The Book of Community

A practical guide to working and living in community

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The Book of Community

A reference guide to learning, working, and living in community

By Las Indias

Translated into English by Level Translation

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Dedication

To Epicurus, who started all this.

To Paul Blundell, who brought us news about ourselves.

To Odín Manzano, Andrés Maneiro, and all of the readers of *El Correo de las Indias* who have helped us to improve the original text with their corrections, questions and notes.

Prologue

By Daniel Bellón, poet and friend of the Indiano community

I have to begin by telling you that in your hands (on your computer, on your tablet, on your digital book reader, in the stack of pages you just printed), you have a treasure, literally.

It's a small treasure of valuable experiences for anyone who proposes to strengthen their real community, the people they value and feel united with, by sharing some dimension of life in common, whether it's the economic dimension, the intellectual dimension, or everyday existence.

In this case, it's the collective experience of an exceptional group of people, all daughters and sons of what we could call "the freedom generation"—which reached its youth and adolescence in the midst of the explosion/implosion of old systems like the Soviet Union, apartheid, and the bevy of Latin American military dictators—and who decided, in the middle of a turbulent and ever-accelerating process of decomposition of the very structures of the second half of the twentieth century, to take the reins of their own lives, and share, for the pleasure of learning, a project that would allow them to have an interesting life, worthy of song and celebration, with all its difficulties, conflicts, and annoyances.

The Book of Community is an object, a book, even if a digital one, that's almost a contradiction in various terms: it's an intimate story, but a collective one; it's full of teachings and messages, but refuses to proselytize; it's organized clearly and didactically, but, while offered for its usefulness, refuses to be a manual. It's difficult to say precisely what *The Book of Community* is if you aren't clear on the ideas and the strength of the libertarian thought of the Indiano collective. "Libertarian" is meant in the most radical sense of the term: liberation from chains that, while appearing to be as soft and weightless as shadows, overwhelmingly oppress our way of thinking with commonplace ideas, untouchable principles, and different-colored flags waving in the breeze. The Indianos' thought is also sustained by practices that are continuously compared with reality and subjected to the demand for the material survival of their members, as free people and as part of a real community, in a setting that many try to flee, avoid, or at least cheat: the market, or if you hate that word, the public plaza where goods and services are exchanged.

The members of the Indiano community belong, I was saying, to a generation that reached adolescence and early adulthood in a very special time in which two powerful tendencies converged: on the one hand, a vigorous springtime for the people after the fall of the Berlin Wall (the epicenter of the change whose waves reached all continents and which,

like all springtimes, came to give sweet fruits but also extremely bitter ones), and on the other, the emergence of something radically new: the appearance and expansion of the networks that gave rise to what, today, we call the Internet, which we now treat with the same casual offhandedness as running water, another daily miracle of human ingenuity in this still privileged part of the world.

Many things have changed since the ’90s and the beginnings of the current century. After the promises of distributed networks came new forms of police states, the disappearance of privacy, and the centralization and enclosure driven by so-called social networks. After the liberation of many countries from dictatorships of one kind or another, there immediately came the bitter reflux of the terrible Yugoslav wars and the ferocious conflict in Rwanda, which brought us images of barbarism that we had imagined we’d put behind us forever. After sleep came, as usually happens, the bitter awakening we’re still shuffling about in, like a long hangover from a brief but intense party, a rave that wound down… and which sometimes doesn’t allow us to appreciate the economic and social conquests that these last twenty years have meant for a good part of the world’s population, which, for the first time, has the tools to be global and local at the same time: the globalization of the small.

In the collective that came together into the early “Society of the Electronic Indies,” young hackers and network enthusiasts pulled off the difficult trick of being in the right time at the right age, and, also in their case, with their eyes as wide as platters and their ears listening attentively. They started with the metaphor of considering the Internet to be a new continent in need of exploring and mapping, and of enjoying the opportunities that could be glimpsed—hence the name, laden with reminiscences, of the “Society of the Indies.” Over time, they came to realize that the true continent to discover and habit was themselves: the community of learning, of business, of life, that had been built over the years; that their experience of personal and collective autonomy was a wealth in itself, a treasure, as I said initially, in these confused times we live in, which they are not the only ones to call decomposition. This is the experience they share with us in *The Book of Community.*

If one were to reread (with our current perspective) just the prologue of *The Network Society* by Manuel Castells, published almost twenty years ago, they would find there a portrayal of everything that has been happening to us in our societies in recent decades. It was written and translated into Spanish. Perhaps many of us decided not to understand, not to face the vertigo: the dismantling of welfare states, the globalization of financial transactions, the appearance of exclusive identities (in particular, religious fundamentalisms), and the dizzying emergence of new ways of producing and of relating.

We were warned, it should be said, though most of us decided to apply the magical thinking

of hoping that what we don't want to see doesn't exist. There's an Indiano aphorism that appears in almost all their texts, both those produced individually and collectively: "behind every architecture of communication, there hides a power structure." If you think about it, it's quite clear, but, I say, we prefer not to look, and that's why we seem not to understand. That's why dystopia has become the leading genre of children's literature.

In that context, the Indianos build their community, and create tools by intuition, by trial and error; it's only later that they encounter historical references—well hidden from the general public, to be sure—of others that tried to build their own communities of free and productive people in the face of pressure from States or religions and dominant forms of thought in their times. They read and learn from those histories, from their successes and their failures, and find their place in that whole process, their place on a continuum of struggles for freedom, and no longer feel alone, marginal, freaks, but part of a noble tradition. From that new position, in a true mode of self-understanding, *The Book of Community* emerges.

