

The Anger that Moves.
The Affirmative Dimension of Rage in the Italian Movement
against Gender Violence Lucha y Siesta

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Our aim today is to look at anger as a tool that might structure political protest in a more affirmative, relational and non-confrontational way. What we propose is to set aside the idea of anger as the dangerous passion that seizes personality, disturbs judgment, and imperils social interactions and rather focus on the connection established through anger.

In anger interdependency thrives: there is no anger that is no relational. So, what we will do here is to invite you to switch from our traditional understanding of anger as a shattering, blind and destroying force to embrace an idea of anger as a “source of information”, as “a passion of displeasure that might be excessive or misplaced but not necessarily harmful” 141

Reconceiving anger in these terms preserves its mobilizing force, that is, its capacity to prompt us to action, while inviting to set a political relationship in discord.

Anger connects two poles, it interpellates the other and creates the potentialities for political action through the collectivization of pain, of oppression. When I speak out my anger, I am addressing someone and summoning their responsibility. But I am also disclosing my longing, desire, need for their response. The other finds themselves “unwillingly addressed” and is drawn into a relation with my pain, my oppression.

In this sense, anger is not merely an aggressive reaction implemented through violence. Rather, as Barbara Cassin puts it anger “nourishes a response”. It reveals the desire for connection. A desire that unfolds itself through a discomfiting exposure of both poles.

Anger shapes a form of resistance that taps into the unwilling receptivity of the Other to build a bridge, to resist beyond opposition.

Many are the things that can sprout from stripping away violence, removing hatred from anger. Yet, two are – in my opinion – the most important:

First, by looking at the intersubjective aspect of anger, we can make use of it. Anger, when is not only an impulse toward annihilation, provides us with a *political affirmative tool*, that is, with a feeling that can be used politically to envision new paths, *together with the oppressor*. This creative side of anger is contingent on our treating it as a creative force, whose goal is not merely to demolish what exists, but rather to create an alternative future with what already exists.

And second, and most importantly, it pushes us to reframe political agency outside the masculinist fantasies of autonomy and sameness, hierarchies and linearity. In calling into question the Other, anger unleashes the potential of

connection, it reveals that exposure and vulnerability are always mutual. The political response that anger demands forces, and I quote Ursula Le Guin, “*a continuous interchange between two consciousnesses. Instead of an alternation of roles between box A and box B, between active subject and passive object, it is a continuous intersubjectivity that goes both ways all the time*”. Doing away with the idea of political resistance as deployed “between two boxes”, allows us to withdraw from the binary dynamic that creates the condition for a one-way deployment of anger – either I win, or I lose.

This means to recast anger as a call for intersubjectivity, political mobilization as the demand for a response, agency as vulnerability. To get rid of the idea that to resist is to oppose, strive and annihilate. And at the same time, it means to accept that fury is part of any political relationship. Fury, not hatred. Relationality, not opposition.

To think about anger in these terms expands our political – and personal – horizons. It asks us to reconsider agency as

intersubjective and thus reshapes resistance outside the binary relation perpetrator/victim; oppressor/oppressed to create a common ground, where conflicts can and must take place.

When Nicoletta and I set ourselves to the study of anger as an affirmative political tool, something was happening in our native country.

What I will do is to take you all to a brief virtual journey to Rome, Italy, where the group of women Lucha y Siesta is extensively employing the political tool of affirmative anger in order to maintain the activities that, since 2008, they carry out in an occupied building where they have organised a women shelter and a feminist cultural center. Following a notice issued by the City Council of Rome, which wants to sell the building that officially belongs to them in order to repair their instable finances, the women of Lucha y Siesta started a series of campaigns aimed at avoiding the eviction. But, before looking a bit more in depth at these campaigns, let's

outline the general ethos that guides them. According to Anahi, one of the activists of Lucha y Siesta with whom we carried out an interview, when the collective received the eviction notice the immediate reaction was a reaction of comprehensible anger towards an institution that refused to recognize the contribution that Lucha y Siesta makes in the context of practical and symbolic contrast to gender violence in a city like Rome, where spaces that support victims of abuse are particularly scarce. However, they also recognized that a blind anger wouldn't have guaranteed their survival and for this reason they decided to rely on two specific mottos that convey the idea of resistance and conflict but strategically substitute the concept of muscular and opposite strength with references to fluidity and creativity: "We cannot break the rock, let's become water"; "Resist and Revise".

The affirmative dimension of Lucha y Siesta's strategy is testified by the name of the committee established to coordinate the campaigns "Lucha alla città" (Lucha to the city), which identifies the women shelter as a service

belonging to the city. By choosing this name, the group creates a local collective identity that does not directly oppose the City Council but frames it as a part of the institution itself. This symbolical continuity parasitizes the authority of the City Council, thus defeating its absoluteness.

This non-antagonistic strategy has been implemented through specific creative actions. Among these, the most representative, is, in our opinion, the *luchadoras* campaign, which was launched by the art-activist and Lucha y Siesta's friend Rita Petruccioli, who invited Italian illustrators, comic artists and street artists to reproduce in their own style the image of a *luchadora* (a women player in the Mexican sport of *Lucha Libre*). Petruccioli's call was endorsed by hundreds of creatives who illustrated a squad of racially, bodily and stylistically diversified *luchadoras* ready to virtually defend Lucha y Siesta from the eviction. The drawings circulated widely online, until the point of becoming iconic of the Roman collective's struggles, and many of them were later printed and attached in the walls of the streets of Rome.

Among other combative *luchadoras*, the image proposed by the street-artist Hogre is the most suggestive to discuss Lucha y Siesta's representation of anger. Reproduced as a stencil that was massively stamped around Rome, Hogre's *luchadora* portrays a woman with a contentious attitude who is ready to put her hands on who's in front of her and is clearly displaying rage as her guiding feeling. The act of aggressively calling in the viewers and dragging them into an uncomfortable tie where the reasons of the Other's pain and oppression need to be acknowledged, testifies to the relational import of anger. Here, the absence of a counterpart, which is substituted by the image's ability to address the viewer as its implicit interlocutor, is also crucial in the re-signification of anger as a non-oppositive force. This is true not only in the case of Hogre's work, but relates to all the images of the *luchadoras*, in which the presence of the antagonist is erased. Instead of openly representing as enemies those towards which the anger is directed, Lucha y Siesta's campaign performatively addresses the viewers and mimics with them the demand for reciprocity. The effects of

this representative practice are two and connected: the polarising logic is not visually reproduced and, as such, it is escaped (together with the political risks of directly portraying the City Council as the group's clear adversary). Instead, the Other is virtually embodied by the viewer of the *luchadoras* images, a technique that allows to display the pervasiveness of patriarchal violence as well as the need, (for everybody, from their own stance) to take on their personal and political relational responsibilities.

The type of relationship that *Lucha y Siesta*'s raging representations of their collective Self showcase and implicitly demand is that of a tie among peers where conflict is not ruled out, on the contrary, it is re-conceptualised as a relational, non-oppositional practice.