SUBSIDIARITY, ANARCHISM, AND THE GOVERNANCE OF COMPLEXITY

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There is a striking resemblance between, on the one hand, administrative and technocratic approaches to problems of subsidiarity and multi-layered governance, and, on the other hand, the classic anarchist theories about the construction of federated societies and decision models. What could this mean, for contemporary anarchism and for contemporary capitalism, as they both acknowledge complexity as a core characteristic of world construction?

1. SUBSIDIARITY

If things were as simple as that, the concept wouldn't be a theme of worldwide scholarship, but American professor of Law Paolo Carozza (2003: 38) suggests at the beginning of an article this as "for now a very simplified working definition": "subsidiarity is the principle that each social and political group should help smaller or more local ones accomplish their respective ends without, however, arrogating those tasks to itself".

Subsidiarity is as well an analytical tool as a structuring and a procedural principle that can be interpreted differently in politics and in law. As an analytical tool it provides a conceptual alternative to the idea of state sovereignty in trying to make sense of the plurality and diversity of power relations and political and socio-legal structures that characterize contemporary governance systems. It is also a structuring principle (*un projet de société*) in that it adjudicates responsibilities with respect for pluralism and diversity. And it is procedural (*une stratégie d'action*) in the sense that it is a political rule of play in the negotiations between actors about these responsibilities. Vertical subsidiarity then deals with the question which level of government is best suited to govern a specific issue of the public interest. Horizontally, the question is to which degree the government, another authority, 'the market', or even 'activities of general interest, originating from citizens, both as individuals and as members of associations'[2] define the field in which public services are administered.

Although the term (re)appears in political discourse at the end of the twentieth century, the idea behind subsidiarity is much older. Traditionally, the principle is said to have its origin in Thomas Aquinas' philosophy (1225-1274), or even in classical Greece. In the Netherlands of the nineteenth century, an important Christian manifestation of the idea of subsidiarity is

[2] Costituzione italiana, art. 118, ult. comma: "Stato, Regioni, Città metropolitane, Province e Comuni favoriscono l'autonoma iniziativa dei cittadini, singoli e associati, per lo svolgimento di attività di interesse generale, sulla base del principio di sussidiarietà."

found in the Calvinist principle of sphere sovereignty *(souvereiniteit in eigen kring)*. Neo-Calvinist theologian and Prime Minister Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) formulated the idea that societal spheres, such as the family, business, science, education or the arts should not be subjected to state government. These spheres are the expression of the organic development of mankind within society, and they should be governed by God's rules, instead of by worldly government.

The commonality between sphere sovereignty and subsidiarity lies in the societal spread of responsibilities and competences. Sphere sovereignty emphasizes the autonomy of the different life spheres; subsidiarity puts the emphasis on the complementarity of political, public and private competences (Frissen 1996: 20).

However, it is Catholic social theory that gives the concept of subsidiarity a boost, from the end of the nineteenth century on (Carozza, 2003: 41; Razzano, 2005: 9). Whereas the 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum* justified limited state intervention to protect and enhance the living conditions of the working class, the 1931 encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* reformulated the "principle of intervention-but-not-interference with a decidedly stronger emphasis on the limits of public authority". The "underlying and interwoven" ideas presupposed in this text have, according to Carozza, provided the starting point for all subsequent uses and adaptations of the principle of subsidiarity. He mentions three ideas, and for all of them he explicitly states that they have nothing to do with a classically libertarian view of society (2003: 42-44).[3] We shall see how he comes to feel the need for this unexpected repudiation.

The first foundation "is a conviction that each human individual is endowed with an inherent and inalienable worth, or dignity, and thus that the value of the individual human person is ontologically and morally prior to the state or other social groupings" (Carozza, 2003: 42). The second presupposition is that, although the 'individual human person' stands at the core of the theory, they can only fully realize their inherent worth and dignity in a social context, i.e. in community with others. The mutual responsibility between smaller communities and 'higher' groupings is what constitutes a social and political order. Third, behind the idea of subsidiarity lies a conception of freedom that is not solely negative, i.e. the restraint from interference. It also means "freedom to *act* in such a way as to participate fully in the goods of an authentically human life" (ibid.: 43, emphasis in original).

