**Part I: Lenin and our generation**

Lesson #1

I: For a Marxist reading of Lenin’s Marxism

This year we will be working with Lenin, with no intention of reaching a comprehensive definition of this figure, but, rather, to confront a few problems which are born from Leninist thought with the problems which presently face the class movement, and we will do this in three blocs of lessons and some other interval and supplementary appendices. The three blocs of classes are the following: the first bloc has a propaedeutic character, on the internal dynamic of Leninist thought. We will seek to follow the way in which problems are formed in the political theory of Lenin, comparing them with the way in which we tackle similar themes. The second bloc of lessons will make reference, in a more specific form, to the discourse on organization and, in particular, on the subject of the soviet-party in the thought of Lenin. Lastly, in the third group of lessons the focus shall be on the subject of the extinction of the State starting from, on the one hand, from his work *The State and Revolution* and, on the other, from the actual conditions of the relations of force between classes and the development of the productive forces. In addition to these three blocs of lessons and questions a few notes and appendices (which work around the dialectic in Lenin, on sovietism, on Left-Wing Communism, an infantile disorder) Three blocs of lessons of uneven content and importance. Putting these disproportions aside, the invitation to think and act which a reading of Lenin provokes is so great and thrilling that it will be of great benefit, without a doubt, in this work.

We will begin with the first point: Lenin and us, Lenin and the political experience of the movement of these years and let us ask the question: what has been the contribution of Leninism to our theoretical and political formation? The question begs confrontation and, as happens with any confrontation, there appears implicitly the need for a standard or judgment, which can be radically expressed in this way: we ask if Lenin, for us, continues to mean something, if the method used by Lenin continues to be valid in our current era, and if this corresponds with the practice of investigation and action which, often spontaneously, we have found and renewed within the class struggle. “Spontaneously”; we say this not because ‘spontaneity’ is our religion, but because no one, during the 50’s and 60’s, helped us analyze the class struggle. To respond to these questions it is necessary to retrace the evolution of Leninist thought in its totality, carefully analyzing its fundamental articulations. First point: analysis of capital; second point: the thematic of organization; third point: struggle against autocracy and, consecutively, close organic approximation to the definition of the revolutionary process; fourth point: thematic of revolution; fifth point: thematic of the construction of socialism during the phase of the dictatorship of the proletariat. And it will be necessary to follow this process always keeping in mind its contents as well as the relation between tactics and strategy, the most characteristic element of the Leninist discourse. With respect to Marx, the existence of class struggle and the development of the forces of production determined that Lenin valued in an extreme mode the
aspect or question of tactics as an element which enriches in general Marxist thought. It is certain that Marx’s texts on the Commune are an example of intelligence/knowledge of the concrete historical situation, of the capacity to identify the moment of insurrection and develop a theory from it: it is also without a doubt that in Lenin— as Tronti has observed in *Operai e Capitale*— the relation between theory and revolutionary praxis, between defining a strategy and determining tactical moves, and, above all, the new use of the medium of organization together imprinted a new qualitative development in communist theory.

We will start with a purely introductory discussion. How to read Lenin today. I will leave for another time criticisms of how the official communist movement reads Lenin. There is no doubt that dogmatist temptation and the most genuine opportunism have been articulated in the reading of Lenin that we have come to know in the recent past in the theoretical development of the communist movement and which we have lived directly. Lenin appears as an author which has said everything, the author which had glorified insurrection….and at the same time the author which wrote *Left-Wing Communism and Infantile disorder*: a mine of arguments and counterarguments where theory transforms into philological efficiency in order to travel the shortest path between two convenient quotations. However, putting aside the opportunist and dogmatic temptation, it is necessary to recognize that the thought of Lenin presents a series of formal contradictions, whose relevance is, on occasion, very substantial. Taking into account this circumstance, for us the principal question is to determine if the thought of Lenin can—and to what degree—be subjected to what we can call or name a Marxist analysis of Marxism. What does this mean? This means that, as a starting point, Marxist authors must be subjected to a practico-historical criticism, which is fundamental in defining and classifying their thought. Marx himself gives, with respect to the evolution of his thought, a few examples of what he understands by a Marxist science of Marxism, which is to say, the capacity of situating the inevitable discontinuities and variations of political analysis within the framework of a coherent model: this happens, for example, in the texts on the Commune, where the initial opposition to the advance of the insurrectional process transforms itself into an internal analysis, playing a central role in the process. Thought is discontinuous because reality is dialectical and the movement, revolutionary and progressive:

But the revolution is thoroughgoing. It is still journeying through purgatory. It does its work methodically. By December 2 1851 it had completed one half of its preparatory work; it is no completing the other half. First it perfected the parliamentary power, in order to be able to overthrow it. Now that it has attained this, it perfects the executive power, reduces it to its purest expression, isolates it, sets it up against itself as the sole target, in order to concentrate all its forces of destruction against it. And when it has done this second half of its preliminary work, Europe will leap from its seat and exultantly claim: Well grubbed, old mole!”

In more general terms, this signifies that one of the fundamental characteristics of a Marxist discourse on Marxism is the accepting of the inevitability of its discontinuity and the
discontinuity of its real referent. Marxist thought could have a fictitious internal continuity, an 
internal relation of filiations and of their respective worthy antecedents only if we considered it 
as ideology. But this is not possible: Marxist thought can only confront itself with real problems 
which gradually renew themselves, and the only continuity it can lay claim to is that dynamic 
and contradictory one derived from the revolutionary subject which it references. Marxism is the 
real continuity of a subject which proposes a subversive exigency as a continuity of its proper 
being: only in these conditions does theory transform itself into a material force. Hence the 
discontinuity of Marxism as a negation of ideology: it could never be simply a theoretical 
continuity, never a filiation, never a continuous process which leads to another; it will always be 
rupture and renewal of political hypothesis facing necessity, the requirements, the attributes 
which the revolutionary subject presents. The reading and criticism of a Marxist author can only 
be carried out from the praise of the recognition of the real of discontinuity, the only systematic 
and continuous reference point of Marxism.

So, if we intend to analyze the thought of Lenin, the first and biggest danger which we 
risk is to generate a discourse on Leninism. Leninism does not exist: or, better put, the theoretical 
propositions which seels this label should be redirected to the behaviors and attitudes to which 
they refer; we can measure their validity under the relation between the necessities of a historic 
subject (the revolutionary proletariat) and the series of subversive problems which this subject 
encounters in its turn and on its path. Perhaps this is a too drastic of a reduction of the historical 
density of the thought of Lenin? I don’t believe it is useful to have such reservations in this 
respect. In order to corroborate and as an example, I want to emphasize the lecture that Lukacs, 
in his essay of 1924, realizes on Lenin. Who is Lenin? wonders Lukacs, and begins his response 
in this way

"Historical materialism is the theory of revolution of the proletariat. This is so because 
its essence is the conceptual synthesis of its social being which produces the proletariat 
and determines the whole of its existence; it is so because for historical materialism the 
proletariat struggling for liberation finds its clear self-consciousness in it. The stature of a 
proletarian thinker, of a representative of historical materialism, can therefore be 
measured by the depth and breadth of his grasp of this and the problems arising from it; 
by the extent to which he is able accurately to detect beneath the appearances of 
bourgeois society those tendencies towards proletarian revolution which work themselves 
in and through it to their effective being and distinct consciousness.” (9)

Historical materialism, which is to say, the thought of the theorists of historical materialism, 
must be analyzed, therefore, within a given/determined class existence, taking into account both 
its presence as much as its tendency. So, Lenin is this, he is the most complete representation of 
what Lukacs denominates the ‘actuality of the revolution.’