This is reflected in the very structure of the book: first, the experience that they want to share with us, what they have learned together in their flesh and blood, in their pockets, in their backs, with few clues to follow, making it up as they went by trial and error… and second, passionate historical references: Epicureanism, the Icarians, the kibbutzim… The tradition of community, so to speak: a way of letting us know that their experience isn't eccentric, but rather is found throughout human history.

I want to finish by talking a little about my own experience with the Indiano community. I remember our first meeting perfectly: Natalia's smile, David's enthusiasm, María's always-reflective look… I always had the sensation of being in a house with open doors and windows, where you are always welcome but no one holds you. Later, I met Manuel, Mayra, and Caro, and again, had the same sensation that I could describe as a permanent invitation to shared learning, which blossoms on every side at lasindias.com, as it did before at Cyberpunk.net, and I'm well aware I'm not the only one who has experienced it.

When I think about them from the distance that living on the islands imposes, a poem by the great Peruvian Antonio Cisneros always comes into my head, which is part of a very brief and intense work entitled "Chronicle of Baby Jesus of Chilca," which specifically sings of the existence (and the dissolution too, I don't want to mislead you) of a real community of fishers and salt-makers. Here is part of the poem. I'll leave you with it, and with *The Book of Community.* Enjoy the treasures.

> In the house of the commons, the destinies of water and of all souls of this world are governed.

Tall as two Christians and bigger than three dead whales stretched out.

Here, men and women of the valley and of the beach speak for themselves.

And they each have a name.

Introduction

Few words have had as many meanings as "community." While its medieval origin meant support for the first forms of democratic sovereignty, beginning with the communard revolt of 1520, the term would become synonymous with rebellion and democratic revolt. That is the definition **Quevedo** uses it with, as does, to a certain point, the subtle and ever-critical **Cervantes**.

The Encyclopedia of **Diderot** and **D'Alembert** went back to its guild meaning, defining it as the "meeting of private citizens who practice the same art or occupation under certain common rules that form a political body," a definition that prepared it for the extension of its use during "the century of revolutions" to mean any form of local sovereignty sustained by forms of shared property.

Cabet, who was much more popular than **Fourier** in the 1840s, called his egalitarian colonies "communities," and by extension called the projection of the social system based on them "communism." The term was so successful among the "anti-system" thinkers of the time that it came to define movements with little or no interest in creating phalansteries or cooperative communities. In this way, within a decade, "community" and "communism" came to be used in two groups that, while they were not openly antagonistic except on a few occasions, did compete openly with each other for the attention of the restless and malcontented, while their respective propaganda machines ignored each other.

On the Left, it was a few Jewish immigrants, beginning in 1909, who recovered the term to name their settlements in Palestine. Based on sharing goods, work and savings, the "communities" movement became the largest volunteer social experiment of the century. Paradoxically, it did not revive the word "community" in the rest of the world, but rather, only its Hebrew form: "kibbutz."

Beginning in the '30s, however, **Tönnies** and **Weber** in sociology and **Adler** in psychology, developed a definition of community—*Gemeinschaft*—which, in the '80s would be expanded to political science and history as "real community." This distinction was highlighted by Benedict Anderson in contrast to the nation, the "imagined community" par excellence.

Under this definition, a community is any human group united by interpersonal relationships where all members know the others and recognize them as belonging equally; from this belonging, both personal and collective obligations and rights are derived. The family—

nuclear or extended—and to a lesser extent, the pre-modern brotherhoods and guilds, become the model of what "community" means for an educated person.

Meanwhile, in the United States, the word "community" brought together territorial meanings with ideological characteristics. The importance of dissident religious groups in the culture of the Anglo-Saxon colonization of North America meant that towns and colonies were associated with certain Christian denominations. The tension between the enlightened political values of the young State and the particular beliefs of each church became part of the always-contentious definition of jurisdictions between the states and the federal government. But it also gave a legal basis to a new concept, "community standards," which reinforced the association between the place of residence and the voluntary acceptance of a fairly relaxed but extensive set of private norms.

The role of "community standards" in Anglo-Saxon America was similar to that of local cultures in Europe: they showed the kind of diversity that the growing national identity made a show of, while still defining the primary group that much of the agrarian population identified with, which provoked the distrust of the enlightened urban classes. But as religious identity was diluted as the primary characteristic of identity in North American culture, the word "community" came to evoke more and more those tenuous obligations of neighborliness that materialized in volunteer work and social assistance organized by churches. Community tended to mean all the people, whether they knew each other or not, that shared a physical or social space. Universities, suburbs, associations of all kinds, and more recently, online networks, came to be defined as communities with their own "standards," which were now tacit or explicit rules for coexistence and collaboration.

So it is that, by globalizing conversation, community can mean almost anything, on a spectrum from living in the same city to sharing everything. Today, "community" is one of those words that have a positive emotional consensus. But, one should wonder, when two people use it in the same conversation, if they really mean the same thing.

The following book is written based on the experience of a community that is a community of goods, learning, production, and savings. Those of us who write it have been sharing everything for more than twelve years: conversation, income, work and, in recent years, a house. We wouldn't trade it for anything.

We know that **most people who propose to "create" a community don't want to "live in community."** They are looking for guides to design a way of life for themselves and their circle based on sharing more than what they share so far, even if they feel like it's excessively risky to have "too much" in common. We believe that this book can help them

do better without having to reestablish existing boundaries. It's not that these different dimensions are independent from each other—not at all—but what we learned in each one of them will be interesting even for those who only want to go deeper into one.