Upon these three foundations rises a concept of subsidiarity that is at the same time negative and positive. It is negative in that it forbids the 'higher' association to arrogate the tasks that can be effectively undertaken by the 'lower' grouping. It is positive when it justifies intervention by the state when the smaller associations are unable to achieve their ends by themselves. Carozza (2003: 44) concludes: "Subsidiarity is therefore a somewhat paradoxical principle. It limits the state, yet empowers and justifies it." Carozza may be right in asserting the distance between this Catholic idea of subsidiarity and classical libertarianism – but only in its emphasis on justified state intervention. However, the libertarianism he refers to is a very specific school of typically Northern American individualist anarchism, in which indeed freedom is basically an absolute restraint of interference in one's personal life[4]. This is of course incompatible with Carozza's description of subsidiarity as an affirmation of plurality and diversity, as "a principle of distribution of the diverse social functions that together make up the common good" (2003: 46).

[3] Also Giovanna Razzano (2005) sees three underlying principles: the principle of the plurality of social autonomies, the principle of loyal collaboration, and the principle of solidarity.
[4] As exemplified by Robert Nozick (1974): Anarchy, State and Utopia.

2. CLASSIC ANARCHISM

In a European context however, libertarianism is more like one of the synonyms for anarchism in all its community-oriented variations (see anarcho-syndicalist or even anarcho-communist journals as *Alternative libertaire* or *Le monde libertaire*). As it once was said: all anarchism is socialist (but not all socialism is anarchist). The nineteenth century, the century when the concept of Christian subsidiarity came about, also knew an anarchist tradition of subsidiarity – although again it was not called that way -, that emphasized personal and social responsibility for one's life, and a clear bottom-up approach of societal organization. We find these theories in the works of the first classical anarchist writers, like Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin.

The term 'anarchist' in its contemporary political sense is introduced by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon for the benefit of "one of my youngest readers" near the end of his *Qu'est-ce que la propriété* (1840: 168):

- Vous êtes républicain?
- Républicain, oui; mais ce mot ne précise rien. Res Publica, c'est la chose publique ; or, quiconque veut la chose publique, sous quelque forme de gouvernement que ce soit, peut se dire républicain. Les rois aussi sont républicains.
- Eh bien! vous êtes démocrate?
- Non.
- Quoi! vous seriez monarchique?
- Non.
- Constitutionnel?
- Dieu m'en garde.
- Vous êtes donc aristocrate?
- Point du tout.
- Vous voulez un gouvernement mixte?
- Encore moins.
- Qu'êtes-vous donc?
- Je suis anarchiste.
- Je vous entends – vous faites de la satire; ceci est à l'adresse du gouvernement.
- En aucune façon : vous venez d'entendre ma profession de foi sérieuse et mûrement réfléchie ; quoique très ami de l'ordre, je suis, dans toute la force du terme, anarchiste.

The content of the concept 'anarchist' has never been very clear, but one thing is sure: the classical anarchists as Proudhon and his disciples Mikhail Alexandrovich Bakunin and Pyotr Alexeyevich Kropotkin are foremost thinkers about order. Proudhon, Bakunin and the like are working and writing in a period in which the (young) nation-states of Europe are experimenting with modern democracy, elected parliaments and the separation of powers. At the same time, amongst the working population a class consciousness is developing and expressing itself in overtly socialist organizations. People become aware that the new democratic achievements are limited to a small class of proprietors, while the growing industrialization leads to increasingly harsh exploitation of the workers. It is in this context that Bakunin wrote: "In a word, we reject all legislation, all authority, and all privileged, licensed, official, and legal influence, even though arising from universal suffrage, convinced that it can turn only to the advantage of a dominant minority of exploiters against the interests of the immense majority in subjection to them. This is the sense in which we are really Anarchists." (Bakunin, 1871/1882: 25)

Indeed, in the minds of the classical anarchists, no legislation ever had another purpose than systematizing the exploitation of the working class to the benefit of the ruling class. These laws are inevitably bound to the concept of the State, this 'historically necessary evil', this 'passing configuration of society', as various authors called it. So the disappearance of the state's law is fatally linked to the disappearance of the state, and *vice versa*.

