

Leonardo Ricci

The Possible Significance of the Student Revolt (1968)

Unpublished typescript retrieved into the collection kept in Casa Studio Ricci. The text was written by Ricci in English, presumably in 1968, when he was living the revolts in the United States.

When, some days ago, I was asked to write this article, I accepted with enthusiasm.

It seemed easy and natural to be able to testify being present as the significant facts of the student revolt in Italy developed.

Knowing well, above all, what is happening In the United States, it seemed simple for me to frame the Italian phenomenon within the vaster context of the international student movement.

The days pass and I continually destroy what I have written.

Not because the elements escape me such that I am not able to determine the problem. I would say the opposite; for knowing too well the phenomenon; for my being too much inside it. Because emotion does not permit me the necessary separation. Because I hear with my ears the screams of the students in



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their many declarations. Because that magnificent tension that they have inside them is near exploding.

Why do I have their excited faces in my eyes? Perhaps I dread seeing one of them beaten or wounded because of too much blood seen in war when I was their age, absurd blood, insane that it is shed in the world today. Because in the many nights spent with them in these last months they reawakened in me the hope of a different world, of a new society.

Hope that I certainly haven't lost, because you cannot lose a thing that you have inside and for which you work.

But hope which you feel closer because finally something stirs, not any more on the individual level, in this sea of conformity and indifference.

Beside the fact that the most banal and convoluted, thinkers talk about, analyze, and compare the facts of these last times in Italy, and the world, it makes felt the nausea of words compared to that which occurs, which is much more beautiful and also cleaner, if it is at the same time confused.

If you try to compose these facts to channel them where they don't want to go confusion results, at times in a more disgraceful manner. Absurd intellectuals and journalists immediately obtain scholarly texts, citing them at random. To the classic names of the theories of Marxism, they add those of Althusser, Marcuse, Svezzy, making in good or bad faith, a frightening confusion. Instead, at this moment, one needs calm nerves; to be simple beings, humans.

Because these misunderstandings can give birth, they can also carry serious consequences. One doesn't need to throw gasoline on the fire, or water either. This internal fire of the young generation has to grow spontaneously to bear new fruits – to burn out of the existing structures all that is horrible, corrupt, and false – to open new ways to a new man no longer exploited, as he was up until today, not only at the economic level, but also and even more so at the psychological level. And perhaps it is in this word itself the key to what I would like to say.

Students are in revolt in various parts of the world. This is a state of fact. Such revolts happen in countries with diverse societies and economics. It is therefore certain that their significance cannot coincide. Those who generalize cannot be but superficial. The student in revolt in the United States cannot have the same motivation as that one in Czechoslovakia. The one in Algiers cannot have the same motivation as the French, Italian, or German student.

There is nonetheless¹ a minimum common denominator; a profound, existential uneasiness² that manifests itself in the desire to knock down existing structures and to open new horizons. That which it signifies is that idealologies³ of the past are obsolete, in all or in part, or at any rate no longer contain direction

1 Mistype: to be replaced with "nonetheless".

2 Mistype: to be replaced with "uneasiness".

3 Mistype: to be replaced with "ideologies".

for resolving the various problems of this historic moment. The gravest phenomena are manifesting themselves in the capitalist or neo-capitalist societies.

To say, therefore, that capitalists or neo-capitalists are in crisis, that they shatter their structures, that the forms of present democracy have shown their limits, their foundations must endure profound change, is only to repeat superficial slogans.

To say that in the socialist societies similar phenomena occur and that, therefore, the errors exist in the fact that the various revisionist forms carry a process of involution of socialism to the point where it takes the liberal form of a neo-capitalist society, is from another point of view, to repeat slogans even more superficial.

The sympathies of the students go to the youngest societies, young at least from the technological point of view.

The names of Mao, Ho Chi Minh, Che Guevara, Castro, are most recurrent⁴. There is in this some romanticism. The exploited, the oppressed, the damned of the earth, those who suffer hunger, they exist where the contradictions are strongest, where the class struggle does not exist or is newly born. All this is natural and logical. In these countries, the methods of traditional struggles have broader perspectives and more precise horizons. But it is perhaps important to investigate the phenomenon wherein the civilization of the machine has been the most advanced and is being substituted by automated⁵ civilization.

A civilization which always assumes more the visage of a scientific civilization would be able to appear objective, beyond ideologies. A wise civilization, not controversial, just in itself.