Rather than a typical "manual," this book should be read as advice. Its focus is practical, because was practice that guided our evolution. Like Borges, who "wrote" *Quijote* in the middle of the twentieth century, discovering that "what was coming out of him" was identical to what Cervantes had written even though he had not read him, we realized, little by little, that what we'd learned by trial and error, what defined the lifestyle that we were discovering, followed the steps of a long tradition that began in the garden of **Epicurus**, and which we recognized in our era in the Icarians and the Israeli kibbutz. Still later, we met other communities in the US, Germany, and Austria that, with years, sometimes decades, of history, and dozens, if not hundreds of members, that had arrived at very similar lessons and models to ours. They are productive and egalitarian communities that give special importance to conversation, learning, and debate, but also to production in common for the material needs of all.

Because we didn't start from any concrete model, and because we didn't have "blueprints" from which to build, we have organically incorporated tools and techniques that go far beyond the slim current community bibliography. This bibliography is, almost entirely, of North American origin and suffers from the need to "invent" what was invented long ago in South America and Europe: the forms and practices of the housing cooperative. What's shocking is that by dressing it with new clothes (the "eco-village" or "intentional community"), it can find a market in places like France, Spain, Argentina or Uruguay, where there's a very long tradition of this kind of cooperativism. In contrast, there is little, by which I mean almost nothing, written half-decently about the topics that we usually share, when we "communards" from different places in the world meet each other: how to create an environment helps everyone to overcome their fears and laziness, how to enter the market, how to integrate new members, how to avoid community self-absorption, etc.

These will be our central topics on the following pages. We think that communities that share everything have **a treasure trove of valuable experiences for anyone who proposes to strengthen their real community and the people they value and feel close with, by sharing some dimension of life in common**, whether it's the economic dimension, the intellectual, or everyday coexistence. Unfortunately, these experiences are mostly part of the "oral culture" of each community network. They are shared but rarely written down. This book is one of the first attempts to do so in Spanish [originally]. It does not answer to any ideological label in particular, but does attempt to collect learning from many communities that do not hide from such labels. It attempts to collect a "communitarian consensus," but

also make its contribution, except that this contribution has more to do with common sense in caring for the people and things around us than with any political or social theory. It is intended for **those that are considering joining a community or who want to experience community practices with their friends**.

If we've done it well, it will save you time and learning that sometimes can be painful. If we made assumptions or left out important things that are not obvious, we hope you'll write us so we can improve later editions.

I do not say this for the many, but for you; for we are theater enough for one another.

– Epicurus

Community

Freedom and individualism

The culture around us says it values individual freedom above all other things. Additionally, it tries to give us the impression that every association with others necessarily means a surrender of freedoms. That surrender would only be justified, in concrete cases, by some "great cause" that made it necessary, or was fairly idealistic.

This is a proposition that is as twisted as it is false. It contrasts freedom with responsibility. To accept and share responsibilities with others does not make us less free. To be free, we need others, and therefore, to gain freedoms, we need to take on responsibilities both to ourselves and to others. In life, more freedom always means more responsibility… unless we're confusing the free person with the tyrant, who does what he wants without taking into account the costs to himself and others.

This tyrannical idea of freedom assumes that any of the manifestations of community that surround us—family, friends, work—are really constrictions and small, everyday prisons. And is true that occasionally, it may seem this way to us: we may have to change our job, partner, or circle of friends. We may have to change attitudes that make us unhappy, or redefine our commitments. But no sensible person gets it into their head to give up relating to others to be more free. In the end, we all know that the ideal of individual freedom cannot be isolation, and that the person who has no family or friends, who renounces work and doing things with others, is not more free, but less.

So the most "natural" reason for someone to join or encourage the formation of a community should simply be: "to be more free, to be able to be more responsible, and have more sovereignty over my own life." But it turns out that what the archetypal models of community in our culture—and in many others—has always offered us was just the opposite.

Since the imposition of Christianity in Europe, the model of the community of goods, savings, and work has been the monastery. The problem is that Christian monasticism—like Buddhist and almost every monastic life—is based on renunciation, on the total constriction of space for individual decision. Monks take vows of obedience, poverty, and chastity.

The hours of their day are a succession of work and rituals instituted in a Rule. Christian or Buddhist monastic life is understood as "renunciation," not as a better base for the development of each person. The monastery is not a denial of tyrannical individualism, but rather its most radical affirmation, which is why it conveys the same message to us: to share with others is to renounce ourselves, and if we share everything, like the monks, we totally renounce shaping our own life.

Fortunately, there existed another, older, European tradition, Epicureanism, which understood that we form groups out of need, and that we feel that need because sharing with our peers is what really allows us to feel free and pursue happiness. But that's another story and deserves its own space.

Great causes

When egalitarian communitarianism resurfaced in the nineteenth century as a response to the life industrial capitalism offered workers, it recovered many Epicurean values. But it also absorbed a good part of the Protestant Reformation's salvific ideas about redemption, which socialism and nationalism also inherited from Christian beliefs. The result was a "double soul," which was sometimes hypocritical and always contradictory: egalitarian communities, like their "little sisters," cooperatives, were presented as a new lifestyle at the service of their members, but at the same time, were justified as tools at the service of a "greater change." Since the 1840s, social revolution and national independence had taken on the role that the "second coming" played in monastic Christian ideology. The curious thing, looking back on it more than a century later, is that sooner or later, that instrumental conception of communitarianism ended up creating an existential crisis in all those who had adopted it, both when the "final objective" became a reality—Israeli kibbutzim—and when it didn't—radical social transformation in the US and Europe.

However, the tendency to "justify" community in the name of a "great cause" emerges again and again. And it continues to be a mistake. **An egalitarian community is not a means for other causes; it must consider itself and the people who form it as an end in itself**. There is no other possible basis for an honorable communal culture, and really, we need to be frank about this: **every instrumentalization of a community and of the people who form it is destructive**.

