

“The Bogeyman”

The Story of a Political Soldier and Elements for the Sociology of Terrorism

Ero fanatico, ubriaco fradicio di politica.¹

Pierluigi Concutelli, Io, l'uomo nero²

The story of former neo-Fascist terrorist Pierluigi Concutelli has attracted attention on account of his recently published memoirs, although his was already the sort of household name that could not be uttered without evoking feelings of horror. In Italy's terrorist nebula of the 1970s, he is a secondary figure, cited exclusively in connection with the assassination of the judge Vittorio Occorsio,³ which he carried out as a chief operative of the network of the sulfurous neo-Nazi partisan Stefano Delle Chiaie.⁴

It was not until after he was meted out a life sentence for the judge's murder that he acquired a sinister fame as an implacable jail executioner—i.e., one of those lifers with nothing to lose, who could be counted on to silence “problematic” criminals within the prison walls. Two such incarcerated Fascists, one of whom was implicated in a key bombing episode and was allegedly willing “to squeal,” were “casually” transferred to Concutelli's detention place, where he strangled them to death with shoe laces, one in 1981 and the other 1982.⁵

Concutelli matters, for his vicissitudes not only afford a glimpse into the abyss but also shed light on the very trajectory that leads what “in the beginning” seem fully socialized and “normal” people into the most recondite zones of violent transgression. After retracing the biographical stages of Concutelli’s political engagement, this article draws on these experiences to sketch out a general outline of the psycho-sociological profile of terrorism’s gestational field. In sum, the findings are that, psychologically, the subject is from a green age possessed of a *monastic* yearning, which, coupled with the fascination for weapons and the “seduction” of violence, conceals more often than not a thirst for self-annihilation. Sociologically, terrorist militancy of any color appears to follow a *gradual* “decivilizing” process in which the eventual dissolution of the zealot’s original grassroots organization is generally the precipitating factor leading him/her to join the germane underground militarized cell. And the pacing of such a progression is inevitably dictated by the “higher” institutional levels of the political confrontation, which at that time in Italy was one of “simulated civil war.”⁶

Concutelli

Pierluigi Concutelli, a Roman, was born in 1944.⁷ He thus belongs to the very first batch of that contestant cohort that would explode against “the system” in the *anni di piombo* (“the years of lead,” ca. 1969–1979). At bottom, for these soldiers of terror, it is a matter of faith, of *creed*. Concutelli could not quite explain how it hit him—his uncles had been Fascists but not his father; his was not a politicized family. As a mere boy, he had found himself one day gazing at a nostalgic, pro-Mussolini graffito smeared across a bridge’s girder. In that moment he chose: he would stand with the “*vanquished*” (*gli sconfitti*), with the black-shirted paladins of “virtue and order,” who had lost the war. Yes, they had been defeated, he reasoned, but they were not “losers.” He swore he would side with them “with commitment, dedication, and responsibility.” And he never turned back.

Like every Italian, he was polarized early on by the Cold War. The chief propagandistic kriegspiel played out during his childhood (the preboom era of 1946–1953) was the rumored threat of a Soviet invasion propitiated by the seditious, illegal *réseau* of the PCI’s⁸ shadow army.⁹ In such a clime,

the right-wingers, purportedly with a nod from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization,¹⁰ set out to counter the “Red menace” by readying—paramilitary and equally unconstitutional—structures of their own.¹¹ To this day, we are given to believe that these super-secret federations of spies, veteran troopers, and master saboteurs, set up by Anglo-American handlers, stood on alert in all member-states of the Atlantic Alliance, all of them religiously convinced that “Red Orchestra” had a mind to subvert the whole of Europe.¹² Italy’s sub-loops of the network were known by the code appellation of “Gladio” (Glaive) or “*stay behind*”; they were said to have attracted several hundred “patriots” that figured in the plot as the counterpart to former Communist *maquisards* (*partigiani*)—Red sappers who were putatively training in Czechoslovakia since the official onset of the Cold War in 1946. All things considered, this remains a story that is unbelievable; the likelihood of a (politically and logistically concrete) Soviet invasion of Europe was *positively nil*—as much so in retrospect as it was at the time, in fact.¹³ Thus one wonders what could have possibly been the deeper object of this strategic shadow-boxing, all the more so as it was also taking place between specular images of the same military aggregation it is recounted, in fact, that because the other half of Italy’s antifascist resistance fighters—the so-called White partisans (as distinguished from the “Red” ones, loyal to Moscow)—were, owing to its Republican and/or Catholic allegiance, hostile to Soviet intrusion in Italian affairs, a number of these “Whites” went on to organize “Gladio” itself. And this obscure layer of historical depth (one of many) adds to the lasting impenetrability of the spiritual plane upon which were played these matches for supremacy throughout the entirety of that strange, “cold” season.