Bakunin criticizes Rousseau, who states that man is born free, but that he yields part of his freedom by joining society. For Bakunin however, yielding or transferring a part of freedom equals resigning freedom completely. Freedom is indivisible; one cannot be partly free. Freedom is not anterior to society, but the result of mutual acknowledgement; it is not a case of exclusion, but of active association. In a rather Hegelian way, he writes:

> Man completely realizes his individual freedom as well as his personality only through the individuals who surround him, and thanks only to the labor and the collective power of society. Without society he would surely remain the most stupid and the most miserable among all the other ferocious beasts. Society, far from decreasing his freedom, on the contrary creates the individual freedom of all human beings. [-]
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> I can feel free only in the presence of and in relationship with other men. In the presence of an inferior species of animal I am neither free nor a man, because this animal is incapable of conceiving and consequently recognizing my humanity. I am not myself free or human until or unless I recognize the freedom and humanity of all my fellowmen. [-]
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> Only in respecting their human character do I respect my own. I am truly free only when all human beings, men and women, are equally free. The freedom of other men, far from negating or limiting my freedom, is, on the contrary, its necessary premise and confirmation. It is the slavery of other men that sets up a barrier to my freedom, or what amounts to the same thing, it is their bestiality which is the negation of my humanity. For my dignity as a man, my human right which consists of refusing to obey any other man, and to determine my own acts in conformity with my convictions is reflected by the equally free conscience of all and confirmed by the consent of all humanity. My personal freedom, confirmed by the liberty of all, extends to infinity. (1871/1882: 3-4)

Although these anarchists dismiss an order that is imposed upon them, they do favour an internalized, self-appointed or inescapable order (inescapable, because stipulated by the community of peers). The social norms will be based upon the 'general will' and can, if necessary, be maintained by force. In other words, there will be legal norms. So there is no rejection of law *in se*, as long as it is chosen law, which is made consciously by agreement amongst the citizens themselves. Law becomes then a plural concept according to both its origin and its function.

In Bakunin's mind autonomous municipalities would form federated provinces, and these then again would work together in federations, and so on towards increasingly larger interrelations. This way, the aim was to come to a system of integrated federalism: a political system in which people delegate the power of decision to a 'higher level' only when the nature of the problems to solve requires this.

> Je veux l'organisation de la société et de la propriété collective ou sociale de bas en haut, par la voie de la libre association, et non de haut en bas, par le moyen de quelque autorité que ce soit (…). Voilà dans quel sens je suis collectiviste et pas du tout communiste (in Guérin, 1965: 34).

Apart from this subsidiarity on a territorial basis, anarchists would also promote functional decentralization. Dutch contemporary theorist of anarchism Thom Holterman writes (1998: 34 – my translation): "In the debate about the state, it is important for anarchists to find out for themselves which provisions are of overriding importance for the individual and social being. And very soon they will notice that people need each other to secure (human) life, and that this can be organized functionally." Functional decentralization takes place through the attribution of competences to corporations, associations of people with the same interests, who have built an organization to promote these interests collectively. All kinds of interests that is, not only professional, but also e.g. around education, or childcare, or sustainable energy provision.

The combination of territorial subsidiarity and functional decentralization leads in Holterman's view to an anarchist conception of the state. The state is then not a *Ding an sich*, but it refers to specific relations between geographical circumscriptions and between (groups of) people and between these territorial and functional unities and federations. And he concludes (1998: 41-42 – my translation): "As these relations come to be governed predominantly by interest groups, the referral to territory in the definition of the concept 'state' will lose its sense. In as far as specific relations between people are no longer determined by 'territory', this will correspondingly have an influence on the existence of the state." Indeed, due to the rise of information and communication technology, the governance of a territory is less important now than the access to relevant networks. In the terms that we are using today, an anarchist conception of the state would consist of a combination of polycentric and multi-level governance.

For political thinkers about the state, this immediately evokes one crucial question: what does this mean for the concept of politics? Jean-Marie Guéhenno (1993: 35-36) reminds us that classical federalism was rooted in a geographical logic: the municipality is inserted in the region, which is inserted in a federal structure.

