

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)
Anti-Copyright



The subversive weed

Amedeo Bertolo

Amedeo Bertolo
The subversive weed
1979

Retrieved on 17th May 2021 from autonomies.org
This text was presented at the "Self-management" studies conference in Venice, 28–30 of September, 1979, and was subsequently published in Interrogations, n.º. 17–18, 1979.

usa.anarchistlibraries.net

1979

- Michele La Rosa, Mauro Gori (a cura di), *L'autogestione. Democrazia politica e democrazia industriale*, Città Nuova, Roma, 1978.
- Georges Lapassade, *L'autogestione pedagogica*, Angeli, Milano, 1973.
- René Lourau, *L'Autogestion comme condition du dépérissement de l'État*, "Autogestion et socialisme", n° 41-42, 1978, pp. 145-165; *Lo Stato incosciente*, elèuthera, Milano, 1988.
- Roberto Massari, *La teoria dell'autogestione*, Jaca Book, Milano, 1974.
- Noir et Rouge, *Lo Stato, la rivoluzione, l'autogestione*, La Fiaccola, Ragusa, 1974.
- Philippe Oyhamburu, *La Revance de Bakounine ou de l'anarchisme à l'autogestion*, Entente, Paris, 1975.
- Gian Paolo Prandstraller, *Felicità e società*, Cominità, Milano, 1978.
- Pierre Rosanvallon, *L'età dell'autogestione*, Marsilio, Venezia, 1978.
- Menahem Rosner, *L'Autogestion industrielle dans les kibbutzim*, "Sociologie du travail", n° 1, janvier-mars 1974.
- Ernst Friedrich Schumacher, *Il piccolo è bello*, Moizzi, Milano, 1977.
- Leonardo Tomasetta, *Partecipazione e autogestione*, il Saggiatore, Milano, 1972.
- John F. Turner, *L'abitare autogestito*, Jaca Book, Milano, 1978.
- Roberto Villetti (a cura di), *Socialismo e divisione del lavoro*, Mondooperaio, Roma, 1978.

Bibliographical References

Given the nature of this text, which develops a line of thought that is still a little tangled and some reflections written as a “chemical reaction” to the crossing of my anarchism with the diverse / monotonous / rich / contradictory / stimulating/ irritating / original / deceiving / libertarian / crypto-authoritarian culture of self-management, I purposefully avoided any bibliography. I list below the books that, in a slightly disordered reading, accompanied my reflections:

- Pietro Bellasi, Michele La Rosa, Giovanni Pellicciari (a cura di), *Fabbrica e società. Autogestione e partecipazione operaia in Europa*, Angeli, Milano, 1974.
- Alfredo Bonanno, *Autogestione e anarchismo*, La Fiaccola, Ragusa, 1975.
- Murray Bookchin, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, Ramparts Press, Berkeley, 1971.
- Yves Bourdet, *Per l'autogestione. Analisi e prospettive*, Moizzi, 1976; *Teoria politica dell'autogestione*, Nuove Edizioni Operaie, Milano, 1977; *L'Éspace de l'autogestion*, Galilée, Paris, 1978.
- Pierre Clastre, *La società contra lo Stato*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 1977.
- Franco Crespi, *Teoria sociologica e socializzazione del potere*, Angeli, Milano, 1974.
- Henri Desroche, *Autogestione, partecipazione e associazionismo cooperativo*, in *Fabbrica e società*, op. cit.
- Félix García, *Coherencia libertaria (1)*, *Pedagogía y organización*, “Bicicleta”, n° 15, 1979, pp. 48–49.
- Milojko Drulovic, *La Democrazia autogestita*, Editori Riuniti, Roma, 1977.
- Piero Flecchia, *La cultura della viltà*, Emme, Milano, 1978.
- Roberto Guiducci, *La diseguaglianza tra gli uomini*, Rizzoli, Milano, 1977; *Un mondo capovolto*, Rizzoli, Milano, 1979.

Contents

<i>A demand for anarchy</i>	6
<i>Means, end or method?</i>	8
<i>Between theory and social practice</i>	10
<i>To graft and prune the old trunk</i>	11
<i>The hierarchical division of labour ...</i>	13
<i>... and its egalitarian recomposition</i>	15
<i>The problem of dimension</i>	20
<i>Small is beautiful</i>	23
<i>Equal but diverse</i>	25
<i>Harmony and conflict</i>	27
<i>Social Right</i>	29
<i>The Mühlmann Effect</i>	30
<i>Re-reading History</i>	32
<i>Towards self-management through self-management</i>	33
<i>The spaces of self-management</i>	35
<i>A front that is not a front</i>	36
<i>The subversive weed</i>	39
<i>Appendix</i>	40
<i>Bibliographical References</i>	42

to be *outside* of management. If this correlation is not taken into consideration, participation runs the risk of becoming a burden or of meeting with indifference and absenteeism. This trap may become formidable in the eventuality of a generalised participation, [...] of an integral economic republic, in which each conscious and organised citizen would have the right and the duty to participate in all industrial, agricultural, financial, social, social-cultural affairs, on which her/his life depends and, consequently, would be obliged to make them dependent on her/his consciousness and domination. There would thus be an invitation to not only comprehend and dominate moral relations, but also administrative relations, budgets, the accounting of gains and losses, etc. There would also be the complementary invitation to be present in assemblies, meetings, commissions, committees, etc., naturally with the registration and qualification of that participation: active, semi-active or inactive. One can imagine that the situation would become very similar to laboratory experiments in which the possibility of dreaming is taken from an individual, even in their sleep. Before the neurotic danger of such a situation, the field of participation could elaborate some solutions. For example, there could be a right to *non-participation*, as in those places where you pay twice as much for the right to place on the record player a silent disc to have a brief period of time without noise. Furthermore, there could be an integrated automation, thanks to central super-memories, of all of those “committee-cratic” processes conceived by participatory activity in its artisanal stage. In one case, as in the other, there would be a participation restrained by *distancing*. Durkheim stated that “nothing is good without measure”, while underlining that the two kinds of societies with the highest incidences of suicide were either societies of excessive individualism and insufficient socialisation, or, conversely, societies of insufficient individualism and excessive socialisation.”

panding exactly like an invasive plant, with the same stubborn resistance to drought and poisons, with the same formidable capacity of multiplication, with the same faculty of responding to mutilations, regenerating a new plant with every fragment.

In this way manner, struggle becomes the life of every day and everyday life becomes a struggle, preserving it from the symmetrical dangers of self-marginalisation (perhaps felicitous, but only *perhaps*), the realization of micro-utopias, the tiring Sisyphus like labour of conflict functional to the system, the necessarily short, impatient, blind forging ahead and the delays due to the intellectual separation from reality. Developing all of its wealth of method, self-management can bind each moment of a long journey through the “personal” and the “political”. It can be a revolutionary strategy which, by means of the daily and incessant de-structuring/de-struction of power, in psychic infrastructures, institutional structures, ideological superstructures, makes grow a libertarian and egalitarian counter-society in the interstices of hierarchical society, until this latter breaks the global cohesion and coherence, until it inverts the relationships of force between the old and the new. Then, the necessity of anarchism can and should break the shell of what denies it, and that is revolution.