All the while, in the 1950s, rosy-cheeked proselytes like Concutelli eagerly sought out Black unrepentant veterans and clustered about them to drink down every word of their fables of war, which told of “boys gone off to seek death”—from Africa to Russia, all the way to home, in the north, at the hands of Communist *partigiani*, Italians like themselves. Doubtless, to youths like Concutelli, “fiercely anti-bourgeois,” drawn to brutality, and instinctively repelled by Catholicism’s remissiveness, the Fascist *myth*—especially its mass-appealing, illiberal ethos—provided full-bodied identity: they were keen, thirsting for nondescript, violent

heroic action, *and clearly felt out-of-tune with the times*. Their political incorrectness, twined with some kind of existential restlessness and a remarkable dose of aggressiveness, eventually fomented a mood of “revanchismo,” i.e., a desire to get even, a desire to settle scores once and for all—as the rancorous heirs to the “vanquished”—with the philistine deceitfulness of what they snidely dubbed “*lo Stato Democristo-borghese*.”

In the postwar constitutional arc, the presentable face of Mussolini’s aficionados had rallied to the vexillum of the MSI,¹⁴ the republic’s token right-wing party. But Concutelli, already an extremist in his late teens, had come to despise the MSI, which he saw as a tool of the postwar regime to domesticate and incapacitate neo-Fascism’s revolutionary potential. Thus, elements of his ilk—the intransigents—logically drifted to the right of the MSI, landing perforce in the so-called extraparliamentarian fringes. For *all* European terrorists of the “first generation,” including Concutelli, this gradual drift to the transgressive rim coincided, of course, with the generational point-of-rupture of the mid-1960s.

Social protest and, above all, nationwide revulsion for the universities’ decrepitude and limited admissions policy had turned campuses into battlefields,¹⁵ upon which, according to a triangular configuration soon to become standard, Reds and Blacks squared off while the police—harassed by both—stood in the middle, ready to slam them all. Concutelli was living in Sicily at the time and he witnessed, as a protagonist, one of the very first of such displays of urban warfare at the University of Palermo. When repeated student provocations degenerated into open clashes, compounded by police charges, *he caught on fire*: there and then began for him the fight to the death with the “*enemy*,” the Communist militant, cynosure of all the hatred a *camerata*¹⁶ could muster—that battle was, for him, “the spark.” The year was 1966. From that day on, the politics of physical combat would define his militancy: it would all come down, for years, to thrashing and getting thrashed. Reds versus Blacks, kids all of them, “addicted to politics; ideologized addlebrates,” as Concutelli would later ruminate, irremediably “deployed,” “trapped,” as it were (by the invisible strategists of the Republic) in a serial choreography of nasty melees, which were proclaimed, most disingenuously, to hark after the fratricidal feuds of 1944–1945 (in the North of Italy between pro-German

Repubblichini and “Red” *partigiani*). Several would be the (young) fatalities of this “game.”

Consumed though he was with odium for the Reds, Concutelli had, much like his Communist adversary, no less political fury to spare against “the system” itself, that squalid and inveterate consortium—as all social revolutionaries construed it—of feudal prelates, pettifogging *brasseurs d'affaires*, baronial, squandering State “entrepreneurs,” and perennial Mafiosi. But of the Mafia’s chieftains, whom he would later meet in prison, Concutelli came to feel deep respect for those “of the old school”—and this was on account of a fundamental likeness between “Blacks” and “Men of honor”: the cultivation of a “sovereign” type of barbarousness, hierarchical, proud, and righteous in its use of boundless, sanguinary savagery.¹⁷ When in 1968, a constellation of neo-Fascist squads—including Concutelli’s—had wanted, brazenly, to add their protesting numbers to the Communists’ symbolic and epochal “assault” on Rome’s School of Architecture, the leadership of the MSI—the party of “law and order”—had forcibly, and unsurprisingly, enjoined them to back down. The name of the game was clear enough. Now what: Reds and Blacks *together*? Would not such incongruence thoroughly disorient the average viewer of the televised theatrics of partisan violence? Would not such *mélange* irremediably confuse, and thereby defeat the results expected from the archetypal black-and-white contraposition of foe/friend? “Having [thus] missed the boat of student revolt,” Concutelli brooded, “we had no choice but to fall back upon our right-wing ghetto.” He was disgruntled, and (even more) angered: this wasn’t what he had wanted—he felt he was fighting on the wrong side at the wrong time with the wrong people.

Not that the members of the *Fronte Nazionale* (FN), a splinter grouping Concutelli had accosted shortly thereafter, were the “right” kind either. Those seemed to him a gaggle of soured Quixotes indulging, worst of all, pernicious and counterproductive fancies, such as the possibility of a coup d’état—pernicious because, in his view, a coup would have only strengthened the regime. But the FN had *weapons*, plenty of them, and that was reason enough to put up with its inconclusiveness: all aspirant terrorists have an instinctive attraction to weapons. Concutelli’s association with the FN was short-lived, however, because in 1969 (after

being caught by the *Carabinieri*, one evening, in the midst of flagrant target practice in the open countryside) he was sentenced for illegal arms possession and imprisoned for two years.