> Et cette pyramide de responsabilités, déterminée par la géographie, permet d'organiser, sur plusieurs niveaux, une vie politique: il y a un espace de solidarité de la commune, un espace de solidarité de la région, un espace de solidarité de la nation, et, à chacun de ces niveaux, les citoyens fixent les priorités, rendent des arbitrages et, surtout, expriment une volonté commune : c'est la définition même de la politique. Tout change quand l'activité humaine s'affranchit de l'espace, quand la mobilité des hommes et de l'économie fait voler en éclats les découpages géographiques. La solidarité spatiale des communautés territoriales disparaît, remplacée par des regroupements temporaires d'intérêts. [-] La politique survivra-t-elle à pareille révolution ? Depuis l'origine, depuis la cité grecque, elle est l'art de gouverner une collectivité d'hommes définis par leur enracinement dans un lieu, cité (polis) ou nation. Si la solidarité ne se laisse plus enfermer dans la géographie, s'il n'y a plus de cité, s'il n'y a plus de nation, peut-il y avoir encore de la politique ?

3. THE GOVERNANCE OF COMPLEXITY

The acknowledgement of complexity as a core characteristic of social relations is a relatively recent phenomenon. The contemporary concept refers originally to developments in science and in the philosophy of science in the beginning of the twentieth century, when it became more and more clear that knowledge could not be reduced to the acknowledgement of sets of fixed patterns. The world could no longer be understood by classifying it under natural or social laws. Elements that earlier had been regarded as *noise*, because they would not fit into the patterns, came to be accepted as fundamental to real knowledge. The cultural basis of modernity had been the assumption that the world complied with rules (no longer divine, but natural or social or historical), that those laws could be known, and that what did not fit under the rules had to be dismissed as an anomaly or an aberration. What happened now was that first in the natural sciences, and later in the information and social sciences, one discovered that, increasingly, phenomena did not fit under the existing laws, and that maybe one should reconsider fundamentally the concept of law and the need for it. Deviation from the norm would no longer be a failure, but instead a crucial element to understand what is really happening.

Now, South-African philosopher Paul Cilliers is certainly not the first one to argue that our contemporary western postmodern societies are to be understood as complex systems, but he has done this in a very convenient ten-point list (1998: 119-123).

1. Complex systems consist of a large number of elements.
2. The elements in a complex system interact dynamically.
3. The level of interaction is fairly rich, involves an array of different capacities.
4. Interactions are non-linear: "The social system is non-linear and asymmetrical as well. The same piece of information has different effects on different individuals, and small causes can have large effects. The competitive nature of social systems is often regulated by relations of power, ensuring an asymmetrical system of relationships." (120)
5. The interactions have a fairly short range. "In large networks this results in groups or assemblies of elements clustering together to perform more specific functions. *[-]* Different clusters are interconnected and since these connections are non-linear, they can produce large effects, even if the interconnections are sparse." (121)
6. There are loops in the interconnections (reflexivity: the activity of an element can directly or indirectly influence itself).[5]
7. Complex systems are open systems; they communicate.
8. Complex systems operate under conditions far from equilibrium. Society is a process, not defined by its origins or its goals, but by what it is doing.
9. Complex systems have histories, collections of traces distributed all over the system and open to multiple interpretations.
10. Individual elements are ignorant of the behaviour of the whole system in which they are embedded. Since all elements of the system are in part creating society through their actions, no complete picture of its present state is available to anyone. (123)

Somewhere in the 1950s, one of the founders of complexity theories, Heinz von Foerster, stated that one of the main challenges of complexity is that it works according to the principle of *order from noise*. The classical principle of social organization had always been *order from order*: natural laws – or even divine laws – define the natural order. Later on, societal

[5] Ultimately leading to expressions of autopoiesis: see e.g. Gunther Teubner, (1989). Recht als autopoietisches System.

organization came to be understood by the statistical principle of *order from disorder*: the unordered behaviour of individuals can be understood statistically on the level of a population. *Order from noise* however means that out of unordered behaviour or turbulence (noise) organized phenomena (order) can come about. And exactly this is what the governance of social complexity implies: bringing (temporary) order into a reality in which multiple actors are functioning with diverging aims, interests, modes of operation and assessments.