"Great causes," as noble as they may seem to us, cannot be put above real people, or they will destroy the community. It's quite likely they will even open the door to worse things.

No sensible person tries to turn their inner circle, their family, or friends they share hobbies with into tools of some "higher cause." We all understand why: **there is no ceding personal or community autonomy without consequences**. If it is accepted that there is a "greater good" whose results seem more important to us than the way we relate to our loved ones, the ground is sown for an ethic of sacrifice in which our life, that of those we love, and that of anyone else, can end up stripped of all meaning. It is no coincidence that the kibbutzim ended up turning their defense groups into the core of the Israeli national army, or that some of the communes of '68 ended up with their founders among the most wanted terrorists of the '70s. Sacrifice for the "higher cause" is the argument that has served since the wars of religion to recruit cannon fodder for the battlefield.

And even without reaching such extremes, the result is never encouraging, simply because

it is morally harmful for all involved. The narrative that says that community is an "experience," an experiment that is valuable from the perspective of a "higher," "more important" change is only a way of diluting responsibility and the need for the commitment of the community to its members, which is to say, of everyone to everyone else. That's why "putting the justification outside" is attractive: it makes us feel falsely secure, falsely "good" and "generous"… giving us an alibi to be less responsible.

That's also why, even when used hypocritically, it's dangerous. There is a typical symptom: the "communitarization of dependencies": the need for our community to be "recognized" in circles that represent such-and-such a cause, movement or universal identity, as if its success depended on that, and not on satisfying our own individual and collective needs. It's an expression that tries to make a virtue of the most typical feeling of inferiority: by placing the objective of the community outside of the community, we shout to the four winds that we're not important enough for something to be good simply because it does us and our loved ones good.

A community only has one objective that it cannot renounce: to serve its members by helping them live better and be more free and responsible. On the way towards that objective, the community will build goals with other people and will define ideas about how to improve their surroundings and collective strategies to do so. But never, never, will it be able to subordinate the needs of the members' loved ones to "higher cause," whether gods or homelands, dogmas or utopias, without endangering all they have built together.

In reality, the very idea of communitarianism, at least in the Epicurean tradition, is that there is no cause more important than real and tangible people with whom we build spaces, security and well-being, each one with their particular and unique set of choices, preferences and contributions; all walking their own road to happiness. Every one of them is, in the most essential sense of the term, "sacred."

Community culture

All coexistence, every human organization, aspires to what Adler called the "community spirit": to go from the logic of competition for recognition and a feeling of inferiority to the logic of contribution and a feeling of fraternity. The engine of that "magic" leap is feeling that "we're a part," that we're valuable and appreciated by those around us. But, obviously, that's easier said than done. Feeling like part of a group doesn't depend on a declaration or a rule, but how each one fits into the way the group is. But the way a community is should not be seen as something separate from those who form it. That "way" is something we humans learned to shape through a diffused set of symbols, practices, and small rituals. We call it "culture."

There's a big difference between a national culture and a communal culture. National cultures express how the institutions of a society would like their citizens to be. Their main objective is develop the "national identity," a "way it ought to be" that seeks to value the type of differences that justify institutionality, a State, and ultimately, everything at the center of all nationalism.

In the national mythos, the nation joins territory and collective destiny into a single concept. The main message of all national culture is that individually, we are the way we are because that territory, its history, and its destiny shape us emotionally and intellectually. This explains the centrality it grants artistic objects, from music to visual arts: according to nationalists, national artistic creations should represent us, should "make us feel" intimate and special because they are the expression of the "spirit" of the nation that shapes us. "National art" expresses our spiritual link with the identity and territory that "made us the way we are."

The narrative of national culture tries to tell us that we will only feel and completely understand the world from within the nation, which is to say, from within the State that materializes it, or will materialize it. That's why **national culture is necessarily disempowering**. Everything that tells us that outside of a given medium or territorial environment, or outside of a given set of institutions, we cannot be complete people, learn, or understand or feel fully, is nothing more than a constant onslaught against personal autonomy.

Community identity is different. It is the identity of a real community, a mutual recognition between real people who know each other and relate to each other. In every real community, the content of identity changes with each conversation, with each new member, and with each incorporation, just as in any family or group of friends. So it doesn't make sense to

promote an identity inwardly. **If community identity has a core, it's "what we learn together," which is to say, something over which we have sovereignty and which we shape**.

That's why community culture does not try to approach any "ideal." It doesn't even try to convince us that there's nothing better for us that our own community. It simply needs to remind us that we can improve ourselves. **The challenge of community culture is to remind us that we can be what we want to be**. And that's different for each person, something that each person must define for him/herself. Its main tool is to remind us that we can contribute meaning to what we do, with its imperfections, its successes, its ironies, and its small tendernesses. From Sunday pastries and small talk, to the study of new disciplines, to the success in the market that pays our bills.

It's all about exalting life to feed the virtue in each person, helping to eliminate fears and quickly overcome failures. But above all, the objective of cultures of communities that work is to affirm each of their members as people who are equally responsible and equally capable of being free. In short, a functional communal culture transmits the idea that **the more autonomous each of its members is, the more they will contribute to community as a whole**.

Art and artists

In all times, egalitarian communities have attracted intellectually restless people. From Epicurean papyri to Icarian essays or the lyricism of the first kibbutz, all community movements have developed their own artistic expressions. But, while communitarianism has produced literature and visual arts, it has not produced well-known writers or painters. Even those who have gone on to fame have generally done so later. It would seem that egalitarian communities produce art without artists.

