

Non-conventional conflict and psychological warfare in the 1968 student movement

We will use the approach developed by Vittoriofranco Pisano and the French school of psychological warfare in our attempt to methodologically contextualize the operative methods of the 1968 student movement, while noting that the explanation developed by these authors provides an efficacious key to the reading of both the operative methods of the 1968 student movement and the ends pursued by such movement. The analysis of Vittoriofranco Pisano provides a theoretical picture of the protean form of the new conflicts under the name of *low-intensity non-conventional conflict*. This arises when two or more players – nations or otherwise – pursue subversive or violent ends without adopting either the rules of representative democracy or those of conventional warfare. In particular, low-intensity non-conventional conflict is developed through subversive agitation, terrorism, insurgency, civil war, revolution, coup d'état, the formation of clandestine or semi-clandestine networks, and disinformation. For our limited purposes, only a few of these key concepts will be required for a methodological classification of the 1968 student movement.

The first method adopted by this movement was certainly **subversive agitation**, enacted by people belonging to political parties, parliamentary or extra-parliamentary movements for the purpose of achieving political and ideological objectives through the use of disinformation, the instigation of civil disobedience, passive resistance, the illegal occupation of property, acts of vandalism, the infiltration of peaceful demonstrations with the intention of triggering violence or the infiltration of national or other structures, and lastly, the use of media tools for psychological warfare. The ideological context that nourishes subversive agitation can be inspired – according to Pisano – by Marxism-Leninism or anarchy.

Insurgency can follow subversive agitation and requires the partial or total control of a nation's territory and the resources through the use of illegal political organizations and paramilitary forces. Insurgency naturally entails armed conflict and above all implies a significant amount of operative planning to be implemented through urban guerilla warfare.

The **constitution of networks** aims at the erosion of individual states and even at geopolitical level. The case histories indicated by Pisano include fighting communist parties, the multinational activities of Soccorso Rosso, and various sympathy groups.

Disinformation is more a part of the wider context of pw because it aims at an alteration of the facts, the falsification of significant documents, the use of agents of influence, the release of underground news, and the creation of organizations to be used as fronts. Its impact on public opinion – Pisano notes – can most certainly be deleterious. The reflections of French strategist Loup Francart and the French school of pw on the whole are particularly relevant in regard to the concept of disinformation and a better understanding of the operative methods of non-conventional warfare in the context of the antagonist movements that claimed public attention in the period around 1968.

In his essay *La Guerre du sens* (Economica 2000), the French expert contextualized disinformation as it regards mass information, observing it to be implemented through contributions from various subjects whose ends could only be propaganda and subversion. More specifically, disinformation aims at identifying our weaknesses and errors through proven manipulation techniques such as: 1) the negation of an item of information or part of it; 2) the denial of an item of real information; 3) omission; 4) compression; 5) the discrediting of facts and/or intentions; 6) the accrediting of false information. *Propaganda*, which aims at influencing the masses through the imposition of a monolithic view of reality while maintaining as its primary objective the weakening of the

adversary while reinforcing its own real or potential allies, is certainly closely linked to disinformation. Totalitarian propaganda has been historically proven to be particularly effective in its ideation of a new form of man, its use of specific themes (such as anti-Semitism, for example), its exploitation of semantic support of special symbolic value (such as evocative symbols, slogans, and watchwords), and techniques of manipulation that include simplification, insinuation, the frequent use of authoritative reasoning, the isolation of the adversary, and the creation of scapegoats. It is usually accompanied by *indoctrination*, which acts on habits and behavior in the attempt to impose its vision of reality to achieve psychological submission through ideology for the purpose of creating a new order through fanatical and widespread proselytism and may even end up in psychical or physical imprisonment. The next step is *subversion*, which is implemented through precise phases: the crystallization of discontent and the intimidation and agitation of the masses, followed by their militarization. There is no doubt – the Author notes – that in its entirety, subversion is a part of indirect strategy, and therefore one of the weapons used by the weak, and the cultural subversion aims initially at dissolving social bonds and consensus through moral and psychological destruction and subsequently at imposing a different order on society. In the political sphere, subversion attempts to paralyze public life, while at social level it is expressed through the formation of armed groups composed in parallel structures oriented at insurrection.