Appendix

After the orgy of generalised participation in the pages above, I now want to add, as a partial antidote, a brief excerpt from a presentation by Henri Desroche at the international seminar on self-management and workers participation in Europe (Bologna, 1970): “It is a first proposal or a first hypothesis: the aspiration to participation is correlated with the aspiration to *gain distance*. The engagement in the company is correlated with a *disengagement* from the company. The propensity to be part of the management is correlated with another propensity

The temptation is strong for the anarchist: “self-management” is a new word for something old, better, for many old things, because this word also, as with almost all of the economic, political and social vocabulary, can mean more than one thing.

In its broadest, “extremist” sense, self-management is synonymous, if not with anarchy, with self-government (a term from the old anarchist lexicon). It is what Philippe Oyhamburu defends, for example, when he confronts the claims of those who advocate “self-management” with the thought and achievements of anarchists and anarchism, highlighting the fact that the self-management movement not only takes up the greater part of the themes of the later, but arrives at the point of repeating them *word for word*. Furthermore, the Yugoslavian term *samoupravlje*, from which “was born” the translation to the word “self-management” at the beginning of the 1970s, looks like a Serbo-Croatian variation on the Russian *samoupravljanje*, already used by Bakunin, which can be translated either as self-administration or as self-government.

In its more limited meaning, self-management is synonymous with co-management, that is, the subaltern participation of workers, that is, inter-classist collaboration, that is, deception. Between one extreme and the other, there exist all of the possible intermediate nuances of meaning and of the theoretical-practical choices of socialism, from the libertarian to the authoritarian, from the revolutionary to the reformist.

Therefore, there is a strong temptation to finish with the matter, above all because of the inflated and mystifying use of the term, which can only irritate us (we are offered “self-managed” vacations, “self-managed” televised electoral propaganda by parties ...). However, we believe that, behind the success of the word, there exists more and something more important than an umpteenth mystification and a subtle recuperation, with a new terminology, of the anarchist tradition. The very effort at mystification and recuperation, in itself, signifies

a social “demand” to which mystification and recuperation refer to.

A demand for anarchy

The fact is that self-management was before all else a widely diffused demand and social practice over the course of the last decade.¹ The self-management boom is perhaps, from the anarchist point of view, the most important cultural phenomenon of this post-war. And by cultural phenomenon, I do not mean the flourishing of texts about self-management, which I see more as an effect rather than a cause of the boom, but to the multiplication of practices in social conflicts, above all since 1968, but already foreshadowed in the preceding years.

A growing desire for individual and collective *self-determination* manifested itself over the length of this period (sometimes clearly, more frequently, confusedly and contradictorily, but always “readable”) in a thousand ways: from hippie communities to factory occupations, from student struggles to the feminist movement, from the refusal of delegation to the search for different interpersonal relations ... Between the “*on fabrique, on vend, on se paie*”² of the LIP³ and “the body is mine and it is I who control it”, there is

¹ The author is here referring to the 1970s. [Translator’s Note]

² The passage appears originally in French. This was a slogan of the LIP workers: “we produce, we sell, we pay ourselves”. [TN]

³ The author refers here to the well known experience of the self-management of the LIP watch factory located on the periphery of Besançon (native city of Proudhon) and begun on the 17th of April of 1973. LIP was a solid company until it was purchased by a group of “investors” who presented a plan for collective dismissals that reached to 100s of workers, mostly women. The organised resistance by the workers gave rise to a notable movement of struggle, which lasted years, multiplied illegal actions without ever ceding to the temptation of violence, basing itself on direct democracy and a fertile imagination. The practice of self-management affirmed itself as a valid alternative. [TN]

typographical business, seems to demonstrate that “islands of self-management” are in reality possible and that their survival is not necessarily linked to a supposed integration or even a substantial innocuousness. The *Comunidad* functioned so well that it survived various repressive waves and it was so little innocuous that it had to be crushed *by force of arms*. It could be objected that the island of self-management was not able to defend itself. But against the Uruguayan military-fascist dictatorship, neither the mass labour unions, nor the armed struggle Tupamaros, succeeded in resisting.

I believe accordingly that islands of self-management are possible and that these, amidst a thousand obstacles and hundreds of failures, can and should become archipelagos. In reality, they are always more nodes than islands in a network that bring together self-managed units, not only between themselves, but also and above all, with the self-management of struggles. These latter should be, in a certain sense, the “realised” extension of the former, in a relationship of reciprocal strengthening which mutually exalts the potentialities of development and the capacities of defence. It is a matter of surpassing the threshold of rejection or assimilation by the old organism of social hierarchy. Beyond that threshold, self-management can be neither assimilated nor rejected.

The subversive weed

Such a network of cooperatives, organisms of struggle, communities, cultural associations, allows for the multiplication, in a progressive process, of the contradictions of the hierarchical system, multiplying all the while the pedagogical “situations” of self-management and inversely reducing the repressive/integrative capacity of what exists. As a subversive weed, self-management can press and pry into any fissure, any crack, gaining root and breaking up the cement of the system, and ex-

taken by workers to free companies from the bankruptcy of owner management normally ended up with the delay of the bankruptcy or these became simple cooperatives with a hierarchical management and intensive self-exploitation. There is the recent failure of the *ex-Fioravanti*, a pasta producing factory which, in 1974, experienced a long period of self-management. There is also the recent news, apparently of a very different kind of experience, that the *ex-Motta di Segrate* (a cooperative of 160 members producing pastry and pre-cooked meals for canteens) is operating under self-management. Sick leave is down from 20–30 percent to 2–3 percent, the President claims with satisfaction. Is this due to the work being less alienating? No: it is rather the intensification of alienation for fear of losing their jobs in a period of economic crisis.

Examples of self-management as a result of owner bankruptcy also seem to be multiplying in Spain in a similar context of crisis, with very similar consequences, at least if one reads “Ajoblanco” (n° 43, 1979). It concludes with a melancholy review of failures, asking itself whether “islands of self-management” are in fact possible and with a statement from a worker: “After all of the difficulties that we faced, we are firmly convinced that self-management can only be realised if generalised and in a different society”.

Is it therefore impossible, if not logically, at least practically, for self-management to survive (and with greater reason, for it to develop) within the rules of the capitalist game and/or the techno-bureaucratically established rules by and for the hierarchical division of social labour? Between failure and assimilation/integration, is there *in fact* no intermediate space? I have a different opinion. I believe that it is not a matter of impossibility, but of difficulty, even though of great difficulty. The example of the *Comunidad del Sur* of Montevideo, which functioned for two decades under libertarian and egalitarian self-management, as a community and as a mid-sized

continuity. The social pursuit of self-management in fact exists in a multiplicity of ways and at every level, which translates into a de-structuration of power in all of the macro and micro-systems where power manifests itself: from the family to the State, passing through the factory, the neighbourhood, the school, the hospital, the labour union, the political party ...

Is this a rejection of power or a pursuit of power? Reformists and authoritarian revolutionaries prefer to qualify this social pursuit as a pursuit of power: but is it still power when there is no desire to become a faculty of “command and obedience”, but rather a faculty for deciding autonomously? The aspiration to self-management seems to us to be the libertarian equivalent in terms of power, parallel to the egalitarian socialist aspiration in terms of property. In this instance, what is required is the *socialisation of power*.

