Meaning of Hermeneutics for Philosophy*, a book I dedicated to the memory of Gianpiero in 1994), I tried again to “dissipate various misunderstandings that have accumulated over the years regarding the significance of that theoretical proposal, primarily because the notion of weakness has been deliberately taken in too narrow and literal a sense.” Wasted effort. The outcry is directed at me; Pier Aldo is less exposed, he doesn't get around, rarely writes in the newspapers. And it comes from little provincial Italy, absolutely not from the rest of the world. I am attacked on every possible front: personal, philosophical, political. Everyone piles on. And it shows no sign of waning.

Why?

The main reason lies, I believe, in the beginning. And when I say “beginning” I mean it seriously, not as a figure of speech.