Perhaps the figure of the "artist" is contradictory to the community experience. The "artist" was born with Renaissance humanism. This person, until then, had been a merchant and craftsman, an owner and specialist in knowledge that was reproduced and produced collectively in a workshop-enterprise: the Art. Now he began to be considered a "creator." That is, an individual emulation of the divinity in which he participates through "inspiration," another concept from the Judeo-Christian mystique.

Between the "master of the Art" and the artist there is a leap not only in forms of organizing, but also in the conception of work. The master is the head of a workshop that makes products. The artist does not renounce the workshop—and at times, may even enlarge it—but is now presented as the sole producer of "works." The new character tries to contribute that "divine spark" that supposedly characterizes true "Art," turning it into something "priceless." So, with the individualist and mystical narrative of the "creator," another story is also born, which disparages the "craftsman," that puppet without soul, from whom only coarse and rough work can be expected, mundane commodities that lack the divine touch of a true artist.

Such aggressiveness with what had, until then, been considered Art had to do with something more than with the need for distinction. The medieval creative worker continues to be a craftsman-merchant. The Renaissance and Baroque painter aspires to royal privilege, to the "patent," something extraordinary which must be justified to the powerful. Accordingly, in the medieval workshop, every apprentice was considered capable of becoming a master, but in the artist's workshop, the assistant is a lifetime position, and no evolution is expected of the apprentice. The guild ethic of learning, practicing, and taking on responsibilities is progressively diluted until it reaches the arbitrariness of the Romantic "genius," the antechamber of social Darwinism and its racist derivatives: "one is born an artist," and if the last names are repeated across generations, it is not because there is a shortage of meritocracy, it's simply because certain lineages are "naturally" better gifted in the arts, just as others are in governing the world.

In an egalitarian community, it does not make sense to present works as “divine,” restricted to a few genetically fortunate individuals. Egalitarian communities have traditionally been made up of multispecialists. But in the (usually agrarian) communities of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, multi-specialization was not due to a production need, but the very idea of what the community experience was considered to be.

Creative work was conceived of as a good in itself, as part of the development of each person, and therefore as a measure of the success of the whole when it comes time to create abundance. The production of artistic objects and “works” was especially valued. Even among the tough pioneers of the first kibbutzim, who had been part of a reaction against European socialist intellectualism, who were battered by malaria and strenuous workdays, the appearance of newspapers, poems, and small philosophical essays was soon considered one of the major triumphs of the movement.

In community life, one soon realizes that the ability to make creative contributions is not genetically inherited. As medieval artisans thought, it only depends on the capacity for improvement and taking responsibility for learning. Then, each person’s contribution is distinctive, different. Obviously, there are people with more capacity than others in the application of a given technique. They will be better than others at presenting projects, making illustrations, writing novels, poems, or speeches, at designing objects or websites, cooking, programming, playing Go, public speaking… The truth is that there’s no shortage of outlets for creative work in our time. Many of them are not considered “arts” because they didn’t follow a path like that of the traditional “fine arts.”

Ultimately, what communities have learned about art and creative work in general is that **every person can learn to apply a technique and make their products significant, as sources of inspiration or reflection for others**. Creativity is not a genetic or divine “gift” that only a few have, it is a human capacity.

Additionally, there are a great many fields of creative work, and each one makes a contribution. The majority incorporate value to what we offer on the market, while others, which are no less important—from writing blogs to cooking—contribute to greater enjoyment of learning and being together.

Of course, in every technique there are people that stand out more than others, but it’s not a competition: in community, creative work doesn’t try to “become worthy” of a royal privilege or an artificial right of ownership. Creative work is a pleasure and a fundamental part of the development of all people and the responsibility they must take to themselves to be better and live better. That’s why we can’t limit ourselves to the things we’re “the

best at" or where we excel… because, in fact, we'd limit ourselves. We'd put a limit on our growth. Generally, where we stand out most is where we have the least to learn, and therefore, enjoy.

In the end, as a good part of art theory argues today, creativity is really always a process of "post-production," of recycling and permanent reuse. Each one takes from others, contributes a layer, and the process of the creation of meanings, symbols and significant objects continues.

This process, which is cooperative with others and basic to everyone's life, became obvious in the egalitarian world of communities before the "world of art," where rents impelled narratives about "genius." Surely because of this, egalitarian communities have expanded the creative logic of art to more and more facets of everyday experience, at the same time dissolving the figure of the "artist."

Authenticity

Pierre Menard is one of literature's most suggestive fictional characters of all times. Borges tells us:

> He did not want to compose another *Quixote*—which is easy— but *the* Quixote *itself*. Needless to say, he never contemplated a mechanical transcription of the original; he did not propose to copy it. His admirable intention was to produce a few pages which would coincideword for word and line for line with those of Miguel de Cervantes.

That is, Menard wanted to write an "authentic" *Quijote*. The obvious way to do so was to mold his life to adopt the contexts that allowed Cervantes to imagine the book.

> To be, in some way, Cervantes and reach the *Quixote* seemed less arduous to him— and, consequently, less interesting— than to go on being Pierre Menard and reach the *Quixote* through the experiences of Pierre Menard.

That is, to write an "authentic" *Quijote,* the easy way was to become, in his own way and in his own time, Cervantes. We must suppose that Cervantes always can write *Quijote*. But Menard did not want to stop being Menard, or stop being authentic himself, to write an authentic *Quijote*. He had to do it from his own experiences, from his own life. The *Quijote* had to "occur to him," "come out of him" the same, word by word. And he did it.