Another significant approach begins from the reflections of *Christian Harbulot*, the Director of the **École du guerre économique**. The French school, unlike the American or Chinese schools, uses the expression “*war of cognition*” to indicate the polemical use of knowledge and awareness. The disciplines embraced include psychology, sociology, linguistics, and information science, while from the historical point of view, its most significant predecessors include Sun Tzu, Mao, the Comintern and Churchill. Modern theoreticians in the French school include the analysts *Mucchielli* (with his essay entitled *La Subversion*, CLC, 1976), *Geré* (with his book *La guerre psychologique*, Economica, 1999) and naturally, *Harbulot*, are considered the most authoritative representatives.

In strictly historical terms, the genesis of the war of cognition can be traced back to the thought of Chassin, Blanc, and above all, Larechoy, Nemo, and Trinquier following the war in Indochina and the extended conflict in Algeria. As regards the strictly doctrinal dimension of the cognitive warfare and in light of Harbulot’s interpretation, both pw and information warfare presuppose the planned and systematic use of intoxication, disinformation and propaganda, or in other words, the use of techniques finalized to discredit or neutralize the adversary through the manipulation of information. The use of information technology and the mass media has unquestionably amplified the effect and impact of cognitive warfare. Arising independently of Harbulot’s approach, the reflections of *Roger Mucchielli* and *Loup Francart* on subversion provide a contribution of undoubted relevance to our attempt to rationally understand the operative methods of the antagonist movements of the period around 1968. According to the French social psychologist *Mucchielli*, in order to be implemented, subversion requires determined objective conditions similar to those of traditional popular revolts, even if the construction of a *pars costruens* is not necessarily implied in its enactment. Subversion is preparatory to the seizing of power, as is shown by the frequent resort to verbal violence by subversion in preparation for physical violence. In particular, subversion acts on public opinion through both the demoralization of the nation for the destruction of the cohesion of its social groups and the discrediting of the authorities and the neutralization of the masses in order to obstruct any form of reaction by instilling apathy and inhibition. The vision of reality that subversion creates is substantially Manichean and is so radical that it transforms the illegal violence it fosters into legitimate and necessary violence. In this sense, the Author cites the justification used

by Sartre, Marcuse, and Foucault on the legitimacy of revolutionary violence. If the press is an effective medium to be used for the widespread penetration of subversion requests, the specific techniques employed to delegitimize the adversary, such as the instrumentalization of the adversary's mistake to one's own advantage, fostering an oppressive and illegitimate image of the state and society as opposed to another socio-political organization, for example, are equally relevant. In Francart's opinion, subversion acts as a general infection with the objective of seizing power through its corrosion of the authorities. Francart re-interprets subversion indirect procedures in the light of Liddle Hart's view that positions indirect strategy alongside traditional strategy. In any case, for both Francart and Mucchielli, subversion takes place through the demoralization and neutralization of civil society by passing through determined phases such as the cultural subversion that attacks society's values, political subversion that demystifies the image of power, and social subversion that avails of the use of violence and the formation of parallel structures.

Geographical extension

There is no doubt that the 1968 student movement had a global dimension such to involve Europe and North and South America, as well as Eastern Europe (e.g. Yugoslavia). Above and beyond the specific circumstances of each nation, as observed by Arendt (even while bearing in mind the pertinent observations made by *Aron* and *Bauman* on the ideological diversity in the Eastern and Western student movements), the student revolt had worldwide significance. The existence of an evident similarity in the shared non-violent actions employed in this non-conventional conflict demonstrates the existence of a common substrate that does not – as observed by *Gerlach* – contrast with the movement's polycentric and reticular nature.

Overcoming traditional geopolitical logic

One of the constant that emerges with greater clarity from a comparative study of the various movements is undoubtedly their explicit refusal of typical geopolitical logic –e.g. the reflections of *Carmichael* and the anti-NATO slogans in Italy or the desire to extend the conflict in Vietnam around the world.