Now, a socialised power, that is, one not concentrated in specific social roles (and therefore in individuals and dominant classes), but diffused throughout the whole social body and in its articulations as a universal and equal function, may correspond to a close approximation to anarchism. If this is not the case for the anarchism-of-the-absence-of-power (a limit concept like geometric forms), it may at least hold for that dynamic compromise between the ideal model and the bonds to material contexts and cultural givens, which we could call “possible anarchism”. But a socialised power can also be understood, conversely, as an abominable instrument of omnipresent authoritarian control, in which power becomes a universal though unequal function (graded from the top to the base), in a continuous change that involves all of the roles of reciprocal oppression. Brrr ...

Means, end or method?

A profound and serious approach to the theme of self-management configures two useful possibilities – to my mind, fundamental – for anarchists: 1) to reflect on the contents and the more advanced forms (in egalitarian and libertarian terms) assumed by contemporary social conflicts and, at the same time, on the responses given by the dominant classes; 2) to reflect on the problems of “possible anarchism”, that is, on the problems of the social reconstruction, of the global restructuring of the communitarian fabric according to non-hierarchical models.

I believe accordingly that the debate around self-management can be an important occasion for anarchists. If the demand for self-management is, in a certain measure, a “demand for anarchy”, it is not necessary to add a pair of slogans to our repertoire of words of order, but to extract from it indications for our action. If sociologists, economists, philosophers, psychologists, urbanists, increasingly use the self-management key for a quasi-anarchist approach to the human sciences and propose quasi-anarchist solutions to social problems, it is not enough for us to congratulate ourselves for the phenomenon, much less claim priority over the method. We must work seriously to propose ourselves as the point of credible libertarian cultural reference *here and now* ... If politicians and bureaucrats and technocrats prattle on about self-management, or worse, are in the process of elaborating and realising partial or distorted versions of it, it is useless to shout out, “thief!” We must rather demystify their game with convincing arguments and exemplary struggles.

Self-management should not be, of course, a simple pretext for “refreshing” our “beautiful ideal”. Very much on the contrary, it is a matter of carrying out a real renewal of our cultural baggage and of acting in a more useful manner, that is, 1) from real instances and not only from an individual or move-

The answer is not and cannot be categorical. An affirmative answer, at least to the first part of the question, seems to follow logically from the general affirmation according to which: a) what exists cannot be self-managed because it is, by its nature, antithetical to self-management, in each of its parts and as a whole; b) on the other hand, a partial self-management can only be a more or less disguised co-management. Even without denying the validity of this affirmation, I am convinced that to infer from it, in an apodictic manner, the impossibility or the counter-productiveness of experiences of self-management is a mistake born of logical rigidity. Applying this thesis fixedly, one could, in effect, arrive at the impossibility of the self-management of struggles, because they are not in fact a pure negation, but an element of what exists, even though conflictual.

Reality is much more complex and does not allow itself to be limited by any simple and absolute definition. Who can affirm without the shadow of a doubt that the self-management of a community, of a company, of a nursing home, necessarily means managing an *articulation* of what exists and not, on the contrary, a *contradiction* to what is? If it were so, if a specific social-economic system did not admit anything except what is similar and susceptible to assimilation to it, the historical norm of change could not be explained, change which is precisely antithetical: the new is born and develops, with differing fortunes, advances and regressions, rightly next to or even in the heart of the old. Thus was born the artisanal and merchant city in the feudal fabric, capitalist industry in the corporative fabric, technical-bureaucracy in the capitalist fabric ...

Objections centred on the *difficulties* of constituting, developing and defending “islands” of self-management are more convincing. In this sense, experience is rich in failures. France’s *LIP* is an emblematic case because the spontaneous choice by its workers of self-management was emblematic. In Italy, analogous experiences of self-management under-

fact a linear trajectory and it calls to mind, in igniting and extinguishing itself here and there in points and moments of contestation, a diffuse guerrilla and not trench warfare. And this is its strength, because it does not give itself over to a frontal clash, which would be to play into the game of the enemy still – and until the revolution – more powerful.

Can and should this guerrilla expand, as we believe, and come to generalise and reproduce itself more than it is recuperated, it will arrive, sooner or later, at the heart of the organisation. Should a self-management project create permanent structures of interconnection? I believe so because self-management is, by its nature, a synthesis of spontaneity and organisation and because the growth of the revolutionary project must accompany step by step the growth in the capacity of self-organisation at all levels of complexity. I believe however that there should not be *one* form and *one* structure of interconnection, but a plurality of forms and structures, in coherence with the self-management method, in a network structure, whose density and extent increases with the growing dimension of the project.

A front that is not a front

The self-management of struggles is, at least as a general idea, an almost obvious concept. It is an indisputably indispensable element of self-management strategy. Without self-managed struggles, it is impossible to see how one can arrive at a self-managed society. But a final question imposes itself on this subject, last in time, but not in importance: is the self-management of struggles the only form of self-management possible before the revolution and, simultaneously, is it a *sufficient* means to prepare the conditions for an egalitarian and libertarian revolution?

ment demand that is ours, 2) organising our reflection around a concept which constantly reminds us of the consistency of the organisational forms.

I do not wish to say with this that all of the theoretical-practical work of redefining the anarchist project be reduced, in a simple way, to the category of self-management. The concept of self-management in itself can in no way substitute the very rich problematic of the means and ends of anarchism, something which is sustained by a vast conceptual range of an ethical, aesthetic and scientific order ...

In fact, the ambit specific to self-management is not that of ends, nor of means, contrary to what may appear, sometimes, in its individual manifestations in social conflicts. It falls rather in the intermediary ambit of *method*, the ambit of the relations between ends and means. Even while participating in both, self-management is not an end (or a sum of ends), nor a means (or a sum of means), but a *way* to seek and express the coherence between them in organisational terms and in relation both to the theoretical-practical critique of what exists and the proposal of alternative social structures.

To define self-management as an organisational method may seem restrictive. In truth, what this means is that we attribute to it a central importance. Significantly, the great fractures at the heart of the socialist movement were verified not with regard to ends, which *seemed* to be the same, but over method: over the choice of means and over their coherence with chosen ends. To define self-management as a method also means denying it the neutrality of a simple *technique*, good for all occasions, to attribute to it a specific functionality in relation to the values of freedom and equality adequate to it.

Between theory and social practice

Self-management understood as an end seems to me to derive from – and/or lead to – a terribly limited and limiting concept of society and of human beings. Self-management understood as a means lends itself to mystifying uses. It is susceptible, in a more or less insignificant form of decentralised power, to appropriation in new “participatory” techno-bureaucratic systems. Both can give way to new and obscene forms of “interiorised” power, that is, to an “induced” self-control”, a “piloted” self-discipline in a hierarchical society, to a kind of self-exploitation, a “consensual” domination.

Contrariwise, conceived as a method and placed in a position of juncture, not only between means and ends, but also between theory and social practice, self-management can express all of the wealth and all of the difficulty of anti-hierarchical and anti-bureaucratic conflict and thought. In this condition, it can become a formidable logical and operational instrument; a subversive instrument not vulnerable to social and conceptually classist systems, because irreducibly libertarian and egalitarian.

Such wealth is moreover verified *in reality*, that is, in the multiplicity of self-management demands expressed in social struggles and, furthermore, *in the thought* of the theoreticians of generalised self-management who, though in the majority Marxists, arrived not by chance at the substantially anarchist positions of the rejection of the State and of all hierarchy, of the party and of any vanguard ...