Which hiatus implied, significantly, that he failed to be involved in Italy's most notorious and tenebrous season of Black subversion (*eversione nera*) during the 1969–1970 biennium, the highlights of which were the mysterious bombing in Piazza Fontana¹⁸ (Milan, 17 dead) and the bruited Borghese conspiracy to overthrow the republic.¹⁹ Left-wing publicists claim that both episodes were engineered, upon orders from the government's neo-Gaullist faction, by the secret services, which, in the case of Milan, manipulated neo-Fascist gulls into planting the explosives to pin blame on the Left—it was Milan's (highly) improbable scattered droves of “anarchists” that were initially scapegoated before, years later, an avalanche of judicial exonerations drew another veil of “confidentiality” over the whole crucial episode.²⁰ Commentators from the far Right insinuate, instead, that the objective was rather to burn Italy's Center-Right through guilt by association with the neo-Fascists and thereby to legitimize the Communist Party,²¹ whereas conservative Catholics suggest, alternatively, that the episode was part of deeper plan by an unidentified Anglo-Dutch cabal to destabilize the Church.²² To this day, protected by the *omertà* of all political insiders from one end of spectrum to the other, the *actual*, high-level commissioners and strategists of the slaughter have remained nameless.

As far as the exclusive fate of the Blacks was concerned, though their involvement appears to have been strictly instrumental, and though in the end the law could not reach and exhaustively convict them all, decades of judicial inquests have nonetheless shown beyond any doubt that they had actively participated in the choreography of the entire set-up and had had a hand in positioning the explosive devices. And so it was that, by typically compounding opportunism with cynicism, the elite of Italy's Center-Left (Christian Democrats, Socialists, and Communists, who *knew*, all of them) and the Establishment as a whole, buttressed by the mainstream press, were able to put the matter to rest by laying with ease the whole blame on the black-shirted *provocateurs*. They did so, knowing that the tangles of (direct, indirect, or silent) complicity, which were embroiling political initiates of all hues in every nook of the *Palazzo* (including their

international sponsors), were such that *no one* would talk. And these marginal and eminently maneuverable neo-Fascist fanatics, being so truculent, instinctively repulsive to the going taste, and undeniably guilty (despite the technical acquittal), were then ideally situated to take the fall. Discursively, and with convenient lack of closure, they were thus cast to go down in public consciousness as the (sole) “monstrous would-be slayers of democracy and civil peace.”

As soon as he came out of prison, in 1971, unreformed as could possibly be, Concutelli joined what passed in his milieu as the most efficient and ideologically coherent formation of the extraparliamentarian Right: *Ordine Nuovo* (ON, “new order”). ON was a legitimate outfit that officially shunned violence. Three were its “souls”: the thoroughly impractical neo-pagans, the Nazi-worshippers, and the Mussolinians—Concutelli being one of the last of these.

But whatever the official stance of ON’s leadership, violence was the sole currency circulating in the political exchange of the extraparliamentarian brush. ON’s and the other Rightist formations’ nemesis was the vibrantly massive and intimidating *Lotta Continua* (“ongoing struggle”) —ON’s Leftist mirror image—which, when it came to street-clashing, could generally count on the “martial” support of the PCI’s youth organization. At bottom, the main para-military reality was that the Blacks were *vastly* outnumbered; hence, the exigency on their part to strike ever more cruelly, like “mean ugly bastards on perennial duty.” Which, for Concutelli, was, in a way, the defeatist, Samurai-like beauty of it all: the privilege, as he saw it, to die fighting like a Southern Confederate or a Redskin, overpowered by a faceless, barbarous horde in the fin-de-siècle afterglow of a perfectly mediocre and detestable epoch.

Such, then, was the clime and setting: overwhelming numbers of fashionable Red protesters—young and not-so-young, moderate and ultra-violent alike—all huddled together on one side, yet pushing ominously toward the center; a bedraggled platoon of snarling Black desperadoes barricaded in the Alamo of their spiritual untimeliness on the other, and, tottering sideways above them all, the *regime*. There it hovered, Italy’s embattled regime, with its spies, *transversal* clans, expectant Communists, and, most preoccupied of all, its chief and presently challenged custodians—the *democristiani*, each one of them

losing sleep over the fate of the “citadel,” the very eye of the storm: the Church.

Down below, though, in the trenches of metropolitan subversion, *hatred* was still being methodically and studiously cultivated. That the Blacks relished the bloodshed and fomented it whenever they could was a given. They themselves shamelessly professed their yearning for incessant, bloody concussion, sporting like a badge of honor this urge, which lay in the marrow of their soldierly addictions and political rage. Yet on the other side of the barricade, the Blacks’ institutional enemy was doing nothing to placate, ignore, or defuse the tormenting wrath of neo-Fascism’s stray dogs—far from it. Despite its fine reformist rhetoric and highly convincing moralistic department, Italy’s Communism thrived *also* on calculated antifascist hate-mongering—not just the branding as “fascist pig” of whoever spoke against it (which was routine), but the deliberate provocation, day in day out, of Italy’s Concutellis. Who, in turn, *ravenously* bit the bait every time, “like dipshits,” as he put it. Likewise, though, no authority on the Right, or in the shadows of the intelligence world, was deterring them either—quite the opposite, in fact.