Diversity

One evident consequence of overcoming strictly national logic (such as the glorification of armed struggle in the Third World interpreted as another manifestation of the West) certainly drove more than a few movement leaders to radically criticize Western political systems and praise those of the Third World.

Anti-nationalism

Anti-nationalism was unquestionably widespread and generated by the following causes:

- a) the degeneration of nationalism into Fascism and Nazism;
- b) the fact that nationalism was a relevant ideology for determined institutions (such as political and military institutions);
- c) the fact that nationalism was an important instrument in legitimizing consensus;
- d) the fact that nationalism was undeniably responsible for instances of genocide;

Localism

The refusal of nationalism had the following consequences:

- a) elegies to independence and separatism (from the Barbagia mobilization to Ulster);
- b) the rediscovery of local dialects;
- c) the firm defense of local autonomy against centralized logic.

The generational orientation

The expression refers to the younger age of the activists (between 16 and 30) who made:

- 1) a rebellion against political authority interpreted as illegitimate and based on lies (an opposition that was not original in any way because it was mediated more or less consciously by the European and American anarchist movements) in contrast to praise for other types of democratic rule (the Paris Commune) with the use of:
 - a) irreverence towards traditions;
 - b) the element of playfulness brought to protest;
 - c) verbal violence;
 - d) intimidation and physical violence.
- 2) a protest against the alienating mechanics of the reality that programmed people's lives;
- 3) ferocious criticism of the need to conform to reality.

They also stressed the need for areas of autonomy (such as communes, reserved neighborhoods), here as well recalling the anarchist experiments, also through the use of extremist methods such as subversive agitation.

Naturally enough, they were aware of the absolute need to refuse any form of integration or use of the logic of consumerism, as they were also conscious of the usefulness of evoking the past by praising the IWW workers union, the Spanish anarchist movement, the Nazi Resistance,

spontaneous uprising, and the wisdom of adopting new graphic, musical and cinematographic forms of expression.

Criticizing training and education institutes

The refusal of training and education institutes began with:

1. the glorification of the political movement against bureaucratic obstructionism at such institutes;
2. the defense of mass education institutes as instruments of emancipation;
3. the refusal that the university could become an integrated part of society;
4. the refusal of preference on the basis of social class;
5. the idea that only an alternative education might really emancipate an individual;
6. the refusal of asymmetry between teacher and student;
7. the creation of a highly politicized and intolerant cadre school;
8. the scrapping of old university institutions (the Italian Goliard Student Movement);
9. the refusal of traditional examination methods;
10. the progressive dissolution of the barriers between town and gown (the world at large and the university);
11. the refusal of the antiquated curricula that had little concern with current reality;
12. the use of the political–cultural debate inside high-school and university classrooms;
13. the defense of collective self-teaching practices;
14. the refusal of lessons by pontificating professors;
15. the awareness of the impossibility for knowledge to be neutral;
16. the usefulness of occupying classrooms with the operative methods of subversive agitation;
17. a radical refusal of authoritarian indoctrination;
18. the awareness of being an autonomous subject – such as a student mass – and the bearer of specific needs (in Italy through a strategy of alliances in the manner of the Third International Column) as demonstrated by documents from the University of Trento and thesis at the Sapienza University in Rome;
19. the desire to transform the student into a revolutionary activist required to oppose capitalism at educational and training institute level;
20. the need to overthrow the teacher through progressive operative methods ranging from non-violent to violent action;
21. the awareness accrued – only subsequently – of the irrelevancy of education as a vehicle of the revolution;
22. the urgency to structurally modify and not merely reform educational institutes;
23. the need to achieve real egalitarianism as opposed to the fictitious selection of “countercourses” through a critical education and a new political foundation of a leftwing movement further to the left of the one in parliament;
24. the need to closely link knowledge with political action in order to achieve real awareness.

In fact, beyond the ephemeral dimension of many alternative proposals – starting with “countercourses” – the training and education institutes became a springboard for a new politic

protagonism that culminated in extra-parliamentary practices, terrorism and traditional political institutions. Moreover, these institutes were the perfect place to overcome political, social, economic and military institutions, through a reeducation characterized by intolerance and political fanaticism.

