

## **Andrija Filipović**

*Faculty of Media and Communications, Singidunum University, Belgrade, Serbia*

### **Book Review<sup>1</sup>**

## **Mario Mieli, *Towards a Gay Communism: Elements of a Homosexual Critique*, London: Pluto Press, 2018, xxxviii + 321 pp., ISBN 9780745399515**

The appearance of Mario Mieli's book *Towards a Gay Communism: Elements of Homosexual Critique* is a breath of fresh air in the field of queer studies and queer theory. Originally published in 1977 in Italian, it is an artifact of an era that seems as far away as the Middle Ages when it comes to radical politics and radical theory from a contemporary point of view. This new edition includes a foreword by Tim Dean, an introduction by Massimo Prearo, and a translator's preface by Evan Calder Williams (and translator's footnotes throughout the text), all three of which offer the necessary theoretical, social, and political contextualizations for Mieli's work. In this review, I will focus on Mieli's concept of transsexuality, the core concept in his critique of the dualism that characterizes heterosexuality and homosexuality, and the patriarchal capitalist society that produces such differences.

Mieli returns to Sigmund Freud in order to build his critical conceptual apparatus. It is interesting to note that Mieli's return to Freud was written after Jacques Lacan's great impact on psychoanalysis, but Mieli quickly dismisses Lacan's kind of psychoanalysis. Moreover, Mieli mentions Lacan only once in the context of his critique of anti-psychiatrists who "are better in making sense of Lacan than they are at understanding homosexuality. ('Would you like some Lacan? It's better than a banana...')" (25). Mieli is somewhat more sympathetic to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's project of an anti-Oedipal critique, but again he finds it lacking when it comes to the homosexual and particularly transsexual communist revolution. For example, while Deleuze claims that homosexuality may not be enough to escape the Oedipal triangle, Mieli writes that "we gays do not recognize ourselves in the classical Oedipal categories ... Homosexual desire threatens the Oedipal reproduction" (52). Moreover, Deleuze's analysis of sadism and masochism, while broadly correct, appears "restricted" (133), something true for his analysis of schizophrenia as well, when understood

---

<sup>1</sup> First published at H-Socialisms, H-Net Reviews: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=53447>

from the perspective of a specifically transsexual-homosexual lived experience (as Mieli explicates from his own personal experiences).

What does Mieli do then? He keeps Freud's insight that when humans are born they are first and foremost polymorphously perverse, that is, their desire is multidirectional and nonlinear. Directionality and linearity come later, with what Mieli terms throughout the book as "educastration", the shaping of desire, body, and subjectivity according to the requirements of patriarchy and capitalism. Educastration, on the one hand, produces heterosexuals, with their severely guarded taboos regarding same-sex attraction, while on the other, it produces homosexuals, who are shaped as exclusively oriented towards the same sex and forced to negate erotic desires toward the opposite sex. Patriarchal capitalist educastration, then, produces repressed desires, misshapen bodies, and unhappy subjects on both sides of the divide. To be precise, it produces the very divide between heterosexuality and homosexuality, and females and males, that revolutionary transsexual communism needs to overturn, together with a capitalism that feeds on the forced sublimation of desire that follows from policing the boundaries between these binaries.

Transsexuality in Mieli's conceptual scheme is very far from the contemporary meaning of the term. While recognizing "those who are physiologically or even solely psychologically transsexual today (in the drama of their individual lives, outlawed by the repressive system of the individualist monosexual 'normals' with their enclosed lives)" (256), Mieli pushes the concept of transsexuality to include the meaning of going beyond ("trans") the established boundaries of sexualities, sexes, and genders. Transsexuality in this sense requires sexual revolution that "includes complete recognition and the concrete manifestation of erotic desire for persons of the other sex on the part of homosexual men and women, and the realization of a new gay way of loving between women and men" (254). The first step toward transsexual communism is the abolition of artificial boundaries within homosexuality itself and between gay men and women. This step would also overthrow the dominance of heterosexual white men, as the patriarchy on which they depend would be extinguished for all those who are subjected to it (gay men, heterosexual women, lesbians, etc.) as they discover new (erotic) relations between themselves.

The final goal of transsexual communist revolution is nothing less than the creation of a new human being. The transsexual synthesis of the antitheses between hetero- and homosexuality will lead to "*polysexual*, transsexual human beings; better, instead of hetero- and homosexuals there will be human beings. The species will have (re)found itself" (254). It will also lead to the rediscovery of human community and intersubjective reciprocity beyond the subject/object divide. Reclaiming an intersubjective community of transsexuals will also lead to the abolition of a capitalism that survives only by exploitation of alienated desire. Transsexual communist revolution not only goes beyond sexuality/gender/sex divides, but "the revolutionary homosexual struggle demands the erotic and emotional recognition of every human being in the community and the world. Each of us is a prism, a sphere, is mobile, and beneath

and beyond the contradictions that presently oppose and negate us, each of us fits potentially together with anyone else, in a 'geometry', both real and imaginary, of free intersubjectivity – like a wonderful kaleidoscope to which new and previous stones are steadily added: children and new arrivals of every kind, corpses, animals, plants, things, flowers, turds [...]" (122). In the end, as it can be gleaned from the quote, Mieli's transsexual revolution is world revolution. It goes well beyond the division of species and well beyond the divisions of beings, and this is where contemporary queer theory, posthumanism, and the new materialism can find a fresh source of inspiration for the critical understanding of the current state of affairs at the beginning of the twenty-first century.