Actually, at the very top, the powers-that-be seemed perfectly satisfied to watch the factions tearing at each other in just such a fashion, making sure at all times that the level of overall tension would suffer no drop for lack of initiative in either camp. Not unlike radical Islamists in the aftermath of 9/11, the neo-Fascists had become and made themselves over into such a picture-perfect catalyst of easy opprobrium as to afford the masters of spin the perennial opportunity to script them in whatever demonizing scenario the regime might have wished to leverage. As if “trapped”

by (a) the spiritual (and absurd) inauthenticity of anachronistic garb and ritual; (b) the overpowering indulgence of vicious appetites; (c) their structural subservience in the game, and formidable political ineptitude (young expendables, always); and, above all, (d) a tragic drive for self-annihilation (see below), they, like the latter-day, improbable “warriors of Allah,” were making it all too easy, as the best of “media-genic” villains, to distract, with their (more or less) destructive and despicable antics, the public eye from grasping the actual political stakes of the “game” itself.

Thus it was that, in their shared reality, the Blacks progressively came to see themselves as the victims of political besiegement, or "ideological racism," as Concutelli would recall. It was in this particular atmosphere that "slowly, in a whisper, there began to circulate talk about the armed struggle. *The regime*," he concluded, "*wanted us dead*." Politically, he and his *camerati* reckoned that years of activism, pamphleteering, and "skull-cracking" had led to nothing; they felt they weren't taken seriously. And so, *a little at a time*, into their heads burgeoned the thought that the moment of all-out decisions was drawing near. If die he must, Concutelli sentenced, he would do so with a gun in his hand. Meanwhile, State authorities were communicating through the media that the country no longer had anything to fear from the so-called neo-Fascist danger, which turned out to be precisely the sort of disinformation likely to exasperate even further the already paroxysmal degree of political fury harbored by Concutelli and his. That sort of intoxication seemed to him part of a plan to drive militant neo-Fascists "to the blindest form of fanaticism." And so while "others" appeared to be deciding the fate of the *camerati*, Concutelli and his posse gathered to sing ever more frequently and more loudly the hymns of Salò's diehards, "*vogliamo andare all'inferno in compagnia...*"²³ He was then just one step away from terrorism and was lucidly aware of it.

The second and decisive spark along this path of nonreturn was a 1973 decree of the Ministry of the Interior with which it officially outlawed and disbanded ON, accused of seeking to resurrect Mussolini's PF (*Partito Fascista*). In Concutelli's view, this executive decision was the final shove that precipitated what had been theretofore a "gradual" process into a scramble for "utopian revolutionism." This acceleration, occurring in conjunction with the dissolution of the militant's legal mass organization, seems to be a general feature of *any* activist's descent into terrorism (Black or otherwise); it presents him/her with three options: drop out, reenter the system, or embrace the gun. As we know, Concutelli chose the last of these. Wanted by the police, who came looking for him one day in 1974, he made his resolution instantly and became *latitante* (a fugitive), disappearing into "clandestinity" to lead a terror cell until his arrest in February 1977.

"Clandestine" life is hard, as all former terrorists have testified. What was hardest for Concutelli was to give up love and affection and, more

than anything, to step into the realm of “extra-legality”—that is, to break the law, by robbing banks and kidnapping. And spilling blood. After all, he and his men had been brought up in the cult of “order and honesty.” The structure of the underground organization Concutelli was about to join could be likened to a pyramid resting on a triangular base, the apices of which were (a) the Political Chief (propaganda); (b) the Director of Operations (logistics); and (c) the Military Commander, the *primus inter pares*—whose position Concutelli eventually assumed. The (muddled) plan of the organization, in his words, was to “perturb” the regime—which, in the near future, however, he and his men felt was unbeatable—enough to broaden and inflame the revolutionary movement, possibly by uniting with the Red Brigades (!), and settle scores in some kind of Armageddon that would have finally toppled the despised Christian-Democrats and their technocratic bankrollers.

More than a delirium, thus formulated, the strategy seems rather a fine example of stupendous political imbecility. Which judgment, in point of fact, applies consistently to the Mission Statement of *all* terrorist organizations in all times—indeed, the political myopia and naïveté of the Red Brigades, which so awed Concutelli, was just as striking (i.e., this recurrent presumption of being able to unleash mass mutiny in structurally *immobile* societies through the commission of symbolic and bloody inciting incidents). But indulging this kind of retrospective lambasting of the operatives’ strategic *gaucherie* is to miss the crux of the problem entirely. The tactical independence of such underground outfits—let alone their political autonomy—is an oxymoron: these are to function as mere executors; executors of orders issued by political centers the protagonists and chronicles of which are seldom if ever revealed. Concutelli’s higher-ups in the pyramid—above all, Stefano delle Chiaie, who engineered the fusion of *Avanguardia Nazionale* and *Ordine Nuovo* in 1975, before sending out Concutelli on his murdering missions against surgically targeted magistrates—were in Rome. In these strategic headquarters, there is a political vision, and, of course, it is anything but myopic or imbecilic. Of his peregrinations after the decision to join the terrorist underground, Concutelli has said precious little: in 1974–76 he is busy traveling—sometimes accompanying his chief Delle Chiaie—across Spain and France with “suspicious” ease and protection. To what end is