Meanwhile, inside this civilization which shows itself, there are greater dangers hidden for man.

The passage from a mechanistic civilization to an automatic one brings the consequence of serious alterations in the traditional rapport among classes. If we study in depth the problem of primary activities, secondary and tertiary, to use some classifications still in use, we see rapid changes. To be simpler, instead of speaking in abstract terms, we can make the phenomenon more evident by speaking in terms of class: farmers, workers, and managers.

Of two classes, that is, which produce "plusvalue"⁶ and of one which uses them to its own advantage.

If we hypothesize a rapid transformation from the mechanical to the automated civilization, we arrive at the conclusion, apparently⁷ paradoxical, that the primary and secondary activities and a good part of the tertiary activities,

4 The mistype was corrected by handwritten signs, specifically "recurrent" replaced "recurrant" that was on the typescript.

5 The mistype was corrected by handwritten signs, specifically "automated" replaced "automatic" that was on the typescript.

6 Mistype: to be replaced with "surplus value".

7 Mistype: to be replaced with "apparently".

those which administrate, will be totally absorbed by the machine and by the computers.

There would remain for man only the activity of diverse order that today might be categorized as managerial, intellectual, and creative.

It is that which, in a manner apparently abstract, signifies that the farm class, the workers ("plusvalue"⁸ producers) are today exploited and will be substituted by machines and electronic brains.

Since to exploit machines and mechanical brains does certainly not mean to exploit man, it would appear that we are close to a new harmonious society, bereaved of contradictions, without classes. This would be theoretically possible. But we must give attention to some very grave dangers that could bring irreparable⁹ consequences:

1- Some countries arrive with such strong anticipation of a technological- automatic civilization as to augment in a dangerous manner the existing difference, carrying the contradictions to a point always more explosive. The evils of economic imperialism, today already unbearable, will become monstrous. The very smallest minority in the world would be able to dominate an appalling manner the very large majority. Even Europe would be able, in the shortest time, to decline to the role of a country economically conquered, truly itself colonial, an undeveloped continent.

2 - In the same developed countries, given the most rapid possibility of technological transformation with respect to the possibility of mass education to carry them to the point knowingly and conscientiously necessary for an automated civilization, a profound split between the skilled and unskilled can occur, that is-, between a few people capable of inserting themselves into the new process and those masses thrown out to the fringe of society, lacking every power of diffusion, in the better cases maintained for false charity, obligated to consume the products which an absolute minority with machines and computers serves to them.

In synthesis, a society in which very few orders from far away—invisible¹⁰, impersonal orders transmitted across impersonal means of communication, such that it forces all the others to blindly obey. In certain parts of the world fattened like capons, with their roosterly attributes¹¹ removed. To remove these attributes in our case means to completely remove the conscience of existing. In other words, the possibility to exist, at the same time also the chance to be. Does it always increase psychological exploitation?

It is evident that affirmations this general will need to be substantiated with more precise examples. But it is also evident that he who engages in politics,

8 Mistype: to be replaced with "surplus value".

9 Mistype: to be replaced with "irreparable".

10 Mistype: to be replaced with "invisible".

11 The adverb "roosterly" does not exist. The periphrasis could be "rooster attributes".

and therefore governs the people, needs to be aware of certain phenomena that are taking place. He can not behave as often happens, and as is happening in Italy, ignorantly or as though he were ignorant of what is happening and of the grave dangers which they comprise.

There is therefore, a philosophic gap to fill—an existential void that we in the west, above all in Europe, have to fill up if we do not wish to renounce being participants in the evolution of man and to go under the tow of other countries.

I see in the revolts of the students in Europe and in our particular case in Italy, as¹² the attempt, at times desperate, to fill up this void.

Where will the student movements in Italy burst, as I found in the United States? It was an emotional experience when I had been able to listen to the news on American radio and television and to see images of what was happening in my own country.

It was also emotional because in the United States it is difficult to read or hear anything of Italy. It is spoken of, if you concede¹³ to me a little irony, only when the Pope moves. Three days in Rome and then in Florence. The College was occupied for many days. With obstinance, with determination, that refuted every compromise to didactic orders.

The word of the day was "General Assembly." Not thinking about that which could have happened, of the many dangers innate in that species of unleashed fury, for me as a man, for me as an ordinary professor, this two words¹⁴ give me internal joy.