The fact is that self-management, as we were saying, is only a libertarian and egalitarian methodology *if* all of its presuppositions and implications are fully accepted in depth and extension. That is, when the conditions necessary for any individual to be truly the subject and not the object of choices which affect them are studied and when, by necessary coherence, the field of application of self-management of the limited

The spaces of self-management

The self-management of *struggles* was not only one of the most successful slogans, but perhaps also the most obvious manifestation of the demand for self-management of the last decade, and this a little everywhere. From the more traditional spaces of the class struggle, the places of work, to new or partially new spaces, we are witness to the expansion of this demand, which is the refusal to be used by leaders as soldiers, as the particular fountain of the power of institutional managers (political parties, labour unions ...) of social conflict. It expresses the desire to decide *for oneself* when and how to struggle for one’s own interests and when and how to accept the inevitable temporary armistices.

A new question imposes itself: what social subject can spark struggles that allow for the revolutionary growth of self-management? Who is this subject? The working class as it is more or less traditionally conceived? Is it a social front that runs from the student to the technician? Is it the marginal and the “precarious”? In my opinion, the very extension of the social demand for self-management is a sign of how the revolutionary subject, at least potentially and as a tendency, can be identified with numerous social strata. When revolt is *a revolt against power*, it gathers together all of those whom the dominant minority robbed of their quota of power, in a sort of class accumulation of “more power.”

The self-management front of struggles is therefore a front which opens up to and encompasses, or can encompass, numerous social roles: domestic worker, tenant, student, soldier, worker, peasant, wife, son, the unemployed, the consumer of gas ... It invades, with critical theory and practice, numerous aspects of hetero-management, in now fragmentary and episodic ways, always recuperated by the institutions, and which, even then, contradictorily, always returns and reappears. This is a front that is not in reality one, because it does not possess in

an accelerated stage of transition between one form of hetero-management and another.

Focusing on the first of the three points which I schematised as indications of the Spanish Revolution, a first question arises: in the popular self-management, how much was there of “natural” spontaneity and how much of constructed spontaneity (or merely freed?) by half a century of libertarian propaganda, agitation, organisation? And the question arises because it is clear that, as I have already underlined, the attitude and behaviour of the human being in society have very little to do with nature (or perhaps even nothing, beyond social instinct) and great deal to do with culture. Therefore, for the revolt of the slaves to become a self-management project, for the class struggle to become an emancipatory revolution, it is necessary that many parts or segments of the exploited classes develop a culture – a desire and a capacity – of self-management, educating themselves in individual and collective self-determination. Passivity and dependence must cease to be psychological characteristics of the workers. Initiative and responsibility must cease to be the monopoly of restricted elites.

The formula “towards self-management through self-management” expresses, beyond an obvious, almost tautological, internal coherence, a self-pedagogical demand as well. As Félix García says, “there is no libertarian organisation which is not a pedagogical organisation, in which pedagogy does not cover each and every one of its pores”. One is not educated for freedom, one educates oneself. The task of militants who recognise themselves in the method of self-management is not therefore to teach self-management, but to stimulate the creation and multiplication of “situations” of self-education, that is, forms of direct action and direct democracy, according to a lexicon that is proper to the libertarian tradition, in which self-management is already *practiced*.

microcosm of business is extended to all spheres and to all levels of social life. Generalised self-management thus becomes a cultural dimension, in which can be found: individual and collective revolts against all and any form (economic, political, sexual, ethnic, ideological ...) of relation of domination; efforts (great or small, revolutionary or marginal) and experiences (extra or anti-institutional) to re-establish, on new bases, collective life; tensions of ideals and emotive drives not reducible to recognised necessities and more or less satisfied by the large hierarchical systems; efforts to re-think society, and therefore, human beings, to find new approaches and/or keys to the reading of history.

Does not this generalised self-management organise itself, or tend to organise itself, more like a true and proper *system* rather than a method? For example, as an alternative model of global society with socialised power, does it not end up as that possible anarchism that I spoke of earlier? Yes, but because in this system, in this model, in this cultural dimension, are introduced criteria of judgement (values) and cognitive criteria (modes of selection and organisation of facts so as to transform them into information) which, even though derived or extracted from the organisational method, they are no longer just method, they are no longer just about self-management. And because self-management is not a neutral method, that which derives from it either by induction or deduction has the anarchist seal, or better, is that much more anarchist the greater is its depth and extension.

To graft and prune the old trunk

Generalised self-management therefore may well be another way of saying libertarian socialism. Is it nothing new? On the contrary: it is rather libertarian socialism rediscovered, or better, reconstructed in the struggles, in the experiences, in the

scientific and technical innovations, in a word, in the culture, of these last two decades.

Generalised self-management is a theory still in construction, as any living theory should be, but which has already defined references that correspond to our own references. This is something which is not surprising given that it followed, more or less, the same logical itineraries we did, but it followed them today, whereas we did so yesterday.

General formulations, such as the “first principle of self-management” as defined by Bourdet (refusal of the delegation of power, revocability of all mandates at any moment), give anarchists, who always theorised and practised them, the impression of a discovery ... an obvious discovery. We cannot and should not however limit ourselves to viewing the phenomenon with suspicion or with satisfaction, but yes, before the pillage – more or less voluntary – and the recycling of our ideas becomes irreversible, we should accelerate the restructuring of our theoretical capital. The latter is an obsolete capital, not in its general formulations – which also rightly confirm themselves as valid in the debate on self-management – but in all of its intermediate articulation and in its operational instruments.

Ecology, alternative technology, anti-authoritarian pedagogy and institutional analysis cannot simply be *added* to anarchist thought, in the same manner that occasional fragments of the social and human sciences, from anthropology to economics, from psychology to sociology, cannot be mechanically added to it. The operation that I desire is much more complex. The old and solid trunk of anarchism is still vigorous, but it must be energetically pruned so that young branches can sprout and develop and so that it may receive new grafts without rejecting or suffocating them. The blossoming of the practice and theory of self-management seems to me in fact to be a good occasion to prune and graft. From the debate on

the hetero-management of the “great” problems (war, planning ...) and, on the basis of these, progressively returns to occupy the spaces temporarily left to self-management;

3. The authoritarian plague can hide and even develop, even in those proletarian organisations best vaccinated against it, such as anarcho-syndicalist structures, and even in the most anti-bureaucratic organisations, by ideology and by tradition; they can initiate technobureaucratic tendencies, in perfect good-faith, due to “objective demands”.

The Spanish Revolution – its preparation, its achievements, its defeat – is, therefore, an extremely rich mine, still largely underused, from which self-management thought can and should extract invaluable lessons, above all if what is sought is not so much – as has been done until now – the history of a war between fascists and anti-fascists, but, *within* the anti-fascist camp, the history of a mortal struggle between proletarians and the State, between self-management and bureaucracy. And this even if, naturally (it should be superfluous to mention it), self-management should think its revolution and its strategy in current realities, which are not those of Spain in 1936 and much less those of Russia in 1917 and France in 1871.

Towards self-management through self-management

The strategy, far from resolving itself in the problems of the revolutionary period, also and above all covers the route between the immediate present and the revolution. It is a matter, as I said, of finding a path or paths to arrive at revolution in the most ideal way, such that it is conceivable as an accelerated phase of the journey of self-management and not

dinary tension, but which continues in the normal everyday. However, this remains only a general logical solution. For it to become an operational solution, it must be made richer by much more articulated concrete determinations.