never spelled out. Interestingly, in 1975 we find him also in Angola, shooting at Portuguese Communists—ever the political soldier, fighting the Reds wherever the high players of the “cold game” happen to field them.²⁴ As said, in 1976 he is back in Rome, where, alone, he mows down with machine-gun fire Judge Vittorio Occorsio—a *giudice scomodo*, who was allegedly probing too deep into the “Black” swamp in connection with the murderous bombing of Piazza Fontana. On February 13, 1977, as he is preparing to take out another magistrate, Pier Luigi Vigna, the police raid his lair and apprehend him. Brimming with wrath, he steps into Italy’s carceral inferno, bent on soldiering on, instinctively convinced that he merely has to take the fight wherever life leads him, whatever the cost. He would continue to brawl and kill until, as he put it, “*la guerra italo-italiana*” itself came to an end, courtesy of the “centrals”—in the late 1980s, when the Wall came down.

What of his militancy, his murder(s)—especially those indescribable strangulations within the prison walls? Did it ever occur to him that he and his could have been manipulated (*manovrati*) into committing it all? Interviewed in 2007, Concutelli wondered sneeringly: “*Manovrati? . . . Inculati,²⁵ non manovrati.*” He came to the conclusion that he was merely someone who had “thrust himself forth,” and that was why he still could not get out of it.²⁶

A Profile of the Circumstances

First of all, a few words on the source(s). In this respect, mainstream scholarship is generally prone to question whether testimonies of this genre are truthful and reliable. My sense after spending years scouring the literature—fiction, nonfiction, as well as academic and journalistic output—is that they are. They constitute a dependable resource—to the extent, that is, that all those familiar with this late segment of Italian history can cross-examine Concutelli’s story with a mound of other testimonies and accounts, and assess with a fair degree of reliability what additional fragments of information may be accepted as veracious. After all, Concutelli himself is manifestly and unquestionably laconic over those segments of his career whose unveiling would give away the nature of the power play—the code of silence is in his case strictly observed: though of

middling-to-low level, he remains a man of “power.” Yet he does not allude, confuse, or muddy the water. When interviewed or interrogated, he does not set out to spin those overly disingenuous equivocations that have been, instead, the “postwar” bread and butter of all the other players: from Mario Moretti—the most famous commander of the Red Brigades—down to every single politico, policeman, and terrorist involved in this violent season in one form or another. In sum, there is nothing explosive in Concutelli’s memoirs, *politically speaking*; but, as a *life history*, it definitely has psycho-sociological value, and may thus contribute relevant clues and elements for drawing up a spiritual outline of this disquieting personage, the “Political Soldier.”

There are two main sets of factors to consider in order to draft a summary profile of the circumstances that led Concutelli into terrorism: the sociopolitical setting and psychological disposition.

1. Sociopolitically, the setting is defined by the impact of “higher politics” on the dynamics of mass-level activism in the event of a generational rupture. The first element to bear in mind is that terrorism comes into play not in the ambit of drawn-out “revolutionary processes” (such as, say, the rise of national States or the coming of the “Industrial Divide”), but of *seditions* or *revolts*, as Cesare Lombroso pointedly observed.²⁷ In other words, terrorism is instrumental to *localized* factional disputes; it is a device used, among others, to shift the axis of power within a circumscribed territorial entity, after its incumbent seat of command has come under attack. In the case of Italy, the tenure of the Christian-Democrats—and of Montini’s Church—had putatively been challenged aggressively since the mid 1960s.²⁸ There began thereafter a confrontation of deep geometrical complexity involving various factions (chiefly the Catholics vs. a shifting front of “lay” contenders), in which the so-called opposed extremisms of Black and subsequently Red terror were believed to have been alternatively leveraged in a sequence of strikes and parries propitiated by rival segments of the intelligence corps, each answering to its political taskmaster.²⁹
2. At the *mass* level—i.e., at the street-level of “mass-man’s” visceral appetite and trivial conception of antagonism—terrorists cannot