Perhaps not¹⁵ until¹⁶ now these two words, it was mentioned what "General Assembly" signified, a counterposition¹⁷ to other forms of government.

Someone spoke with great precision of "Direct Democracy." For me the new fact consists in this itself: In these words the explanation of the student movement. In these words, the possibility of the liberation of man from exploitation at the economic level and at the psychological level.

General Assembly in technical terms can mean total decentralization of powers. Expressed in this way, it appears as one of many possible forms of government.

But translated into a lot of money, it signifies liberty, more directly. Finally, liberty for man. Because up until today even in the most open democracies man has been only able only to entrust his own decisional powers to others.

In fact, actual democracy permits us to cast a vote freely now and then, but among categories already fixed. Through the vote, we entrust to others the

12 The preposition "as" was added by following handwritten signs on the typescript.

13 Mistype: to be replaced with "concede".

14 "This two words" were added by following handwritten signs on the typescript, but it should be corrected with "These two words".

15 The adverb "not" was added by following handwritten signs on the typescript.

16 "now these two words" were erased by handwritten signs on the typescript.

17 Mistype: to be replaced with "counter position".

decisional power of our existence, even of our biological life. From that moment we are obligated to stir – even against our own conscience.

Certainly after Nazism and Fascism the word democracy rings as the unique possibility for liberty for every person. But the facts that transpired after the second World War brought us very near the threshold of a third atomic World War, events that include destruction, massacres, carnages which we are not able to define as barbaric, to us demonstrate that an advancement has to be made.

Only when man, in the gambit of the General Assembly will be able to find his space, not that which others want to give to him to express his own powers of decision at almost any level, to make his own choices, only then will we be considered free. There is a long road to be traversed if “General Assembly” is to be truly effective in bringing about a degree of elevated knowledge, of maturity, and considerable culture. Above all, of love; I should say a new love.

A free love¹⁸ free from fixed rules, dynamic and always self-renewing, which includes everyone relating to the same destiny, participates in the same adventure, in the same human condition.

Perhaps to implement the “General Assembly,” not only in the ambient of the university, where it is planned and produced, but in governments, in communities, in factories, will require many stages of development.

But the fact that the students aspire to this is the thing which each man of culture must not only like, but for this also must work with all his might, to take all the guaranteed opportunities.

Then, if it is thought that this necessity and this demand is actually born in the university, where it must be at the maximum cognitive and cultural level, any impulse which is too cautious signifies one of two things: either the caution masquerades¹⁹ the desire to maintain definite privileges for those who exercise it in an autocratic way, or it²⁰ hides a completely obsolete cultural and political level which is out of date.

Certainly the “General Assembly” is not a thing that is conquered. A certain process occurs. Therefore, it must be experimental. But what would it mean to permit experimentation in the university environment unless you experiment, above all, with²¹ a new conception of the operation of the university?

I desire now to express my thoughts on three points: the Italian²² student movement in relation to the Italian political scene, the student movement in the College of Architecture, and in particular in that of the University of Florence.

I write this article on the day in which we vote in Italy. Personally, I don't anticipate great changes which will completely alter the political axis. Perhaps a total

18 “free” was erased by handwritten signs on the typescript.

19 The mistype in the typescript was corrected by handwritten signs.

20 The pronoun “it ” was added by handwritten signs on the typescript.

21 The preposition “with” was erased by handwritten signs on the typescript.

22 The capital letter of the adjective “Italian” was added by handwritten signs on the typescript.

slight alteration toward the left of the electorate, a certain inclusive number of blank or voided ballots that stand to demonstrate the tension of protest in the new generation.

If my foresight is accurate, the Italian political scene is the following: absolutely improbable is an involution of the right which would run the danger of a coup d'état²³ of fascists or of the common public. Just having come out from under a dictatorship the Italian democratic conscience has already demonstrated that no possible attempt in this sense can possibly succeed.

Foreseeable then is a government of the center left which does not have the capacity for profound reform, immobile, in each case too²⁴ slow to²⁵ maintain a²⁶ pace equal to speed of technological transformation.

A Communist party, strong but incapable of effecting opposition therefore hopes to create a dialogue with the Catholics in order to be able to enter into the government, is stopped by a vein of revisionism, is suspended in the theoretical and practical sense from actual technological change.