Re-reading History

It is obvious that the reflection on revolution develops entirely on the basis of past experiences, through that continuous re-composition of historical elements in function of the present, which makes history an essential and living collective memory, just as individual memory continually recomposes, in diverse ways, its elements on the basis of new facts, new experiences, new necessities. In this sense, self-management can also be a key to reading differently the revolutionary experiences of the past, from which to take strategic indications, a key that privileges amidst what is learned those things inherent to the issue of organisational method.

Among all social revolutions, I believe that the richest in positive and negative indications was the Spanish Revolution of 1936–1939, due to the range and extent of the practice of popular self-management that it involved. This revolution, with regards to the revolutionary problematic that I mentioned earlier, schematically indicates the following:

1. The exploited people have within them enormous self-organisational capacities, they know how to find and apply spontaneously diverse and appropriate self-management formulae, at least at the most “natural” associative levels (the factory, the city ...) and at the first levels of coordination, when and while there is an absence of power;
2. Power re-establishes itself, even after a formidable, anti-authoritarian, subversive convulsion, through

self-management, we can extract elements to decide what to prune and what to graft.

Without undeserved inferiority complexes, but also without illusory superiority complexes, anarchists can hope for, in the debate around self-management, a precious contribution of openness in the direction of what is new and different, of creative stimuli, of admonition against hiding its own unresolved problems behind ready to hand formula. For their part, anarchists can bring to the debate the precious contribution of the collective memory of a movement that *lived* consciously (conscious also of its *own* contradictions) the whole problematic of self-management through victories and defeats, joys and sufferings, struggles and daily life, through the hearts and minds of hundreds of thousands of militants.

The hierarchical division of labour ...

The debate on self-management moves first of all from the field of what is by definition most proper to it: from the analysis of collective decision making mechanisms, that is, from the reflection on how, in hierarchical organisational structures, power is determined and on how, inversely, it is possible concretely to organise the egalitarian participation of all in decision making processes. It is a reflection on the themes of authority and freedom and a reflection that leads directly to the fulcral points of direct democracy and the division of labour.

In fact, it is easy to (re)discover from this perspective that the fundamental distinction, common to all class societies, is that between who holds power and who bears it, between who governs and who is governed, and that the cause of this dichotomy is not the private ownership of the means of production, which is *one* of its historically determined juridical-economic forms. It is easy therefore to (re)discover that *the* root of domination is the hierarchical division of social labour and that, as a result,

self-management is an empty shell if it does not presuppose the integration (to recall Bakunin and Kropotkin) of manual and intellectual, executive and organisational labour.

Without this recomposition, self-management is already impossible at the level of a business company, because the effective possibility and capacity of all workers to operate and decide *knowingly* is absent (which is the second of the two fundamental principles of self-management, according to Bourdet). Without such a recomposition, there can be no egalitarian participation based on knowledge and responsibility and there is no, therefore, self-management, but rather asymmetrical co-management between managers and subordinates, even if everyone is formally a partner or member, or even if the first are formally “dependent” on the second, following the Yugoslavian formula.

It is an unsuspecting witness of the regime (Milojko Drulovic) who tells us that according to sociological studies, the frequent conflicts between management and representative organs of the workers express an “acute antagonism, a true struggle over the sharing of power and authority” and one of the causes would be, oh look, the extravagant pretension of the workers to “interfere in the domain of management” based on a “primitive conception according to which self-management would suppress the division of labour”. More truthfully, the integration should be extended to the whole of society, because the hierarchical division of *social* labour is not a phenomenon that can be simply reduced to the sphere of businesses, nor even to that of economics, but it refers to the whole of *social* functions. And even remaining within the economic sphere, it is necessary to recognise in exploitation not only the quantitative aspect, but also the qualitative, which consists in reserving for a small minority the more gratifying types of work, while to the majority fall the more thankless, exhausting, frustrating kinds of labour. The cleaner of sewers continues to be a cleaner of sewers

but of radically transforming it. Self-management is a revolutionary theory-praxis.

The enormous question of revolution rises up here. Ruling out the idea that revolution is simply an insurrection, established that it is a *period* (perhaps *even* comprised of one or more insurrectional moments) of accelerated institutional and cultural transformations, questions are raised about how to arrive at unleashing the destructive-reconstructive *process* (In only one country? In many countries at the same time? In the late-capitalist metropole? In the fatherland of techno-bureaucratic “socialism”? In the periphery of the great empires? In the Third World?) in such a way that self-management solutions can affirm themselves successfully over authoritarian solutions.

How to avoid, as always occurred, that the spaces of freedom opened by the rapid destruction of the old values and structures do not become spaces for a new slavery? I am not referring here to the *external* enemies of the revolution and of self-management, but to the true great *internal* enemy: the mechanisms of the reproduction of power which begin immediately during the revolutionary process and which lead to conclusions in contradiction with the premises of emancipation. How to avoid what René Lourau called “the Mühlmann effect” [Wilhelm Emil Mühlmann], that is, an institutionalisation that denies the social movement? If the generalised innovating *tension* can only be a short lived phenomenon, how can reasonable hopes be nourished that the tension not limit itself to breaking temporarily the dykes of class domination to then rapidly set out again on the course of the hierarchical division of social labour?

Self-management as a method is, *in theory*, the right response, because it implies the permanent disruption and de-structuring of power, whether it be in its destructive or reconstructive aspects, and therefore, even in the post-revolutionary institutionalisation, it is, in itself, the bearer of a continuity of the project that is not exhausted in the extraor-

and its organs. And if the old world has something of value to teach, it is certainly not with its tribunals and its judges and its lawyers, but perhaps with its popular juries and arbitration.

It is not by chance that I cited arbitrations. I believe, in effect, that a third indication of principle is that a social right, founded on values of individual and collective self-determination, should be thought of as a frame of reference of few and simple general norms, within which are to be found an infinite number of free agreements between individuals and the collectivity, at all of the levels of articulation of a society, from the local to the international. This social right should have then a clearly contractual nature. Only thus is it in fact possible to cover the myriad casuistry of situations, the interrelations of complementarity and contrast and, thus, the possible conflicts, which no code could in any way predict.

The Mühlmann Effect

Even in a summary examination, such as that carried out hitherto, it becomes clear that the problematic knots of self-management correspond to the major themes of anarchist thought and practice, and that the self-management approach to different social and political issues reveals itself to have affinities with – when it is not identical to – the libertarian approach. Of course, it is as an anarchist that I followed the logical paths of self-management, by forcing myself to proceed not by deduction from anarchist ideology, but through the application of self-management methods to the essential questions of human conviviality.

Analogous affinities can be identified by addressing the problems of self-management *strategy*. Generally, all of the defenders of integral or generalised self-management agree with the fact that it is not a matter of reforming the existing social order,

even under self-management. The urban planner continues to be an urban planner even under self-management. We can very well imagine a self-managed collective of porters and a self-managed collective of doctors; we can even imagine (it is a difficult abstraction, I admit) that they exchange their labour on a level of equality: one hour of work of the one is paid for by one hour of work of the other. But the exchange will remain unequal, the qualitative exploitation persists. This is masked by the fact that normally – and not by chance –, quantitative exploitation is superimposed on it. Yet when the paradoxical norm, according to which to the more unpleasant jobs correspond the lower salaries, is contradicted, the qualitative dimension of exploitation becomes evident. For example, today a street cleaner earns more than a secondary school teacher, but the result is not any tendency on the part of the teachers to be contracted as street cleaners ...