Alternative and critical knowledge

What new content emerged from the 1968 student movement?

First of all, the internationalization of ideas was one of the most evident characteristics, which was at least as evident as the innovation in the forms of internationalization itself. We refer to paperback and economic, pocket-sized books that gave students access to the classics in humanities and philosophy and created an authentic industry of culture that also documented the movement itself in confirmation of the natural capacity to transform any cultural goods into a product. This knowledge led to the criticism of the totem-book (which was the fruit of the blind assimilation of the Chinese Cultural revolution), a view that would reveal itself self-contradictory in the moment foundations were laid for the fetishism of Marxist, Stalinist, Maoist, and Che Guevara's texts that eventually reached the level of a political-cultural fundamentalism that pronounced the only real culture to be leftist culture.

Secondly, the emphasis posed on the importance of political activity was soon transformed into a totally and profoundly intolerant politicization. Thirdly, the movement could not accept cultural inequality or accept the utilization of knowledge as an instrument in the hands of power (and political, economic and military power in particular). Fourth of all, the movement preached that the aggregate of knowledge was addressed to the repression and containment of dissent. In fifth place, the need to create alternative spaces proceeded hand in hand with the conviction that the institutions would have soon re-absorbed antagonism. Sixth of all, the refusal to believe in the neutrality of knowledge (determined by the belief that objectivity masked slavery to power) led the movement first to a politicization of science and then to the negation of its avowed objectivity. In seventh place, the 1968 student movement led to the popularity of the intellectual who was mercilessly critical of institutions, at pains of being considered not intellectual at all but merely a lackey of the system. Eighth of all, the socialization of knowledge – the glorification of the community above all – led to a fanatical criticism of individual effort as being dangerously bourgeoisie. Ninth of all, the use of anti-psychiatry and reinterpreted psychoanalysis permitted the movement to destroy the identity of the ego (which was conceived as being solely fictitious) and declare the line between normality and pathology unclear, to culturally and politically re-assess psychic folly, validate alternative anti-monogamous sexual practices (unmasking false institutions such as matrimony) in the process and bring into the political arena sexuality with all its centrality in changing the world (the increase in foul language was finalized to unmasking the bigoted hypocrisy of bourgeoisie culture, even if it soon became a purely vulgar end in itself). Tenth of all, the movement was hoping for a radical renewal of humanity inspired by Socialist utopia, libertarian Socialism, and Maoist Leninist Socialism, the Socialism of Castro and Che Guevara. Eleventh of all, these plans for a new order were historically unoriginal, given that the 1968 student movement repeated and/or reprocessed aspects of early Christianity, European anarchy of the 1600s and 1800s, Utopian Socialism, and the agendas of the English Levelers.

Parliamentary democracy was a re-edition of anarchical and community logic that soon changed into either leader-oriented authoritarianism or the ferocious opposition of points of view that rendered the achievement of shared conclusions impossible. Above all, parliamentary democracy – democracy in name only (as *Rostagno* observes) – provided an excellent launching pad and training ground for radiant political careers of the future (above and beyond the intellectual mystifications of *Touraine* and *Morin*). Twelfth of all, the movement structure – a structure that anticipated today's current anti-global movements – was a reticular structure.

The role of political parties

Generally speaking, the movement always manifested a highly critical position in regard to the political parties, which were seen as instruments of dominion and/or indoctrination that served to consolidate conformism and the subjugation to the rules of the dominating system.

On the other hand, the political party system – in most cases – accepted the reasons and operative methods of the student protest movement with hostility, to which the movement replied by constructively creating alternative media (e.g. the Liberation News Service or the New England Free Press) which especially in the USA vaunted a solid tradition and were inspired by semiotic theories of Dadaism, Futurism, and Surrealism. At the level of operative method, opposition took form also through economic boycott or illegal occupation (see the action typical of subversive agitation taken by the German SDS against *Springer*), through the creation of 16 mm films and documentaries on the demonstrations, the establishment of independent cinema networks or portable tape recorder networks up to the use of linguistic spontaneity fare from the artifices of official demagogy. In short, the other characteristics of the new experimentation took place through:

- 1) the use of debates after showing;
- 2) the use of kitsch and pop culture;
- 3) the use of transgressive and foul mouthed anti-bourgeoisie terminology;
- 4) the creation of cinematographic productions of collective nature inspired by the thought of *Vertov* and *Brecht*;
- 5) the use of the film-documentary (such as *La reprise du travail aux usines Wonder*, dated June '68);
- 6) the use of essay films (like *La hora de los hornos*);
- 7) parodies of video clips.

