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My Mad Friend who Wanted to Change the World

Alisa del Re

Dear Toni,

This morning, as soon as I received the news of your death (yes let's call it that, death; death, not decease, demise, end of life, with that roughness of language that did not belong to you, but which you used to make concepts more obvious), I went over the photos of my wedding (February 1972) in which there were you with Guido Bianchini, Luciano Ferrari Bravo, Sandro Serafini, Paola Meo Negri and so many other comrades, many of whom are no longer there, and many have suffered jail and exile.

We have known each other since 1967, when I came to challenge you in class, kicking you and Luciano out because we wanted to occupy the faculty. You agreed to leave willingly, with a hint of complicity. You were already foreseeing the revolutionary moments that were brewing: for these predictions (usually made for the next decade) Guido would blurt out each time with affection and basically with a bit of hope: "the madman (that is, you, as he affectionately called you) has decided how he will change the world."

With you I miss the years of the Institute of State Doctrine, where you had inaugurated a method of collective study and research that was absolutely unique and displacing the rigidities of the Academy.

At dawn we were in Marghera at the entrance of the Petrochemical handing out leaflets to the workers, in the morning at the Institute discussing our analysis and work, in the evening a few meetings. Do you remember when we used to drive to Marghera with Teresa Rampazzi, who saw frightenly little, in foggy Po Valley weather? Yet we were infected by your enthusiasm for the consistency of the struggles going on.

We were doing politics, analyzing changes in the world, changing ourselves. We didn't always agree, but in the rare moments (Rosolina, 1973) when it was necessary to take sides, I was on your side.

You watched with curiosity and awe the development of feminism around you, and perhaps you did not immediately understand its scope. In 1977 the realization began that sooner or later we would be made to pay for the happiness of the social transformations in which we felt we were protagonists.

The first exile in Switzerland, the return, the hope. I remember reading the *Grundrisse* together with Maurizio Lazzarato and our frequent requests for clarification when you returned to the Institute from Milan. And then the arrests, the affection in the letters you wrote me from prison, the thought of your children and those we had left outside.

I sometimes had the feeling that you felt a little responsible toward me, something I always denied even when some tried to make me out to be a poor innocent. What a joy when we saw each other

again in Paris, after you had managed to escape from the prison in Italy, in a difficult but understandable life choice.

We were both living in the 18th arrondissement when you told me you were expecting Nina. A complicated life that of the exile, meetings at Félix Guattari's house, the recognition of you among the great French philosophers. We saw each other frequently, until I returned to Italy. But even after that, I would often return to Paris and each time either for a meeting or simply for a kyr we would exchange political opinions and life stories (me life stories, you clear and illuminating political judgments).

And then the decision you made to go back to Italy with the hope of doing little jail time and finally being free. I didn't agree, you know. We had had a meeting with the comrades in Florence and we had decided to advise you not to go back, not to trust.

We came to Paris to tell you and you simply asked me to be a mediator between you and the outside of the prison, which I refused to do. Is that when you fell in love with Judith? What a stroke of luck you had Toni mio! Surely you were aware of it, you had a lovely, intelligent and autonomous person next to you, one of the few who devoted herself to you just to love you, who surrendered to you without annulling herself in you.

Since your release we have seen each other often, sometimes for conferences or policy schools (the Passignano school), sometimes simply to say hello to Judith, especially when you were in Venice.

The last time was last June, when you told me that you counted on living at least three or four more years, and I believed you because, after all, you had always been right in your predictions so far, except for the dates of the revolution and the length of life.

Instead, today I am here to tell myself that you had lied to me, that I did not expect you to die, that I liked to think that you were eternal, that you could recover your health, as you had always done, with your revolutionary energy that did not mind contingent times. For the first time I wondered why a friendship lasted so long, going through exciting periods and heavy personal and political events, with a life that cannot be condensed into a few lines.

Now everyone will say that you were a great philosopher, that your writings are outstanding, that you were a great teacher of entire generations. And there will also be people who get away with repeating stupid and gratuitous insults about the *cattivo maestro*.

Instead, I say to you, and I say it loud and clear, that for me you have been a great friend and a great man who was not satisfied with anything less than changing the world.