What's paradoxical, Borges tells us, is that the result— Menard's *Quijote* - though identical to the original, has a completely different meaning, which leads to all manner of interpretations among his critics:

> It is well known that Don Quixote […] decided the debate against letters and in favor of arms. Cervantes was a former soldier: his verdict is understandable. But that Pierre Menard's *Don Quixote*—a contemporary of *La trahison des clercs* and Bertrand Russell—should fall prey to such nebulous sophistries! Madame Bachelier has seen here an admirable and typical subordination on the part of the author to the hero's psychology; others (not at all perspicaciously), a transcription of the *Quixote*; the Baroness de Bacourt, the influence of Nietzsche. To this third interpretation (which I judge to be irrefutable) I am not sure I dare to add a fourth, which concords very well with the almost divine modesty of Pierre Menard: his resigned or ironical habit of propagating ideas which were the strict reverse of those he preferred.

In Neal Stephenson's *The Diamond Age*, Lord Finkle-McGraw, one of the founders of the neo-Victorian phyle, realizes that his phyle's social system has a flaw: the new generations receive values from the founders, but not their spirit or passion. It's unavoidable: the new generations *learn* foundational values, they don't create them.

But Finkle-McGraw doesn't accept this. He wants his granddaughter to be "authentically" neo-Victorian, so he commissions the creation of an interactive book. The book is really an artificial intelligence which, through games, helps the girl to interpret her everyday reality in a way that leads her to "create" neo-Victorian values for herself. An accident creates two copies of the book, and one of them ends up in the hands of Nell, a homeless girl. After a thousand adventures, both girls reach adolescence with their own vision of the world. They will be "authentic," and the majority of their values will be clearly neo-Victorian. But they will not join the phyle of the grandfather, they will found their own phyle.

The moral Stephenson conveys to us, echoing Dewey, is that what is "authentic" about Finkle-McGraw's first neo-Victorians was not born of their individual experiences, their traumas, and reactions to their parents' "spirit of '68." The essential thing had been their collective experience and the authenticity of their response, which was also collective, to the decomposition of the progressive world of the twentieth century.

The girls share a new time, that of the collapse of the world created by the generation of their grandparents. Although they have had very different lives and are very different from each other, they share values learned from the book, and will share a proposal for their time. However, that response can no longer be the continuity of the phyle that gave them their values and has operated without changes since its creation, but the foundation of a new one, because they live in an era in which the human experience is already something else.

So, Borges and Stephenson have left us a few interesting ideas about authenticity:

1. **Authenticity doesn't have to be originality**. *Menard's Quijote* is equal to Cervantes', and the values of princess Nell equal to those of Finkle-McGraw. What makes values authentic as we practice them, or try to, is that they are the result of our own interpretation of the human experience, of what life means.
2. **Authenticity is the result of an intellectual effort**. If being "authentic" is equipping ourselves with values that begin with reflection on experience, that means that we should make a deliberate effort to understand the world that surrounds us. It is not understood without effort and without assuming a certain level of responsibility.

3. **Authenticity is the result of an ongoing effort over time**. What made it impossible for the girls to join the neo-Victorian phyle is the same thing that led Finkle-McGraw to create the book that educated them. The neo-Victorian lifestyle was created "once and for all" out of an analysis and a worldview of a given era. New generations simply adopted the conclusions, they did not draw them from their own experience. The neo-Victorians had stopped being "authentic," because they let reality change without proposing to change themselves.
4. **Authenticity has collective consequences and meaning of its own**. Menard's *Quijote* is not Cervantes' *Quijote* even though it has exactly the same words. It simply means something else because another person wrote it, he did not copy it. And, because it means something different, it's read differently by critics. In the same way, the values of the girls are the same as Finkle-McGraw's, but they produce a new phyle, because the same values, in different historical times, lead to different conclusions and produce different results.

Juan Urrutia proposed "forgetting about social conventions or memes that define a collective identity" to reach authenticity. And it's true, **authenticity in the end is nothing more than a permanent effort to immerse yourself in the human experience to interpret it first-hand and give new answers to the uncertainty that inevitably surrounds life**. As both stories recount, that means, at least in part, "unlearning" what our setting offers us as truths to be able to "relearn" them… even if, often times, it's only to reach the same consequences.

People and communities will be "authentic" as long as they are capable of learning and reinventing themselves continuously. What that means is continuously questioning what is changing in the world at the same time that we ask ourselves what we are, and what we want to be individually and collectively. From there, we make new proposals to ourselves and our surroundings from which to continue learning.

To put it another way, an "authentic" community life is the opposite of any kind of touristy experience or "franchise," because the main job of every community –like that of every person—is to reinvent itself again and again.

Quotes from Borges taken from here. Translator unknown.

Success

It has become fashionable to require the story of failures. With so many circuses and spectacles about start-up "successes," with so many hollow "positive messages" and so much cheap "social responsibility," it's hard to believe a narrative about "winners" that doesn't tell the sad stories of those who were left behind along the way. **We discredit success. But that's a mistake.** Success matters. Although the first thing would surely be to not take for granted what it consists of.

Any human group distinguishes triumph from failure, in the first place, for its survival. And communities that integrate learning and production into a way of life can't allow themselves to be complacent about that.

Epicurean communities lasted for almost eight hundred years around the Mediterranean. Some of them were able to do so, without a change in physical place, for more than three hundred. Some scholars calculate today that, as a whole, they were able to sustain more than 400,000 people. Only the constant political turmoil and fanatical fury that accompanied the end of the Roman Empire were able to dissolve them definitively.

The Epicureans thought that we humans do not form groups because we have a "political nature," but out of practical necessity: we need the "community experience" to learn more, live more serenely, and pursue our own happiness. Standards are conventions—there's no such thing as "natural forms" of organization for the State or for the Epicurean garden. So, **there is no other criterion for judging the success of a community than the satisfaction of its members**. That's why a community will endure and improve if it contributes to its members, and they feel it does so.