However, there are today only few who know that Lenin did for our time what Marx did 
for the whole of capitalist development. In the problems of the development of modern
Russia- from those of the beginnings of capitalism in a semi-feudal absolutist state to those of establishing socialism in a backward peasant country- Lenin always saw the problems of the age as a whole: the onset of the last phase of capitalism and the possibilities of turning the now inevitable final struggle between the bourgeoisie and proletariat in favour of the proletariat- of human salvation. (11)

Lenin is the actuality of the revolution. Lenin interprets, in a given specific situation, in the context of a specific relation of an existent class between a historical subject (Russian proletariat) and the complexity of the structure of capitalist power in which he is inserted, the compounding of problems which in that moment, at that stage, which faced the proletariat of the world. In Marxian-speak, the abstract is made concrete, which is to say, it is the sum of all real determinations. The Leninist solution to the problem of revolution in Russia is not, therefore, a solution which refers simply to the character of the existent relation between the revolutionary Russian proletariat and the situation of semifudal relations of production and existing domination, but as this solution, and only as such, as also a solution to a general problem: analysis, interpretation and practical solution specific to a class relation and general contribution to the construction of the revolutionary project, valid for all situations, in a given era. The transition made the last phase of capitalism identifiable with the possibility of inverting the direction, in favour of the proletariat and the salvation of all humanity, of the struggle between (the fatal moment of this country) the autocracy and the proletariat.

I believe that this Lukacsian position is not only correct but profoundly Leninist. In fact, this sense of determination, of the concretion of the situation which we have before us, this application of Marxist science as a choice of a specific relation which in turn is formed by determinant relations of force, constitutes the fundamental synthesis which Lenin realizes and imposes on Marxist science of his time: creation of the Bolshevik party and protagonize the October Revolution signified, in fact, to win/overcome this theoretical battle. So, choice of the specific relation of force between the working class and capital at a determinant historical moment, and, as a consequence, choice of organization as a result of the awareness of this relation and of the conjoint nexus and articulations that derive from this relation and which, starting out from the same, constitute the base of the radical transformation of praxis. This choice of the subject of organization and radical transformation of praxis is a sectarian and particular choice, marked by a perspective which does not only seek to identify the relation which verifies sequentially the working class and capitalist power, but that, at the same time, deals with acquiring the capacity to destroy the relation in which it finds itself, to identify in every moment the possibility of putting the enemy/adversary in crises, to dismantle its instruments of domination, the possibility, definitively, of sparking the violent destruction of these mechanisms. The theory articulates itself, in an absolutely precise form, as a function of the capacity of utilizing violence. Violence is the fabric over which all political relations are woven. The domination of the State is the domination of violence and violence pure and simple is legality, the combination of constitutional forms, the habitual forms of capitalist power of
command. Marxism discovers that violence does not simply exist in formal relations but in the everyday relations of production and life; it discovers that the science of capital is the science of the violence of capital, one of the forms utilized by capital to organize violence over those it submits/over its subjects: Marxism is destruction and radical transformation. The introduction of this link directly between understanding and violence in class analysis composes a sectarian point of view, the point of the working class, the point of view of Marxist theory.

From this point of view we should immediately criticize, for its inconclusive character, a few positions within Marxist theory which seek to eliminate the specific analysis of the proletarian subject. In this respect Louis Althusser’s position is representative, which, at the same time as he seeks to define theory as practical intervention and action of class position, negates it time and time again in attributing these actions to a material subject, characterized by an internal dialectic within subjectivity and material discontinuity, within the distinct elements which constitute it. The science of the revolutionary process negates in converting itself into a science of the revolutionary subject. It is easy to understand the effects of this conception: defense of reflection and mediation (of the intellectual as much as of the party) against the irreconcilability or unmediate character of the dialectic and, as well, against the concretion of the revolutionary subject. How can this position be nominated Marxist or, even Leninist, when for Lenin- as we have just seen and our analysis will reveal further still- the fundamental problem is precisely the specificity of the revolutionary subject and its temporal and spatial configuration? It is evident that constructing the party is something very distinct and different than desiring it!

Well then, returning to our problem, what does it involve to submit Lenin’s thought to the scientific model which he himself contributed to elaborating? It involves asking two questions. The first is the following: what type of subject analyzes the sectarian perspective of Lenin and what is its theoretical horizon? Second question: what is the subject that today can and knows how to interpret Lenin? And, continuing, we should have to ask: this subject that today reads and interprets Lenin and assumes his thematic has it changed or is it, on the contrary, similar and homogenous as the previous? On the one hand, we ask what is the reference for the Leninist point of view and, on the other, what is the current reference of the class struggle and Marxist science. Today, our reference is identified with the revolutionary ‘mass worker’, a subject which in the 1960’s developed in Europe, and before in the United States, an action which gave origin to a period of dramatic crises of capitalist development. But, what is Lenin’s referent? Lenin’s referent is the Russian industrial working class vanguard- as Cacciari claims- shaped by its isolation.