In the end, the movement promoted counter-information intentionally construed as counter-information warfare or – in our terminology – psychological warfare that was soon absorbed by the dominant culture (e.g. sexual transgression became pornography).

Opposition to the system

Opposition to the system was supposed to be permanent (as emphasized by *Dutschke*) and as indicated by *Mao*, and consisted in the alternation of techniques of non-violent action (promoted by Thoreau and Gandhi) with more frequent – especially today – subversive agitation.

In this regard, the refusal to engage in conventional warfare – interpreted as a typical manifestation of Imperialism – was accompanied by the glorification (and practice) of the guerilla warfare practiced by Mao and Che Guevara. The condemnation of military institutions and technocracy was always so resolute and radical (at least as much as the anti-Americanism and the refusal of political realism as an interpretative underpinning of historical reality) as to permit its definition as radical anti-militarism. One of the most evident consequences is the theoretical opposition between the historical world connoted by opposition and authoritarianism and a revolutionary reality that often finds its preferred interlocutor in the Third World. On the other hand, politicization brought the activist to label any demonstration of thought or action as belonging to either the right or the left. Ideologically speaking, above and beyond the differences between Anglo-American antagonism and the new French, Italian, and German Left, Socialism (in all its forms, from authoritarian to libertarian) and anarchy (from the European to American anarchy) were undoubtedly the unavoidable historical points of reference. The relationship with Communist parties and trade unions alternated between suspicion and collaboration. The historically unjustified use of the specific category Fascism to describe all conservative cultural phenomena was one of the consequences of a fanatically politicized interpretation of history that was often incapable of distinguishing between various types of political system (in Italy, for example, describing the various Christian Democrat governments as Fascist as certain Latin American regimes). This uninhibited and fallacious use of historical categories, among other things, is another characteristic of the anti-global movement.

The demonization of the adversary (the politician, the particularly scorn law enforcement agencies, the non-progressive magistracy) was one of the most commonly used ideological procedures, and as common as the obsessive fear of imminent military takeover and the use of hind-sightedness that perceived hidden powers (the secret services, in particular) as the root of all evil.

Equally radical will be the refusal of representative democracy and the political party, against which the operative methods will be the alternation of direct action with steady attrition in alternation with violent revolution seen as a feasible objective thanks to which a new society and a new man might emerge (in this regard, how can the millenary dimension of this hope be denied?).

How can the role of violence interpreted alternatively as an instrument of attack or defense against repression by law enforcement agencies be ignored? How can the use of urban guerilla warfare in May 1968 in Paris that was to lead to an overall insurrection be under-estimated? At the end of 1968, military degeneration laid the basis – in both America and Europe – for armed struggle already present in the ideology of the movement. In this regard, the demonization of the law enforcement agencies was at least as radical as the feeling against NATO, which was perceived as the armed force of US Imperialism in Europe and therefore in accordance with Cold War propaganda (in the Soviet approach). Pan-politics – another characteristic of the 1968 student

movement – led to the extreme politicization of the lawyers, magistracy, and the police. Alongside the mythicizing of the guerilla and guerilla warfare (from Villa to Che Guevara, from Fanon to the Vietnamese), the factory worker and the factory were instrumentally deified to enhance the revolutionary function, as was the student with whom the worker was supposed to ally in the revolution. This was nothing but indoctrination used to turn the worker against the local factory owner and the capitalist system in its entirety, which was seen as the cradle of all evil, an economic system already considered similarly in the Socialist and Marxist tradition. Such evil had multiple faces, which included the prisons and the mental asylums which could not be accepted (the reformist approach was too emphatically bourgeoisie to be shared) and were as unacceptable as the military system (recovering the tired old values of anarchism and pacifism). The movement identified other potential revolutionaries, these outcasts in the prisons and mental hospitals.