Indeed, since the beginning of the twentieth century, in 'western societies' the volume of public activities (incl. social security, health care, education, welfare etc.) has expanded enormously. This has contributed to major changes and challenges for adequate governance. The proliferation of public and private agencies that are working for the common good has seriously weakened the traditional possibilities of authorities to steer public policy. On the contrary, there seems to be a continuous growth of relatively independent, parallel networks and centres of governance with their own new forms of ruling, including varieties of soft law. This all involves a changing role of the state, which lacks the competences to cope with the growing governance role of non-state actors, such as NGOs, transnational companies and semi or quasi- autonomous agencies, each with their own aims and missions. How unclear these sometimes might appear, and how contradictory, conflicting and competitive they might be, they all present themselves as instruments of societal interest and public benefit.

Now 'governance' is not an ideologically neutral term. In the 13th and 14th centuries, it was used in France and England to talk about 'the art of governing'. In general it stands for the more comprehensive regulatory activities undertaken by government, civil society and market parties in various fields and at different scale levels. But by the end of the 1980s the concept was reintroduced in western political discourse by the likes of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, in order to adapt the surpassed system of imperialism in the name of globalization and privatization to the new diffuse conditions of capitalism that Hardt and Negri (2000) would call 'Empire'.

But as Hardt and Negri (2000: 200-201) remind us, imperial control involves the affirmation of differences accepted within the imperial realm. "Contingency, mobility, and flexibility are Empire's real power. The imperial 'solution' will not be to negate or attenuate these differences, but rather to affirm them and arrange them in an effective apparatus of command. *[-]* More often than not, the Empire does not create division but rather recognizes existing or potential differences, celebrates them, and manages them within a general economy of command. The triple imperative of the Empire is incorporate, differentiate, manage." Indeed, contemporary capitalist control combines the economic exploitation of the most profitable private and public sectors with a multitude of initiatives of self-government for 'indigenous peoples', the 'marginalized', or 'the poor'.[6]

According to Frissen (1996) societal evolutions can now best be understood as "non-linear, non-centrist and defragmented". The political-administrative system increasingly resembles an archipelago, and the contexts in which this system operates, are characterized by turbulence. "The complexity of societal processes is such that contingencies rule and that the coming about of patterns or relationships can only be seen as the accidental outcomes of this complexity. Hence, the construction of significance crumbles, which in its turn has

[6] See e.g. Susan Brin Hyatt (1997): 'Poverty in a "post-welfare" landscape: Tenant management policies, self-governance and the democratization of knowledge in Great-Britain', in: Anthropology of Policy – Critical perspectives on governance and power, Edited by Cris Shore and Susan Wright, 217-238.

consequences for structures and processes of politics and governance. These are after all no longer the centres from which societal developments are being directed and legitimated" (Frissen 1996: 9 – my translation).

If a political argument against the acknowledgement of societal complexity would consist in its contended lesser democratic transparency, two things can be argued. First, if the alternative for dealing with complexity would be the confirmation of hierarchy, one has to keep in mind that the formal structures of hierarchy are practically never the expression of the real hierarchic lines and power relations in action. Second, democratic transparency not only consists of transparency, but also of the inclusion in the political processes of as many parties as possible. The acknowledgement of complexity may not involve the clearness of hierarchical lines, but at least it opens up for the participation of a greater number of parties involved (Engelen, 2000: 50).

When it comes to describing the processes and procedures that politics and public administration apply to manage complex societal realities, Frissen distinguishes three general tendencies: localization, functionalization, and autonomization. These three developments are the expression of movements towards territorial and functional decentralization, and at the same time a shifting from central regulation towards decentralized specification of norms. And Frissen (1996: 39) concludes: "This acknowledgment means that variety and pluriformity in the first place are recognized conceptually as relevant societal characteristics, and in the second place are taken as a principle for administrative action and no longer as problems that have to be solved" (my translation).

There is, according to Frissen (1996: 44), a strong link between the empirical reality and the conceptual acknowledgement of self-organization and self-regulation of societal domains on the one hand, and the growing of an archipelago of administrative and social units and a situation of decentralized policy implementation on the other hand. Typically in those kinds of systems of self-regulation a variety of contracts between public and private partners comes about. In those contracts matters of mutual responsibility are dealt with, mainly to prevent the mechanisms of turning away from responsibilities that are common in hierarchic relationships.