Lenin’s discourse translates in organizational terms a real class structure. This structure affirmed in an authoritative form the material character of the vanguard which maintained the industrial working class. This signified its isolation. The relations of developed capitalist production- and, as well, the material reproduction of labour-power and working class- found itself isolated; it was a vanguardist relation. Nonetheless, the
possibilities of the revolutionary process directly depended on the possibility of defending and developing the mechanisms of class production. As a result, the principle task of the revolutionary party was to impede a massive (masivo) attack against these mechanisms on the part of pre-capitalist relations of production. This is the object of the Leninist strategy. Organizationally and materially reinforce the working class, taking into account its objective ‘isolation’: transform this isolation into a vanguard.

The difference that exists between our referent and the Leninist one could not be presented with greater clarity.

The composition of the working class in struggle today, the composition of the working class in general, has nothing in common with the proletarian and worker composition that we find in the first years of the 20th century. From this fact there derives two consequences. The first has a formal character and assumes what we have just claimed: that the continuity of the subversive subject, defined by Marxist science, has to confront itself with the discontinuity of the specificity of the subject, with the dialectical transformation of material forms which it assumes. Secondly, by not understanding the difference between Lenin and us in regards to the historical relation which configures the proletarian subject signifies not understanding the dynamic law of the process. Lenin has lost. We are talking of a victory of the working class attained through Leninism which gave way to a diverse and specific dynamic of the capitalist relation: and this means a transformation, a different configuration of the subversive subject. Not to understand this transformation of the subject signifies not understanding the law and the type of relation that capital establishes with the working class. The working class finds itself outside of capital as long as it provokes a revolutionary impulse, yet, at the same time that this happens, capital tries to submit it, tame it, to reduce it again to labour-power, considering it at times as organized working class to make it function within its productive process, taking on, absorbing some of the classes demands, at the same time it restructures the system of exploitation in such a way to incorporate these demands and convert them as an element of development when before they were elements of rupture. This type of link, the redefinition of the determination through which the working class confronts capital, is fundamental for Marxist science. We name this relation (with all the complexity it presents in regards to its behavior, its modes of necessity and knowledge) the technical composition and/or political composition of the working class. For each historical epoch of the class struggle we have to realize/undertake a definition of the composition of the working class which includes not only its general situation within the mode of production, but as well the combined experiences of struggle/behaviors and the manner in which fundamental and vital necessities/needs renew and define themselves each time in a new form. Marxist thought is confronted with this object as its real referent: the object of Marxism is none other than the constitution, modification and recomposition of this subject. Because- and this we should always keep in mind and present- the real relations of force can only be measured within this subject. From this point of view, the history of capital, globally speaking, transforms itself in the history of working class struggles and the different political compositions of the
class, demonstrating the fabric of both with great precision, the history of capital as its effect. Evidently, when we use the word effect, we mean to say the continuous action and reaction of capital (of the structures of machinery, of domination, of the State) against the subject which embodies the relations of force starting from the revolutionary premise of the refusal of exploitation; however, the dialectical substance of the process does not disappear in casual relations, but insists in the specific causality from the point of view—violence and superior comprehension—of the working class.

We now return to the definition of the historical limit of Leninist thought just as Cacciari had identified. The discourse of Lenin translates in organizational terms a real composition of class which understands to be specifically determined. In the Russian context analyzed by Lenin, the mature relations of capitalist production and, as well, the material reproduction of labour power as/into working class are produced in an isolated manner, a vanguardist one. Lenin starts from the conviction of this specific class composition, of the conviction of its isolation, and, confronting this, transforms this isolation into vanguardism, into a global capacity which pulls the whole movement. “Lenin transforms from a revolutionary point of view the (tardoburgesa) late/dull/slow bourgeois unenlightened ideology over the elite and the masses.” On this particular point it should be explained that we represent a planet which falls beyond the Leninist thematic. The working class in which we struggle does not know these questions: massified by the capitalist mode of production proper, transformed by technological change which was introduced by capital with the objective of precisely destroying and defeating the Leninist ‘vanguards’, of ending its organized ‘isolation’, the class in which we struggle presents a totally different composition. The mass worker of today transforms its condition of non-qualified/skilled labourer—which capital has imposed as a sign of a new form of isolation—into the unification of all abstract labour; it transforms its interchangeable condition of its functions into the possibility of intersectoral and territorial mobility in general: and so on.