... and its egalitarian recomposition

The hierarchical division of social labour is therefore charged with non-egalitarian meanings: exploitation, privilege and, above all, power. The ideologies of power (whether they are capitalist or techno-bureaucratic) justify the hierarchy with the organisational necessities of complex societies. They shuffle the cards because they falsely mix two things which are not necessarily tied. It is undeniable that with social-economic structures more articulated than those found in a tribe of hunters and gatherers that the social and technical division of labour is not, to a certain degree, eliminable. It is undeniable that these structures, from the business company to the local community, and so on, to the broadest social systems, must articulate themselves by functions. But it is by no means *necessary* that the functions become fixed roles: rotation, for example, permits reconciling division with equality. Fur-

thermore, certain functions can very well become collective, others still can be performed with a revocable mandate, others, lastly, will completely disappear because they are only useful and necessary to the hierarchical system; a system which generates them in large quantities and continually so as to preserve and justify itself.

What is there to prevent, for example, that in a hospital all of the workers discharge manual and intellectual functions by rotation (that all be, in different periods of the day, the week or the year, doctors-nurses-auxiliaries), that the management be collective, with administrative tasks attributed temporarily, along with internal and external coordination? There is no real motive for this, but only the false motives of a rationality internal to the logic of power, that is, a deliberate, created and artificially maintained relative scarcity of intellectual competencies used to justify the monopoly of a knowledge class and, therefore, a hierarchy.

The objection that it would be a waste to underuse the minds of the intellectuals, obliging them to dedicate a part of their time to manual labour is repugnantly imbecilic. What to say then of the enormous waste of creativity, intelligence and imagination of nine out of ten people, mutilated in their capacities and condemned to a stupid and disheartening routine in factories, offices, in domestic labour, such that only one person can grow, think, invent? And why do we not also ask ourselves how much the very intelligence of this person was impoverished due to the privation of the stimuli that come from manual activities, that is, from the direct contact with material reality?

From this perspective, the recent phenomenon of mass schooling acquires a particular significance, with its demands for the right to study, with its shoving against, a little ambitiously and a little demagogically, the economic and meritocratic barriers placed in defence of privileged knowing. Beyond the *individual* aspirations to a social promotion by means of a diploma and a university degree, as a *global*

express a tautology. One has to go beyond this and define the general lines of a new *social right* that guarantees the permanence as well as the reciprocal and global compatibility of diverse individual and collective interests, in a system of *dynamic equilibrium*.

Social Right

A first indication of the inspiring principles for a new social right is rightly this: it must be thought essentially as the guarantee of the solutions of equilibrium and not as the pre-established codification of behaviours. The liberal ideological formula for the optimal solution of the conflict of interests through the free play of commodity and political competition is mystifying because it is applied to a non-egalitarian society in which the game is not free, but rather defined precisely by the falsifying laws of the hierarchical division of social labour. However, there is here a true kernel of anti-totalitarian thought, for it refers in fact to a concept of the “natural” equilibrium of contrasting interests. In reality, there is nothing less natural and more cultural than this equilibrium. It is human beings in society who establish the rules of the game. There is no game, nor society, without rules: the problem lies in how and by whom these are established and applied.

A second indication in this direction comes expressly from the theory of direct democracy. The constitutional separation of the legislative, executive and judicial powers – in truth, more formal than real – has value in a system where powers are separated from society and where they are concentrated in dominant roles: only in such a context does it guarantee, *to some extent*, through a certain “pluralism of powers”, the less arbitrary exercise of power, even if, in substance, it is always class power. In a system where power is socialised, the functions inherent to law should also be attributes of direct democracy

an “affective” key. A pyramid turned upside down is not the opposite of the pyramid, but its mirror image. The utopian ideal of a society perfectly conciliated through fraternity (but why *must* brothers always be in agreement?) seems to me to be reflectively similar to the hierarchical utopia of coercive conciliation, equally asphyxiating, even though without laws, regulations, police, judges, directors, priests. In fact, the anarchist prefers to speak more of solidarity than fraternity, which is not an insignificant nuance.

In this regard, the merely outlined interpretation by Clastres, in the last phase of his life, of the bellicosity of primitive peoples as a defence mechanism of the multiple (the diverse) against the One, of society against the State, is challenging. With this interpretation of conflict (of a certain kind of conflict), an *equally* positive reading is proffered.

In effect, not all social conflict is born of inequality. On the contrary, it may perhaps be assumed that the simplified antagonism of interests, created by the hierarchical division of social labour, compresses and hides a much more varied diversity of interests. It is true that the conflict born in and of class society, a conflict which justifies the “work” of the apparatuses of psychic and physical repression, and which justifies a growing waste of social energy for the creation of consensus and the containment of dissension, is an incomparable conflict due to its intensity and devastating validity. The conflict of diversity is not the conflict of inequality. The first does not confront us with the insoluble problem that the second does for interclassist, mystifying ideologies: reconciling the irreconcilable, that is, the interests of the bosses and of the servants. Nevertheless, certain problems are raised.

The probable, and to a certain measure desirable, permanence of conflicts takes us to the delicate territory of their regulation. To affirm that contrasting interests, which are born of *diversity between equals*, can and must be resolved according to libertarian modalities is little more than to

phenomenon, as the objective sum of individual motivations, what is at issue here is a generalised search for intellectual labour, a search, which because it is generalised, cannot be satisfied except through the negation of the social pyramid and the non-egalitarian distribution among everyone of either manual or intellectual work. And it is perhaps not a fortuitous coincidence if self-management made a thunderous eruption, as a demand and as a practice, in May 68, a popular explosion unleashed by the Parisian students ...

The integration of intellectual and manual work determines a condition of equality in the effective possibilities and capacities of decision making. However, it does not exhaust, but only introduces, the discourse about direct democracy, as the division between manual and intellectual work does not exhaust the discourse about power. In effect, not all intellectual workers, on the contrary, only a minority among them, are integrated into the dominant class. Neither scientists, for example, nor doctors, neither professors nor engineers exercise, *as such*, functions of power. They do so only if they occupy positions of control and social management, if and while they exercise functions of “hetero-management”, that is, management *over* other human beings.

Whatever its apparent origin and its justification (property ownership or organisational capacity, merit or competence), whatever the manner by which it was conferred or legitimised (mercantilist mechanisms or meritocratic selection, investiture from on high or “democratic” delegation from below), the power of rulers is always obtained by confiscating it from society, that is, by negating the fact and the right to all others of the faculty of individual and collective self-determination.

The delegation of power that is expressed in representative democracy, or indirect democracy, is perhaps the most subtly mystifying device for legitimising hierarchy. It therefore threatens to be a Trojan horse of power in the practice and thought of self-management, as historical and contemporary

experiences, from Spain to Yugoslavia, from the cooperative movement to labour union bureaucracies, demonstrate. Presented as an organisational *technique*, it is, on the contrary, a functional, organisational *mode* of hierarchical power, incompatible with self-management.