In 2003 Franco Archibugi wrote about the legislative processes to deal with complex societal situations: "Instead of losing oneself in an infinite and endless normative definition, proven by the facts to be inapplicable, one should elaborate in parliament (with the help of a technical apparatus which is directly dependent of Parliament) only frames of reference, which are adapted to a system of multi-criterion decisions, that should seriously limit the scope of the decisions to an analysis of the feasibility and the compatibility of the objectives and the consequent decisions themselves. These decisions, in short, should not be taken unless within a frame of reference (…) of the decision procedure, and on the scale on which it will be applied" (2003, 49 – my translation).

What this might mean is an acknowledgement of the multiplicity and diffuseness of sources of law (including the acceptance of expressions of legal pluralism or of relatively autonomous or semi-autonomous spheres of justice).

4. ANARCHISM TODAY?

Paul Frissen's descriptions of the mechanisms and processes, dealt with in an archipelago of political and administrative bodies, and aiming at the governing of social realities in turbulent contexts, mention territorial and functional decentralization, autonomous local units and contracts between public and private partners to lay down mutual responsibilities. Does this ring a bell, when we remember the theories of the nineteenth century anarchists?

The political or administrative acknowledgement of sectoral or regional diversity, or even autonomy, does not however necessarily imply a coming about of anarchist society. On the contrary, what this idea about subsidiarity may mean on a national scale is shown most dramatically in Italy, where the Constitution of 2001 has acknowledged the principles of vertical and horizontal subsidiarity in the new article 118. By stating that it intends to favour activities of general interest generated by citizens (alone or in association), one might consider that now not only the participation of citizens, but even so their responsibility for actions of general interest are included in the 'constitutional values' (Razzano, 2005: 2). Also the highest administrative court, *Consiglio di Stato*, has declared that the principle of horizontal subsidiarity is related to typical phenomena of societal citizenship *(cittadinanza societaria)*, when there is evidence of activities of general interest by persons, who are at the same time users and agents, and who operate in their own basic community (Razzano, 2005: 7). Crucial, according to the Council of State, for the application of the principle of horizontal subsidiarity, is a significant and active relationship between citizens.

However, from the second Berlusconi-government on (2001-2005) it would become very clear that the state reform that it had pursued (more subsidiarity, more federalism) would not necessarily enhance basic democracy in all its appearances. Since 2003 the annual budget provides for severe cuts in public spending on the national level (education, research, public health, social services, ...). More and more responsibilities are decentralized towards regional and local authorities (education, health, local policing), but at the same time the budgets for these entities are cut. On the regional and local level then, services once provided for by decentralized agencies (transport, assistance to the disabled, the old and migrants) are farmed out to private agencies, at market prices of course. In the end, subsidiarity in Italy nowadays means that public institutions intervene in social matters only when the private sector does not deal with them, and they do this mainly by financing the same private sector. Similar phenomena can be observed on an international scale, remember the 2011 controversy about subsidiarity vs. solidarity concerning the European Programme of food aid for the most deprived.

In 1988 social theorists Agnes Heller and Ferenc Fehér wrote: "The absence of any single organizing centre in modern western societies does not decrease the possibility for action, nor the capacity for changing social relationships. Action potentials are simply relocated. Precisely because of the de-centred character of the social system, emancipatory actions need not focus on changing a single, all-encompassing and dominating centre or institution but they can be pursued in every system and sub-system, in all spheres of society including everyday life. In this context, emancipatory action becomes diffuse. Moreover, it is no longer necessary for *all* actors who aim at emancipation to join forces, as such 'joining of forces' was necessary only as long as one could pinpoint a single organizing centre of all social sub-systems. Different groups of actors can engage in emancipatory action within different systems and spheres (including everyday life)" (1988: 33).

A year later, in 1989, the Brazilian town of Porto Alegre initiated its participatory budget *(orçamento participativo)*, that in 2001 would become an important source of inspiration for the World Social Forum in the same region. The idea was to install on a municipal or local level a system of budget control that would allow those groups that were traditionally not involved in political decisions to fully participate in and influence the outcome of budgetary allocations. This was from the beginning supposed to be more than a municipalist movement. The aim was the establishment of a kind of 'solidary federalism' that from the bottom up would reform the relations between the different levels of the state. And whatever the outcome today of the experiment in Porto Alegre itself, worldwide some 15.300 municipalities on all continents are using the method (Allegretti, 2011: I).