We shall now ask: taking into account this profound discontinuity of the real referent, can we, besides everything else, identify a continuity in the organized figure of the subversive subject? In the cited essay, Cacciari resolves anew this problem in an intelligent manner, contributing a less correct certain solution. Cacciari maintains that the external and isolated character of the vanguard, which converts into a characteristic of the party, should be defended as a formal and methodological principle in the presence of the contemporary capitalist planning offensive: what’s more, in the contemporary/actuality, the dualism of Leninist organization acquires even more importance since capital as the capacity to anticipate class movements through planning, which is to say, through a massified power of command over the social. As a result of this, Leninism would renew itself in the face of a new capitalist aggression/attack against the unity of the class. In my opinion this point of view is absolutely arguable. If it is correct that today we should identify anew different functions of revolutionary organization within the domain of the mechanism of capitalist domination and its new configuration—this is to say, in the unfolding capitalist initiative to respond to the actions of the mass worker and the
crises provoked by its struggle- it is also true that these functions are invested with a content and direction that are irreducible to the Leninist discourse. “With the growing integration of the masses, and in particular the working class, thanks to the increase of abstract domination in the system extended ever more by abstract labour, there also is an increase in degree of abstraction regarding propaganda and agitation… Where the assumptions which shaped the classical relation between political direction and the masses base have disappeared, propaganda and agitation of the masses must also be organized in a different way.” If today therefore, the necessity of developing vanguard moments within the organized composition of the mass worker is situated at the centre of theoretical interest in organization; if, on the other hand, the mass worker which struggles against a State which produces the crises, against a State that is prepared to destroy wealth as long it dominates the working class, recognizes the urgency that its vanguard leads an action which clearly understands the manifestation of the reaction of the State and attacks it forcefully, in this case, it is necessary to affirm that this vanguard is profoundly different than the one contemplated in the Leninist theoretical tradition, since its basis and potential cannot be socially isolated because it is not confronted by the ‘people’ as a whole and because, also, it distrusts the Planner-State and domination over production, while, on the other hand, given the unity of abstract social labour, it is situated in front of capitalist violence and its capacity of destruction of this unity and of the mode of production itself with the intention of developing on this terrain the maximum degree of violence. The problem, in actuality, is not of establishing within the subject who drives the revolutionary process different degrees of conscience and objective force but try to move as a function of the will of capitalist decomposition of the class with the objective of identifying, in praxis properly speaking, the capacity of direction, leadership and traction of the movement. If you want to impose different functions within a subject who is really unified, really ‘massified’ then we must be absolutely clear: these different functions are not born due to the lack of homogeneity of the class as a response to the dis-homogeniety produced by capital: they do not rise in the popular project of recomposition of development but in the subversive project of destruction. Today the only struggle which makes sense is the one which has a real impact and thus is capable of destroying the relations of violence which capital develops as a proper function of its mechanism of value. We can only attribute distinct functions to the vanguard insofar as it moves directly in the same territory of violence, power and armed potential which capital, itself, has organized and deployed.

Once these initial polemics have been defined we must raise to Lenin essentially what follows: given that Lenin starts from a profoundly different subject than ours, what interest does Leninism have for us today? We will answer this question studying the relation that Leninism establishes between strategy, tactics and organization, with the object/aim of verifying a specific composition of class (which Lenin interprets correctly) and its general laws. We will submit these to practical criticism because only identifying the processes, the leaps, the discontinuities upon which working class thought is obliged to reflect, actually, only starting from this perspective, can we call ourselves Leninists and utilize Leninist models of organization. I do not
think that there exists a more adequate approach to connect the contemporary period with the thought of Lenin.

Translated by Guio Jacinto