breed or be bred without the clearly perceived incumbency of *two* mutually hostile camps. On the institutional plane, what then occurs is that at the margins of the arena, where the “two parties” (Progressives vs. Conservatives—PCI vs. DC³⁰ plus the Right) enact their daily joust, there form rebellious grassroots assemblies. These are themselves emanations of the original contraposition, the platform of which is a “dynamized” and aggressively reformist expression of the main parties’ respective tenets. In other words, each fringe holds the same view of the respective mother-party but proposes a radicalized version thereof. What is seldom mentioned in this regard, however, is that the system favors this type of factionalism because its escalating extremism works to magnify the appeal of the traditional parties in the eyes of the temperate (i.e., fearful) mass electorate.³¹ Not only does the vanguard formation deflect from the mainstream the violent exuberance of the “fanatics” by harnessing and giving them a “role” in a structured movement, but also the conspicuous display of the extremists’ angry deeds seem also designed to frighten away nonbelligerent electors of *the same political orientation* (as the violent ones) and push them into the fold of the respectable mass party. The degree of permeability between these movements and the militarized underground is particularly high, and it is notorious that they have been the chief reservoirs of terrorist induction. One may expect all would-be terrorists to undergo a sort of apprenticeship in one such extraparliamentarian (fringe) movement, the “toughs” being generally recruited in its security detail (*servizio di sicurezza*). As seen in the case of Concutelli, it is when these groups come undone—either coercively or naturally (depending on the developments of higher politics)—that the “leap” is often made.³²

3. Zeitgeist and generational singularities. The jolt that sets all of this into motion is “the times,” of course. Terrorism in Italy coincided with an epochal/generational divide of historical magnitude: it came at a time when the postwar reconstruction model of the mid 1950s had exhausted itself and, as a result, the Catholic political establishment saw its sclerotic leadership violently assailed not only by society’s understandable desire for change, but more insidiously, by Interests committed from an early stage to a project of neo-Liberal reconfiguration

of the Italian peninsula.³³ As the story went, the Christian-Democrats, in coalition with Bettino Craxi's Socialists after 1978, succeeded in all manners of ramshackle compromissary ways to deflect, in part, this attack, before being literally wiped out by the post-Cold War purge of "*mani pulite*" ("Clean Hands")—the judicial inquest into political corruption of 1992.³⁴

4. Psychology. All of the above is fertile ground for a particular minority of individuals. It is not true, as it has been often concluded, that terrorists are "*normal*" people.³⁵ They are not.

It is important to stress in this critical connection that the matter is *not* one of (more or less misguided) *rationality*; analytically speaking, this is to say that the investigation should not seek answers by pretending to unthread the wiring of a putatively malfunctioning rational harness within the mind of these political soldiers—"they are not like us" (i.e., us, placid middle-class scholars). When stacked against the deeper mechanisms of instinct and sentiment, the powers of cogitation quickly fade out of focus. They might be functioning conventionally, and in the near totality of the terrorists under examination they indubitably are, but these powers happen to operate within a given framework, and the psycho-emotional framework is what matters; it is the key.

Terrorists are not normal people. In fact, they belong to a special class of people—people who may be designated as "prodigal types."³⁶ The definition is Georges Bataille's, and in the context of terrorism, it subsumes the following other attributes: the foe/friend antagonism, a nihilistic furor driven by Utopian urgency, and a death wish.

Life, says Bataille, tends to follow what he calls "the law of coincidences": an equilibrating process whereby the tendency to dissipate oneself is regularly compensated by a counterinstinct to conserve lifeblood and earthly possessions avidly. When the former pulsion far exceeds the other, we are face to face with squanderers possessed by a deep sense of mission. Such "erotic"³⁷ types, willing to "offer" themselves for a cause, without compensation, may be *saints* or *partisans*. We hear of their gestes when the constituted order is subverted, as both, freely gifting themselves, make their appearance in a variety of movements—either religious or political—aspiring to reshape the social body.

For the partisan, “combat and the humiliation of the enemy possess an intoxicating value” that is wholly foreign to utilitarian calculus (i.e., rationality).³⁸ Such is the “stimulant” of *revolt*, and such is the “*existential*” logic of “*the political*” according to Carl Schmitt: that is, to conceive political activity exclusively in polemical reference to an “other”—a sublimated foe—whose mere existence is seen as the negation of one’s own, and whose blood, therefore, must be spilled.³⁹

Probing further, one could advance the idea that self-sacrifice is actually one of *three* fundamental psycho-sociological dimensions—three dimensions according to which humanity may be declined in a set of standard and suggestive typologies. And one of them is indeed that of the terrorist. Drawing upon Thorstein Veblen’s classic (micro-macro) theory of socioeconomic behavior⁴⁰—which categorizes humanity according to the criteria of tenacity (i.e., commitment to purpose) and spiritual drift (idealistic/compassionate versus self-seeking/barbarous)—and expanding the latter with death-proneness (after Bataille), the scheme yields a fair characterization of “the political soldier.” In essence, being psychically incapable of “sticking it out” (low tenacity), the terrorist espouses violence to expedite the goals of his/her lofty aspirations (idealism); in this sense, the impatient, nontenacious recourse to violence for the poetic sake of social justice is ultimately undergirded by a not-so-hidden desire to sacrifice the self in battle. Hence, the terrorist may be summarily characterized as a type that is nontenacious, idealistic, and death-prone.