Let it be noted though that we are not here making any consideration about the fact that, in a parliamentary democracy, elections are not a means to nominate *the* political leaders, but only a very small part of the *formal representation* of political power. And we omit the facile irony about the mystifying nature of “electoral” choice. The socialist himself, Giorgio Ruffolo, current candidate to the European elections, defined three years ago the voting mechanism as an “applause-o-metre” (an applause-o-metre flawed, we add, by the current sophisticated techniques of public opinion manipulation). What we are interested in highlighting here is that even if, in the abstract, all of the functions of *social* management were elected, these same elected managers would constitute themselves as a dominant class, by the very objective logic of the delegation of power.

The astuteness of extending to the economic and business domain a few measures of representative democracy (in the form of co-management or technocratic “self-management”) is an even fairly transparent attempt at recasting the consensus around productivist alienation in the face of the bankruptcy of capitalist ideology. Even though representative democracy already shows signs of wear in the political field and has increasing difficulties in masking its true oligarchic nature, its renovation in an economic frame can perhaps still exercise some attraction because it is based on cultural values deposited in the collective unconscious. The rejection of delegation is still a relatively new “effervescent” social phenomenon that arises in times of crisis.

... *and direct democracy*

If the delegation of power opens a fracture in the social body, between “managers” and “managed”, self-management

destroy ethnicities, languages, local, regional and national customs, beyond denying, as all earlier powers did, individual diversity (reduced to inequality, as already said, or mortified). Like a social bulldozer, power dreams of levelling hills, filling valleys, straightening rivers, creating an endless plain from which rise up only, at regular intervals, control towers and the squalid castles of its privilege.

Until now, diversity was considered in the best of cases as a fact to respect, an object to tolerate. This however is an inadequate interpretation and, at the limit, dangerously reductive. Diversity, on the contrary, must not only be accepted, but exalted, sought for, continuously created and recreated, because diversity is a human *necessity*, because diversity is a value in itself. *The diverse is beautiful*. As it is beautiful that there are no two identical leaves, it is also beautiful that each house, each landscape, each city, each dialect, each person, each nation be unique and different.

The ethnic minorities which rediscover and claim their cultural identity, the right to their language and to their traditions, are also an expression of the human need for diversity and in this they are consonant with the search for self-management. Even though the repression of diversity can generate, by reaction and similarly to sexual repression, perverse responses (such as neo-colonialism, neo-racism, mini-statism, etc.), these centrifugal tendencies towards the diverse bear within themselves a seed of equality and freedom.

Harmony and conflict

Diversity implies not only complementarity and, therefore, harmony, but also conflict. This does not frighten me. A society without contrasts never appeared to me to be an attractive model. It always gave me the impression of being not the opposite of a totalitarian society, but its inverse in

cause the small is *diverse*. The discourse about equality cannot be separated from that about diversity.

Far from being contradictory, the concepts of equality and diversity are complementary: paradoxically, it is in fact inequality which leads to uniformity, to levelling, to massification. Even though the ideologies of inequality claim to ground themselves in “natural” variations, the only diversity which they recognise is that which is inherent to the hierarchical division of social labour, the only diversity that they justify is the inequality of roles.

Power, by its nature, denies everything that opposes it and diversity opposes it insofar as it is ungovernable: no power is sufficiently elastic to manage the infinitely diverse. Only the diverse can manage itself. What is diverse proclaims self-management, what is diverse is the living negation of hetero-management. Power is therefore in a continuous war – a war to the death – with the diverse; it must destroy diversity, or at least channel it into inequality. In particular, the tendency towards totalitarianism of the power of our times is the implacable enemy of diversity. For technocratic and bureaucratic logic, the ideal world is a standardised world whose “quality” is entirely reducible to what can be computerised, planned, predicted, controlled, registered, machine recorded, added to, subtracted from, multiplied, divided ... For classical capitalist logic, the ideal world is a global market in which everything and everyone is a commodity. For the hybrid logic of late-capitalism, the ideal world is mid-way between the capitalist and the techno-bureaucratic ideals.

For power today, from the techno-bureaucratic East to the late-capitalist West, as well as in the greater part of the Third World that imitates both (in Africa, for example, tribal and ethnic differences are combated, even pitilessly, so as to construct artificial “national” unities), diversity is even more unacceptable than for any other kind of historically known power. Like a compressor roll, power tends to level cultural differences, de-

can only be recognised and realised in direct democracy, that is, only on the condition that power remains a *collective function*, that it is never separated from the collectivity as a superior authority, not even if elected. Direct democracy does not mean, reductively, assembly based democracy. Even if the assembly is its fundamental organ, the subsequent articulation of direct democracy draws on other formulas such as revocable mandates, beyond the delegation of power. There is delegation of power when someone is charged with taking imperative decisions *over the* collectivity, in the name and on behalf of it, relative to a broad range of questions and with ample discretionary power. If, on the contrary, the mandate is specific and temporary, with limited and defined margins of discretionary authority, and above all, if it is revocable *at any moment* by the constituents, that is, by the collectivity that expressed itself through the representative, then this latter does not replace or substitute the collective will, nor can it freely interpret it (an old trick of representative democracy), because its actions are subject to permanent verification.

In general terms, direct democracy may be defined by a sovereign assembly, revocable mandates and, lastly, the constant rotation (at more or less long intervals, according to their nature) of all permanent functions of coordination, of all “leadership” functions not collectively exercised. And this is how popular democracy expressed itself when, episodically and temporarily, it could manifest itself without excessive objective and subjective constraints. The Spanish libertarian collectives were so organised. And so are the numerous Israeli kibbutzim still organised, in which, according to Rosner, approximately some 50 percent of the members participate in committees and management functions by rotation. And do not revocable mandates go back to the Paris Commune? And do we not find revocable mandates and the sovereign assembly as demands and as praxis in the workers struggles of

the last ten years? Direct democracy is already social practice, even if only episodic and fragmentary.

The problem of dimension

Those who want to reduce self-management to marginality, or who would deny it any chance whatsoever, say that direct democracy can only be applied to small scale organisations. Let us then consider the question of dimension. Paradoxically, I am also convinced that the large scale is the dimension of power and that the small scale is that of direct democracy. But I draw from this conviction different conclusions: elementary associative units (productive, territorial, etc.) can and should be small and, between them, a web of horizontal relations should be woven. In other words, large units and the very pernicious concept-myth of Unity with a capital letter should be rejected. The small units, in turn, should not be the bricks of a pyramidal structure, but the nodes of a sort of federative *network* of egalitarian connections that go from *the simple to the complex*, and not from the base to the vertex.

The large private enterprise, the megalopolises, the State, should be rejected and broken down because the “large” segregates power within and outside of itself. Large economic and political aggregates, large social institutions, are the field where the power of the “new bosses-managers” is affirmed and exercised: it is here that the techno-bureaucracy finds its vital space and its functional justifications, whether in late-capitalist or post-capitalist systems.

There is enough experience and scientific research to know that certain dimensional limits cannot be exceeded if *direct communication* is to be preserved, which is essential to direct democracy and which is exemplified (though not reducible to it) in the active participation in an assembly. A decision making assembly of thousands of people is unimaginable. Such

erarchical structure of the territory, where *a* capital occupies the place of *the* capital, to use a little word play.