Another aspect, far from being marginal, was the creation of communes in which this *modus vivendi* so unlike that of correct society could be freely experimented, an authentic lifestyle that could also imply the absence of violent opposition or the presence of passive resistance, and even the non-participation in the dominant society. In short, these self-managed communities were planned inside existing institutions (factories, universities, cities) or outside on the basis of experience gained by *Fourier* and *Proudhon* before finally reaching the political-religious communities of the New Age.

Conclusion

Despite the various experiments, the rebirth inside the movement of more or less organized political groups invalidates both the utopian alternative proposed and the reassertion of the division between the intellectuals and the people. The antagonism between non-violent action and subversive agitation that had amply distinguished the entire movement was eventually turned in favor of armed struggle. The need to go beyond fictitious democracy – representative democracy, in other words – was transformed into the creation of highly centered and structured groups (such as the terrorist groups of the RAF and BR). The persistence in Italy of this movement alternates between connivance and the superficiality of the political class and trade union power invalidate the excellent intelligence work performed by the Reserved Affairs Office (through first the DIGOS then the UCIGOS) and the Defense Ministry (from the Corps to the SID). In this regard, it is sufficient to recall the reaction of a large part of the Italian political class, which was incapable of understanding the real importance of the movement in terms of the stability of the institutions and public order despite the report submitted by Prefect *Mazza* who had clearly understood – as *Miglio*, *Romeo*, *Montanelli* and *Matteucci* in Italy and *Aron* in France had understood – the subversive drift of the movement and its explicit legitimization and coverage by certain university professors and intellectuals.

Giuseppe Gagliano

CESTUDEC President

(Centro Studi Strategici Carlo De Cristoforis)

Bibliography

Non-conventional conflict

Pisano V., *Lineamenti di sicurezza e di intelligence nel mondo contemporaneo*, LUNIG, 2008

Psychological and cognitive warfare in French strategy

Beaufre A., *La guerre révolutionnaire*, Fayard, 1972

Francart L., *La guerre du sens*, Economica, 2000

Géré F., *La guerre psychologique*, Economica, 1997

Harbulot C., *La guerre cognitive*, Lavauzelle, 2002

Lucas D. – Tiffreau A., *Guerre économique et information*, Ellipses, 2001

Mucchielli R., *La subversion*, C.L.C., nouvelle ed. revue et remise à jour, 1976

The 1968 and 1977 Student Movements

A.V., *Una sparatoria tranquilla*, Odradek, 1997

A.V., *Settantasette*, Derive e approdi, 1997

Balestrini N. - Moroni P., *L'orda d'oro*, Feltrinelli, 1988

Beretta R., *Il lungo autunno*, Rizzoli, 1998

Bernocchi P., *Dal '77 in poi*, Massari, 1997

Bernocchi P., *Per una critica del '68*, Massari, 1998

Capanna M., *Formidabili quegli anni*, Rizzoli, 1994

Curcio R., *Si allontanavano alla spicciolata*, Sellerio, 1996

De Martino - Crispigni, *Mondo Beat*, Castelvevchi, 1997

Dongo A. - Monti G., *Dizionario del '68*, Editori Riuniti, 1998

Fo J. - Parisi S., *'68*, Feltrinelli, 2000

Ginsborg P., *Storia d'Italia dal dopoguerra ad oggi*, Einaudi, 1989

Grandi A., *Storie di Potere Operaio*, Einaudi, 2003

Niccolai R., *Quando la Cina era vicina*, Bfs, 1998

Ortoleva P., *I movimenti del '68 in Europa e in America*, Editori Riuniti, 1998

Pardi P., *La controcultura giovanile*, Xenia, 1997

Salaris C., *Il movimento del Settantasette*, A.V. ed., 1994

Vettori G., *La sinistra extraparlamentare in Italia*, Newton Compton, 1973