The basic criterion for the success of a community is that its members feel proud of belonging to it, that they don't want to be somewhere else or doing something else, that they wake up every day and choose it as the best setting to develop themselves by making things with meaning.

And because it is the communards who judge, communities **can't be "open to anyone" or think of themselves as existing for others**, including "ideal" members other than the real people who live in them. That's why it doesn't make sense to have "growth" as an objective. Sometimes we'll have the opportunity to be more. We'll have to evaluate whether or not we can accept the responsibility that brings. If we accept it, it will mean tasks for everyone. But incorporating new peers cannot be a permanent objective of the community or a measure

of its success. If it was, we would end up shaping what we do as a function of people we don't even know yet.

Once we put the criterion of success where it matters—the happiness of the communards—we will all agree that there is a series of ways of doing things and living that, if they come together, make communities feel successful.

The first is **equality**. This does not mean that everyone has the same responsibilities or tasks. Rather, it affirms everyone's equal capacity to make commitments and take responsibility, and is manifested first and foremost in trust and mutual listening, but also in their daily mirror image: the absence of fear of taking responsibilities and making decisions individually. A community is all the more powerful the less it costs each member to soberly take responsibility for a decision that will represent everyone, whether faced with a client, a provider, or a third party. An egalitarian community is first and foremost a community of learning among peers. And there is no learning in common if no one dares to make a mistake individually. A community is all the more successful the more space for decision it can delegate to each of its members.

Surely the greatest expression of destructive fear is excessive love for assemblies and voting. This is a way, like any other, of diluting personal responsibility. But over the medium and long term, it's fatal: it wasn't anxiety about personal property that undermined the kibbutzim, but a hundred years of militant, daily assemblies, dedicated to collectively deciding about hundreds of small things that could have been personal choices. All egalitarianism that rests on committees, requests to the assembly, and approval processes is an attempt to hide the fact that the members don't dare be responsible and equal adults.

The Epicureans were right: we're not "political animals." It's not majority rule or power games that make us more fully ourselves, but personal freedom based on responsibility, belonging, and learning with those whom we have decided to live.

Conspiracies and power games define those who are too fragile to learn, and the love of writing rules and imposing prohibitions defines those who are too cowardly to share. The generous enjoyment of freedom with others is the mark of true personal and community success, the natural result of having constructed a space in which the development of each person supports that of others.

That's why **decisions by majorities and minorities should be replaced with consensus** from day one. Real consensus, not agreements by common minimums or mere passive consent.

You may think that a decision entails too many risks and still support it, just because what can be learned is more valuable than what you believe the mistakes would cost. Or maybe not, but you can live with it, and who knows, it might all work out well in the end. Of course, all those concerns have to be part of the common conversation, just like enthusiasm. Of course, it should never be forgotten that “objections” are not a contribution, and that doing things is the only way to overcome uncertainty. A community that doesn’t make new things, that doesn’t try new paths continuously, is a community that isn’t learning, that is becoming fragile. Community cultures that work transmit the idea that it’s better to make a mistake than to be afraid, to err than to remain paralyzed, to take risks than not learn anything new.

It shouldn’t be forgotten that one of the great fears that our culture instills in us, as the product of thousands of years of authoritarianism and structures of domination, is the fear of producing and entering the market. But what the story of communities tells us is that **communities that raise the banner of their productive nature tend to become established, to prosper, and to last**. The more productive the activity in the market of an egalitarian community, the more autonomous community is as a whole, the more personal decision-space its members have, and the more impact it has on its surroundings.

Without economic development, betting on abundance is more and more difficult. Even the Benedictines and Trappists reformed their idea of “poverty” to distinguish savings in common from their productive capacity, which is fundamental to increasing their social labor. “Sabbatical” or ascetic communities, which seek to minimize their impact on their surroundings, and which therefore bet on scarcity and deprivation as a lifestyle, are very rarely able to survive generational change. They reappear at different times like weeds in the grass, but they don’t even register as a movement, because they can’t get established.

What’s certain is that a community will improve if it knows how to focus on the well-being and personal improvement of its members, if it substitutes factionalism and majorities with consensus and wide-open spaces for individual decisions, if it renounces not only proselytism but treating its own growth as an objective in itself, and if, in economics, it learns to be productive and create abundance, both inwardly and in its surroundings.

Beyond these big ideas, there is little more to say about what the history of communitarianism teaches us about success. The truth is, almost two thousand, four hundred years seems like a lot to reach a half-dozen conclusions. But life is a “package deal,” a complex conversation where everything has an influence on everything else, and big mistakes are mixed in with things that were done well but simply won’t turn out well in certain contexts. That’s what’s so sad about the stories of the many and highly idealistic communities that

didn’t even last five years. They’re a mess. And that’s because things can be done well and yet everything goes badly. Uncertainty is always out there, and we can only reduce it by doing and learning.

And precisely because of that, the history and experience of egalitarian communities teaches us something tremendously valuable about success: there’s no need to take on something “big,” or look for superhuman scales to be able to have a creative and meaningful life with enough well-being. **To achieve success, it’s enough to summon the courage to create community**.

Ceremoniousness

The Internet is full of articles and videos by neurologists who explain to us that our brain comes "pre-wired"—according to some, for "the" religion, and according to others, for "the" belief in God. It's surprising, especially if we think about how what we understand religions to be today is a tremendously recent cultural construction in the life of the species—not to mention monotheism.