While in decentralised authoritarianism, the centre decides over everything that it can and delegates that which escapes it, or runs the risk of escaping it, in federative decentralisation it is the associated unit which decides everything that falls under its competence and, together with other units, that which falls under a common competence, in accordance with agreements and temporary or permanent coordinating organs. It is not word play, but a true logical inversion. It is a matter, for example, of considering neighbourhood assemblies as the decentralisation of municipal administration and this latter as the decentralisation of the State or, conversely, of considering the city as a federation of neighbourhoods (as the medieval commune was to some extent, with a nostalgia for the past) and these, in turn, as federations of smaller aggregate units. Even companies which surpass certain dimensions can be conceived of as, in this light, a federation of parts. Which is precisely what is presupposed, even if only along the lines of a decentralised hierarchy, by the Yugoslav structure of self-management for large companies and what is also behind the non-expressed logic behind the factory councils, made up of section delegates.

There is therefore no objective obstacle to the small scale. It is also, in addition, perfectly compatible with a rich and variegated range of inter-human relations, because with its potentiality for disaggregating power, there also coexists a potentiality to re-aggregate and re-combine society.

Equal but diverse

We said that the small was necessary, we said that the small is possible, we said, finally, that the small is *beautiful*. This last affirmation leads us to a further problematic knot: diversity. The small is, in effect, also beautiful, and perhaps above all, be-

sources, and that the use of renewable energy sources is more effective at small scales; that pollution becomes dramatic and costly as a large scale phenomenon; that interpersonal communication, which is an equally important social function of production, is not richer on the large scale, but poorer (and accordingly the poverty of relations is not only a characteristic of “rural stupidity”, but also of a new “urban stupidity”); that, in their complexity, large social structures are machines of decreasing output in relation to what they “consume”, with the growth of their size ...

And so on. The field of discoveries regarding the irrationality of the large scale, opened by a “simple” inversion of perspective, continues to be very fecund and its exploration is only at the beginning. This current of thought, in its more radical expressions, is antithetical to the scientific ideology of power. In its more tempered expressions, however, it can be useful to power, just like a vaccine is an extremely useful tempered form of the illness. In effect, it is the very owners of the economy and the State who, for some years now, multiply experiences of and proposals for decentralisation, for the dismantling (not separation) of power, in the factory and society. It is a confession of failure, but also an effort to found a different centralisation of power, decongesting the centre, delegating what this cannot control to peripheral zones of power, a decreasing control of the centre to the periphery.

This decentralisation, and the philosophy which sustains it and the science which lends it its instruments, is not the opposite of concentration, but the other necessary side of concentration. This decentralisation has nothing to do with the fabric of federative organisation in which the very concepts of periphery and centre are surpassed, because each point is in the centre of the relations that concern it. The geometrical metaphor of a disk has the same hierarchical validity as the pyramid metaphor: it is the two dimensional version of the circle and it is not by chance that it immediately recalls the hi-

an assembly can only approve or reject simple proposals, proposals previously simplified. Furthermore, an assembly of this kind risks responding, credibly, more to emotional than to rational solicitations, following the law of the psychology of the masses.

On the other hand, if it is true that direct communication can be joined by other forms of horizontal communication (made possible by the appropriate use of electronic and television media, as Prandstraller and Flecchia suggest for example), it is also true that these last should not replace the former, but merely add to them, especially at a federal level, because they can more easily be an instrument of control and/or of polling than of forming and expressing popular will. Accordingly, the first fundamental sphere of collective self-determination can be none other than the elementary associative unit – in the same way that the first and fundamental sphere of freedom can only be the individual – and this unit should be “at the scale of the assembly”. The self-management approach to the problem of scale should therefore be posed, without inhibition, following the line of thought synthesised by the felicitous expression of E.F. Schumacher that, “small is beautiful”. It is a matter of inverting the logical idea, which starts from what exists and its “objective” tendencies towards economic, political and technological gigantism, to then prove the “necessity” of the large scale. To fall anew into that logic would be disastrous for the theory and practice of self-management, for one would then arrive at the demonstration of the impossibility of generalised self-management. It would also be a mistake, because in truth it is not technology, the economy, rationality, that impose macrostructures and macro-institutions, but *a* technology, *an* economy, *a* rationality, determined by the logic of power, even though, in turn, by a feedback effect, they become determining, creating a diabolical circle in which each element mutually sustains itself with “objective” and ideological motivations.

Conversely, self-management should rethink the economy, technology, territorial organisation, etc., starting from *its* demands, applying *its* rationality. This may carry some reduction in efficiency, but it is a price, if revealed to be necessary, that should be accepted. It still has to be demonstrated however that the higher costs of the small scale, even within an accounting framework of technical and economic efficiency, are greater than its benefits.

On the contrary, there is a whole new current of scientific thought that is (re)discovering the signs of some of the “economies of scale” opposed to those until recently branded as justifications for gigantism. As in many other cases, here also one may begin with an apparently unquestionable definition to infer consequences contrary to those given as certain and culturally dominant. We have, in fact, economies of scale when we approach the optimal scale and, inversely, we have growing diseconomies the more we move away from this *optimum*. But no one has demonstrated, nor can they, that the optimal scale tends towards infinity. On the contrary, there are sufficient elements to believe that beyond certain dimensional limits (which are still not those that we would define as small, being rather, let us say, medium), that we have phenomena of economic inefficiency and congestion incompatible with *any* system, that problems of management and social control so grave are created that they annul, even within capitalist and technocratic logic, the advantages of centralisation.

A recent French study of computer technology applied to business management (to hetero-management, not to self-management) suggests that for an optimal ascendant/descendant flux of information, the dimensional limit should not surpass five hundred employees. And in Italy, the discovery of the small business and its virtues dates from last year: the small business is flexible, dynamic, versatile, sensitive, efficient... From being a sign of backwardness, an obstacle to

development, it became, thanks to the work of journalists and “recycled” researchers of the small, the spine, as well as the enabling element, of the economy. Before the elephantiasis of Italian style large companies (nationalised, *irizzata*,⁴ *gepizzata*,⁵ *imizzata*,⁶ assisted, sclerotic, somnolent, ministerial), the ambitious entrepreneurialism of thousands of managers of small scale exploitation, an Italian style entrepreneurialism also, naturally comprised not only of imagination, but also of illegal labour, tax evasion, ecological banditry; an entrepreneurialism that exploits and, in turn, in an ambivalent relationship, that is exploited by large public and private companies.

Small is beautiful

A breach therefore begins to open (finally!) in the wall of the dominant ideology of the “big is beautiful” and a growing number of researchers contribute by demonstrating that a different technology is possible, a small scale technology which is the instrument of man and not of which man is the instrument; that it is possible to respond to the energy crisis differently, without recourse to nuclear energy and the pillaging of natural re-

⁴ A word for which there is no translation and invented by the author on the basis of the acronym IRI (*Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale*), a public entity created in 1933 by the Fascist regime to finance banks and companies that had gone bankrupt during the Great Depression. It was dissolved in 2002 [TN]

⁵ A word for which there is no translation and invented by the author on the basis of the acronym GEPI (*Società per le Gestioni e Partecipazioni Industriali*), a public entity created in 1971, in which the IRI and IMI (see following note) participated and which was integrated into, in 1977, the *Sviluppo Italia* agency. [TN]

⁶ A word for which there is no translation and invented by the author on the basis of the acronym IMI (*Istituto Mobiliare Italiano*), a public credit institution created in 1931 to help companies overcome the difficulties associated with the Great Depression. In 1998, it fused with the *Istituto Bancario San Paolo di Torino* to become *Sanpaolo IMI*. [TN]