Creed. For the Blacks, who confusedly hankered after some kind of revisitation of Fascist, Nazi, and Roman hierarchical supremacy, or even the Hindu warrior ethos,⁴¹ the flattening and dominant egalitarianism of the Red foe was seen as the polar opposite of their palingenetic objective. Yet it is intriguing to note in this regard how after 1975—when the fumes of 1968 had cleared, and the immateriality of their Utopian blueprint was becoming patent to the “political warriors” of each gang, terrorist attacks from either side never targeted the factional rival, but were rather pointedly and relentlessly directed at representatives of the Establishment (magistrates, politicians, policemen, journalists, etc.). It seemed as though in the finale of Italy’s bloody season, Reds and Blacks, gradually discolored of any ideological pretense, had set out to dissipate themselves “*in compagnia . . .*,” in one last effusion of ambidextrous, iconoclastic

violence contra the State—the crux of it all. When, in 1981, Concutelli eyed in prison Mario Moretti, the legendary commander of the “second” Red Brigades,⁴² he thought of him as a “colleague that worked for the competition.”

Locked up for life, were all such “prodigals” then distraught by their failure to die in battle? Apparently, with age, the vast majority of these “indirect suicides”—as Lombroso, again, categorized them⁴³—turn around to embrace life anew. Pierluigi Concutelli, *l'uomo nero*,⁴⁴ for his part, was initially paroled to work as a gardener; nowadays he occupies his free time by working as an editor for a publication of the “Traditionalist” sort. A few years ago, he might have thus been seen kneeling by a file of shrubs in the environs of the Roman prison of Rebibbia, burdened by regret, yet *politically* “repentant” of nothing and inhabited by sentiments, he affirms, that nobody will ever know.

Conclusion

Terrorism is a political device that tends to be consistently leveraged under *sedition* conditions—that is, at times of circumscribed political strife characterized by profound and strident factional antagonism within the elite. When two main antagonistic factions—issued from the same spiritual mass-environment—are unable and/or unwilling to compromise and the stakes are high, resort to the underhanded tactics of terrorist agitation presents itself as an obvious option. In a strictly “provincial” dispute (yet with patent international ramifications)—such as was taking place in Italy during the “leaden years”—terrorism comes into play by way of party dynamics, which predispose the terrain by encouraging, as it were, the formation of fanatical vanguards. The joint purpose of these extremist mass-phalanxes is to attract violent youths bristling for action (the minority), and thereby corral the peaceable voters into the ranks of the mainstream parties. Subsequently, as the issue of the political match remains undecided and social tension escalates accordingly, the dismantling of several such violence-prone mass-aggregations acts as an incentive for those most committed in the movement to make the leap and “go clandestine.” These people are not characterized by high intelligence. Spiritually speaking, the most remarkable among them are

dissipative types, possessed for the most part of an artistic, nonavid temperament that is governed by a strong evangelistic calling, behind which lies, in turn, an indubitable desire for self-sacrifice.

NOTES

1. "I was fanatical, swine-drunk on politics."
2. Pierluigi Concutelli and Giuseppe Ardica, *Io, l'uomo nero. Una vita tra politica, violenza e galera* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2008), 17.
3. October 7, 1976.
4. Stuart Christie, *Stefano Delle Chiaie. Portrait of a Black Terrorist* (London: Refract Publications, 1984).
5. Mimmo Franzinelli, *La sottile linea nera. Neofascismo e servizi segreti da Piazza Fontana a Piazza della Loggia* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2008), 381.
6. Luigi Manconi, *Terroristi italiani. Le BR e la Guerra Totale, 1970–2008* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2008), 125.
7. This account is in its near entirety drawn from Concutelli and Ardica, *Io, l'uomo nero. Una vita tra politica, violenza e galera*, in particular 17–77, 80, 199.
8. PCI, *Partito Comunista Italiano—Italy's Communist Party (1921–1989)*.
9. Rocco Turi, *Gladia Rossa. Una catena di complotti e delitti, daldopoguerra al caso Moro* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2004); Armando de Simone and Vincenzo Nardiello, *Appunti per un libro nero del comunismo italiano. Dalla resistenza al Dossier Mitrokhin, tutti i crimini nascosti del PCI* (Napoli: Controcorrente, 2004).
10. Jean-François Brozzu-Gentile, *L'affaire Gladia. Les réseaux secrets américains au cœur du terrorisme en Europe* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994).
11. Sandro Neri, *Segreti di Stato, Le verità di Amos Spiazzi* (Roma: Aliberti Editore, 2008).
12. Renato Farina, *Cossiga mi ha detto. Il testamento politico di un protagonista della storia italiana del Novecento* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2011), 146–76.
13. For a literary reference to the artificial build-up of political tension around the bruited threat of a Communist uprising, see Dino Buzzati's famous *Paura alla Scala* (Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1949).
14. *Movimento Sociale Italiano (1946–1995)*.
15. Ennio di Nolfo, *La repubblica delle speranze e degli inganni. L'Italia dalla caduta del Fascismo al crollo della Democrazia Cristiana* (Firenze: Ponte delle Grazie, 1996), 481–82.
16. The form of address among Fascists, as opposed to the Communists' "compagno" (comrade).