In the years that would follow, the impetus of Porto Alegre has led to a world-wide array of experiments with self-organization, self-government, 'mutual aid' (Pjotr Kropotkin!), local money systems (lets), gift economy (Fernand Pelloutier!), etc. In short, in their resistance against the disastrous effects of worldwide unbridled capitalism, several institutions of collective action fell back on the classical anarchist proposals: self-organization, federalism, mutual support, the bottom-up construction of circles of self-government, etc. Although numerous studies have been conducted on these initiatives in developing countries[7], they are in no way restricted to agricultural or industrializing societies. In contemporary western contexts, one speaks of forms of 'insurgent citizenship' or, in Italy, of *cittadinanza societaria*. What terms like these relate to are relations that are established between citizens in a very specific, concrete and local environment, in order to provide for specific and concrete needs, and this without expecting anything from the state or even local authorities.

However, in as far as these initiatives mostly fit in a context of 'deliberative democracy', the purpose is never to do away with the state or democratic representative systems. And this reformist approach carries with it the risk of utilitarian recuperation by national and international institutions, which – again – use local participation purely as a vehicle to cut back the role of the state, and to replace the old mechanisms of institutional solidarity with mechanisms of charity or the free market (as seems to be the case in Porto Alegre nowadays). Similarly, when we look at Franco Archibugi's ideas about the governance of complexity, we see that, although he pleads for subsidiarity and functional and territorial decentralization, his frames of reference and the consequential systemic planification remain profoundly state-bound. It is on the national level (if necessary on the supra-national level) that all sectoral and territorial plans are gathered, synthesized and verified in view of their mutual compatibility and the institutional requirements. In his view, the initiative lies with these very public and private, sectoral and territorial operators; they formulate their own plans, and it is on state-level that efficiency and coherence between them is sought after. This of course does not exclude that the state can and should formulate the general guidelines for the procedure to establish coherence between the various plans of different levels.

But what if we don't believe anymore in the nation-state and representative democracy? What if we embrace the concept of Empire, where frontiers are irrelevant, where imperial power is diffuse, where mechanisms of discipline have been traded in for the machinery of control and biopolitics, where politics have vanished due to the disappearance of ideology and resistance? Jean-Marie Guéhenno wrote in 1993 (169):

[7] See for an early overview p.e. Ostrom, E. (1990). Governing the Commons. The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action.

> C'est en ce sens que la révolution à accomplir est d'ordre spirituel. Les débats de l'avenir porteront sur le rapport de l'homme au monde : ils seront des débats éthiques, et c'est par eux qu'un jour, peut-être, renaîtra la politique, dans un processus qui partira du bas, de la démocratie locale et de la définition qu'une communauté donnera d'elle-même, pour aller vers le haut. Le processus sera le même qu'il s'agisse des parties du monde où la démocratie ne s'est jamais imposée, comme l'ancienne URSS, ou de celles où elle arrive à épuisement. La solidarité qui doit permettre de dépasser le repli communautaire ne sera donc pas, au départ, « politique », elle trouvera son fondement dans le sentiment d'une commune responsabilité devant un monde dont les limites doivent borner l'ambition des hommes.

Maybe the recent and growing interest in the recovery, defence and management of what is called 'the commons' offers an impetus to think about and experiment with new forms of autonomous self-government. Elinor Ostrom and the *Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis at Indiana University* have showed that all over the world people are able to organize themselves, independently from the state and from 'the market', to administer resources, food systems and other common goods (such as, in a technological field, open source software).

Meanwhile, the new anarchist theories, with their references to Foucault and Deleuze (and even Debord), emphasize categories and concepts such as singularity, multitude, difference, contingency, events and becoming, or situation. What Proudhon once called 'positive anarchy', is now translated into contemporary terms such as assemblage (*agencement*) or fields of immanence or densification. But in the end, what it comes down to is the theoretical and practical project of the free association of those who are learning to build up common 'assemblages' and the common intention to produce a maximum of freedom. In that sense, anarchism is at least a critique on the existing societal structures from the touchstone of non-state, non-heteronomous community relations.

When it comes to subsidiarity, the question will be then: how to deal with this principle (administrative, political, legal): as an instrument of reformism to re-legitimize the liberal state and the manifestations of 'imperial' governance, or as a revolutionary principle to express worldwide the intellectuality and affections, the productivity and desires of the multitude?

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