What is²⁷ the outlook, when a social democracy that is able to carry an appearance of well-being largely diffused, dedicated more to technological progress itself than to a political desire, but in each case, is²⁸ incapable of eliminating or diminishing the basic contradictions that become more serious. Above all incapable of laying the base of a new society, because it is incapable of planning a new structural organization of humane activity.

What is the political sense, then, of another student movement, limited in number, as this one, still incapable of a direct and profound union with the working class?

To many it may seem an impulsive position. A gust of anarchic rebellion that, after the election, a turn of the screw can suffocate any trace. In any case, it is a movement without political perspective.

For many reasons I am not pessimistic. First of all, the student movement has collected together the leftist forces of all the parties. It remains significant that at least at the conscious level they can exercise on the parties critical action so as to introduce a new tension toward new objectives.

In the second place, the movement has gathered, is gathering at the present time and will gather itself those forces of²⁹ progressive intellectual forces³⁰ who have not had political opportunity and have been obliged to remain outside of the parties, in fearful solitude, obliged to utopia, not able to directly influence the

23 Mistype: to be replaced with "coup d'état".

24 The addition of the second vocal "o" was added by handwritten signs on the typescript.

25 The strikethrough of the second vocal "o" was added by handwritten signs on the typescript.

26 The article "a" replaced "the" of the typescript.

27 "What is" replaced the adverb "how" presented in the typescript.

28 The verb "is" was added by handwritten signs on the typescript.

29 "Forces of" was added by handwritten signs on the typescript.

30 The word "forces" was erased by handwritten signs on the typescript.

living flesh of society. Perhaps they will be able to unite amongst themselves to set forth a political-cultural action more concrete and effective.

In the third place, we must not forget that the great mass of students do not come from working class backgrounds, but from the bourgeois. At times students, whoever they are (and the reactionaries ironically calling these students "pseudo-revolutionaries")³¹ must pay for the revolution with allowances from home.

But they forget that these students that come from a privileged class and who revolt against this structure in a manner always increase³² and in a few years will comprise the ruling class.

A new ruling class, not exploiters³³, one with new objectives, new hopes, and above all, a new conscience and³⁴ political determination.

Life is³⁵ pushing the young to the limits of anarchy and to destruction for destruction sake; to violence for the sake of violence.

It must be asked, therefore, who claims this responsibility. Certainly it could be to assigned³⁶ to those who attempt to structure these new forces, with the mirage of powerful positions of different types, looking to corrupt and prostitute themselves. I don't believe it. It is certainly not My wish and not the wish of anyone. Living in the midst of this new generation, I realize that they are not the same as those already grown during previous³⁷ economic booms, easily structured in good or bad faith by various, false, and artificial paradises of the consumer society.

These generations have a tension that in one way or the other, according to the different historic circumstances, will find there a precise political and operative arrangement.

Of the rest other results are already notable if also indirect. It will suffice to think of the influence that they have exercised on the working class in Italy and above all in France. I would not be able to imagine certain forms of chain reaction³⁸ strikes as are developing today in France if the student movement had not ventured to oppose the actual existing structures, if it had not introduced in the working class, a new hope and also a new courage, if with their deeds they had not shown to the working men horizons more vast than the limited and narrow ones³⁹ at the economic-salary levels of⁴⁰ the corporate⁴¹ character.

31 Here Ricci erased the conjunction "that" with handwritten signs on the typescript.

32 The verb "increase" replaces "grow" that was in the typescript.

33 Mistype: to be replaced with "exploiters".

34 The conjunction "and" was added by handwritten signs on the typescript.

35 The verb "is" was added by handwritten signs on the typescript.

36 The verb tense was corrected by handwritten signs on the typescript.

37 The adjective "previous" replaced "various" in the typescript.

38 Here Ricci erased the words "Wild cat" between brackets on the typescript.

39 The pronoun "ones" was added by handwritten signs on the typescript.

40 The preposition "of" replaced "at" in the typescript.

41 The word "corporate" replaced "corporations" in the typescript.

I now attempt⁴² to put in relationship, the student movement with the university. The university in every part of the world is in crisis. The reasons are well known and useless to repeat.

Largely, the crisis of the university can be summed up in the following term.

The incapacity of the university structure to rise to the process of transformation from the university of the elite to a⁴³ university of the masses.

The incapacity of the university structure to pass from a teaching national-academic-worldly-passive to humanistic-idealistic characteristics of⁴⁴ teaching living, dynamic, active, adapted to a civilization in rapid technological transformation.