17. Alberto Arbasino, *In questo Stato* (Milano: Garzanti, 2008 [1978]).
18. December 12, 1969.
19. December 1970.
20. Gianni Barbacetto, *Il Grande Vecchio. Dodici giudici raccontano le loro inchieste sui grandi misteri dell'Italia da Piazza Fontana a Gladio* (Milano: Baldini & Castoldi, 1993); Fabrizio Calvi and Frédéric Laurent, *Piazza Fontana, la verità su una strage* (Milano: Mondadori, 1997); Paolo Cucchiarelli, *Il segreto di Piazza Fontana* (Milano: Ponte delle Grazie, 2009).
21. Giano Accame, *Una storia della repubblica. Dalla fine della monarchia a oggi* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2007), 228.
22. Bernabei, Ettore and dell'Arti, Giorgio, *L'uomo di fiducia. I retroscena del potere raccontati da un testimone rimasto dietro le quinte per cinquant'anni* (Milano, Mondadori, 1999), 73.
23. "We want to go to hell as brothers-in-arms . . ."
24. Massimo Caprara and Gianluca Semprini. *Destra estrema e criminale* (Roma: Newton Compton Editopri, 2007), 106.
25. "fucked in the ass"
26. Caprara and Semprini, *Destra estrema e criminale*, 119.
27. Cesare Lombroso, *Gli anarchici. Psicopatologia criminale d'un ideale politico* (Milano: Claudio Gallone Editore, 1998 [1894]), 21. Cesare Lombroso and R. Laschi, *Il delitto politico e le rivoluzioni, in rapporto al diritto, all'antropologia criminale ed alla scienza di governo* (Torino: Fratelli Bocca Editori, 1890), 377.
28. Bernabei and Dell'Arti, *L'uomo di fiducia*, 84–87.
29. Giuseppe de Lutiis, *Il Golpe di Via Fani: Protezioni occulte e connivenze internazionali dietro al delitto Moro* (Milano: Sperling & Kupfer, 2007); Sergio Flamigni, *Le Idi di marzo. Il delitto Moro secondo Mino Pecorelli* (Milano: Edizioni Kaos, 2006); Gianni Fasanella and Giovanni Pellegrino, *La guerra civile* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2005).
30. *Democrazia Cristiana*, Italy's Catholic Party (1945–1992)—the country's effective ruling party throughout the Cold War.
31. Amedeo Lanucara, *Berlinguer segreto. Carriera e lotta interna la PCI* (Roma: Telesio, 1978), 149.
32. For analogous organizational mechanics in the leftist camp see, e.g., Diego Novelli and Nicola Tranfaglia, *Vite sospese. Le generazioni del terrorismo* (Milano: Garzanti, 1988).
33. Agostino Giovagnoli, *Il caso Moro. Una tragedia repubblicana* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005).

34. The 17-year interregnum of Silvio Berlusconi —himself a political expression of Craxi’s PSI (*Partito Socialista Italiano*), and therefore of Italy’s First republic—has put, de facto, this whole process on pause: we are now (in 2012, shortly after Berlusconi’s ouster) at a critical juncture that will most likely be decisive in shaping the spiritual future of the country.
35. John Horgan, *The Psychology of Terrorism* (London: Routledge, 2005), 62.
36. Georges Bataille, “Manuel de l’Anti-Chrétien” in *Oeuvres complètes*, Vol. II (Paris : Gallimard, 1973), 393–99.
37. Werner Sombart, *Der Bourgeois; zur Geistesgeschichte des modernen Wirtschaftsmenschen* (München: Duncker & Humblot, 1923, [1913]).
38. Bataille, “Manuel de l’Anti-Chrétien” in *Oeuvres complètes*, 393.
39. Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen, Text von 1932 mit einmen Vorwort und drei Corollarien* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2002 [1932–1963]), 27–33.
40. Veblen, Thorstein, *The Theory of the Leisure Class. A Study of Economic Institutions* (New York: Macmillan, 1899), 212–45.
41. Despite initial, strong reservations, Concutelli, too, like most committed *camerati*, came to drink from the esoteric fount of Julius Evola (Concutelli and Ardica, op. cit., 144). His favorite Evola books were *L’arco e la clava* (Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 2000 [1968]), and *La Via del Cinabro (The Path of Cinnabar, An Intellectual Autobiography*, London: Integral Tradition Publishing, 2009).
42. Sergio Flamigni, *La Sfinge delle BR. Delitti, segreti e bugie del capo terrorista Mario Moretti* (Milano: Kaos Edizioni, 2004).
43. Lombroso, *Gli anarchici*, 47.
44. “The bogeyman”: the self-referential title of Concutelli’s biography—literally “the black man” (the bugaboo) which in Italian, plays on the double-entendre of “black” as in black(-shirted) fascist.