The incapacity to synthesize and to fuse the problems of culture with those of politics as if culture and politics are able to live in two zones, separate from each other; in two closed worlds without the possibility of osmosis.

The incapacity to divert the productive forces from the country to impede the forces of industry or bureaucracy structure the university and force upon it an academic role.

For each of these aspects, it would necessitate long and specific treatment. In the scope of this article, I am able to make only a few assertions of a general order.

A university must give the possibility of access for all. The direction of study suggests how urgent is the problem. A profound reform occurs in the long run in the elementary schools. A modern university must permit interdisciplinary activity. The concept of faculty is total surpassed. A new articulation will pervade⁴⁵ a minimal functional unity of specialization regrouped in departments. The university needs to be autonomous to permit the experimentation of new methods and new techniques. The university needs laboratories and a medium of scientific research. Finally, and above all, the university must be only a technocratic instrument, but it must permit open cultural-political debate.

For many reasons, the Faculty of Architecture problem is still more delicate. Given its young age with⁴⁶ respect to the others presents negative and positive aspects.

The negative consists above all in the structure which still resents in part the transformation of the "Academia" into the university, from this origin to a school too diverse⁴⁷, of enormous growth which has taken place in the recent years.

The positive aspects in the fact that the College of Architecture, is dealing with architectonic and urbanistic problems is culturally and politically engaged more

42 "I now attempt to" replaced "I do now to" in the typescript.

43 The article "a" was added by handwritten signs on the typescript.

44 The preposition "of" replaced "to a" in the typescript.

45 Mistype corrected by handwritten signs: "prevade" was replaced by "pervade".

46 The preposition "with" replaced "in" that was in the typescript.

47 The sentence partially replaced and corrected in the typescript was "from this origin of school too diverse".

strongly with the other colleges. The fact that in the College of Architecture, the student movements are more violent does not indicate only the necessity for reform in respect to other more consolidated colleges, as they wish to believe, but suggests a major politicalization⁴⁸, a major desire on the part of the students not to become only technocrats⁴⁹, easily manipulated by the technocratic society of consumers.

A profound and specific examination of the necessity to change College of Architecture is not possible within the scope of this article. I am able to say one thing. The image of the Architect is changing, and must always change. He can no longer⁵⁰ serve the dictates of a private client who manipulates him or is manipulated by him.

The image of the architect must be one that offers social service to the collective society and in view of which he must be prepared. But because this happens the structure must be completely changed. In our profession the theoretical research is limited to a small percentage. All the rest is⁵¹ applied research. And for applied research, laboratories are necessary for the possibility to experiment.

But our laboratories do not consist only of places that contain specific equipment⁵² and our experiences do not consist only⁵³ of testing new materials.

We have the need to create new alternative models at the urban scale and at the architectonic scale.

Therefore, we must replace an obsolete urban morphology and⁵⁴ architectonic method because they pertain to obsolete society with new models that permit a new way of life in a new society.

For this to happen it is necessary that the College of Architecture call for an increase of concrete activities in service to society.

At this level of projection, from territorial assets to that of habitat, the College of Architecture will be able to contribute to society at all levels, free from internal pressures, not structured.

In the meantime, the College of Architecture of Florence; through the scope of its experimentation, is in a sense a "General Assembly".

Certainly this year it will be difficult to arrive at precise results and effects such as to document advantages of the new structure. But if, as I hope, in the next legislature, the Reform University will not be understood in the narrow and limited sense of some irrelevant modification of didactic laws, but will give ample breath to the autonomy and to the liberty of experimentation, including that of

48 Mistype: to be replaced with "politicization".

49 Mistype: to be replaced with "technocrats".

50 Mistype: to be replaced with "no longer".

51 The verb "is" replaced "goes to" in the typescript.

52 The word "equipment" was added by handwritten signs, in the typescript "machines" appeared.

53 The verb "of testing new" was added by handwritten signs, in the typescript "to test" appeared.

54 The conjunction "and" was added by handwritten signs on the typescript.

the General Assembly as a self-governing body, will give the means, not only economic and structural, to be able to experiment in the⁵⁵ abstract, but to experiment in the concrete touching with social reality. Then we will be able truly to say the university is awakening⁵⁶ from its long academic dream and is becoming strongly alive and working for a new society.

55 The article "the" was added by handwritten signs on the typescript.

56 The verb "awakening" was added by handwritten signs, "developing" appeared in the typescript.