But if we look into it a little, we'll realize that what they're really describing to us is not a neurological mechanism that produces "faith in all-powerful supernatural beings," but the physiological mechanisms of ritualization. The assimilation of ritualism and religion into culture has been so powerful that the authors seem to confuse them. Surely this is not entirely innocent. By confusing one thing with the other, they grant the beliefs of the great contemporary monotheistic religions a "naturalness" that does not exist.

What's paradoxical is that the trend currently dominant in atheism, the so-called "New Atheism" of Dawkins, Harris, and others approves of this assimilation. As the saying goes, they throw the baby of ceremoniousness out with the bathwater of faith in a supernatural being. That is why the public appearance of an "atheism 2.0" with Epicurean roots over the last decade was so refreshing.

> In reality, symbolic capacity, emotionalism, language, fantasy, and ritual are skills that appear in our species as part of a powerful toolbox that made it possible for us to make the leap from the troop to the tribe, and as a consequence, from genetic evolution to cultural evolution. That's why we're preconfigured to be ceremonious and ritualistic. And that doesn't have anything to do with the belief in all-powerful beings.

We owe much more than we think to that inclination towards ceremonious celebration. The great challenge of Economic History has been to explain the great changes in productive systems. In general, what any economist, from Marx to today, will tell us is that the engine of social transformations is technological change. When an innovation is able to produce more value with fewer resources—which is to say, when something increases the general productivity of an economy—everything is reorganized around it, changing the great forms of social organizing fairly traumatically.

If we think back, we'll see that the general scheme works. Except in one case… and not a minor one: going from a society of hunters and gatherers to an agrarian society. There is no way to explain the first settlement as an improvement in productivity. Cultivating required

more resources and produced less than continuing to be nomadic hunters. For decades, all manner of explanatory models were tried, but none was able to reach really satisfactory results. Our ancestors had to endure hunger and hardship to learn to cultivate… and yet, against all rationality, that's what they did.

The explanation has begun to congeal in recent years. New archaeological discoveries tell us that, in fact, the whole tribe did not settle, but rather, one or two people. These people cared for "fermentable" crops that, with every cycle of seasons, allowed the brewing of some type of primitive chicha or beer. These were drinks whose function was to be integrated in a sort of annual festival in which the nomadic community met back up with their less productive and self-sacrificing farmers. The North American archaeologist Patrick McGovern remarks:

> However we characterize these neolithic drinks and the domestication of these plants, we'll find that it's about egalitarian effort, with everyone working together.

In an economy based on a very horizontal social structure like hunting and gathering, celebration is the main mechanism of collective social cohesion. Joining redistribution between farmers and hunters with the satisfaction of ceremonial needs, neolithic humanity affirmed their egalitarianism without friction. The fermentation of wild grains—the most primitive form of beer—begins to play an increasingly important role in these festivals, because they naturally become everyone's "objective." Every celebration needs something special. That way, something that is apparently unprofitable, like sowing and cultivating full time, becomes a common cause and the object of the first division of labor. And what's more, the first commerce: recent research on the DNA of British flora led to scientists to conclude that neolithic communities in the South of Europe shared or exchanged seeds of cultivated grains with their more backward neighbors in the North.

The primitive agrarian community's social structure and productive cycle were not essentially different from those of the nomadic tribe. The primitive communalism of hunters and gatherers that fascinated the first anthropologists was not followed by the State, private property, and the sexual and social division of labor, but a phase of settled communalism where hunting, fishing, and gathering were still very important, whose continuity with the past would be sustained in the ceremonial logic of agricultural celebration. All cultures have forever remembered this phase in the myth of a Golden Age in which equality and cohesion were at the center of the productive process. The survival of the myth could even be interpreted as a profound desire to return to a community economy capable of celebrating and distributing without the symbolic mediation of religion or the State. There

remains a memory, always subversive, of a time in which humans were able to celebrate themselves.

With the end of the commons as the backbone of the economic structure of society, ritual and ceremony became more important than ever to alleviate the fractures of a divided society. That's why the State always tried to capture them, from the religions created by primitive urban States to Soviet parades on May Day, and from flag pledges to civil marriages. Every State used their associated religion for that, and more recently, their secularized versions, nationalisms of all stripes. The State seems to have "horror vacui" and has always tried to take advantage of celebrations, rites of passage, and civil ceremonies. The important thing is to emphasize that it imposes their forms, but not their existence. They exist because they arise again and again, independent of the dominant politics and religion in every age.

That's why each community that wants to affirm its autonomy also has to face the creation of a ceremoniousness of its own: from the dense guild ritualism of the urban medieval fraternities to the harvest festivals of the kibbutzim.

We humans are not only endowed with a special symbolic capacity, but intimately linked to it. A whole part of our brain is consecrated to the creation and enjoyment of rituals. Symbolic capacity, emotionalism, language, fantasy, ritual, and ceremony are skills that are specific to our species. In each of us, those skills do not live only as potential, but as a requirement whose development we need. In reality, we evaluate a social setting by the space it offers to all of them, and only the most narrow-minded rationalism has ever tried to make us forget about our ritualism, relegating it to a shameful role, much like that reserved for sexuality and emotionalism by puritanical ideologies.

But our ceremonial need, like sexual or emotional need, is not a holdover from animal irrationality or a childish behavior that creates dark superstitions. We not only need to tell the tale of what unites us, we need to represent it to feel like we are actors in the meaning of our lives. That is why, for example, as families have abandoned the Christian parish as the center of socialization, there have been more and more Halloweens, Santa Clauses, and local traditions, not to mention the "upgrade" that children's birthday parties have suffered. Purely and simply: we need to celebrate significant occasions because we need to feel like part of a community.

From the community point of view, ceremony and ritual should not be approached with the pomp and pretentiousness of nationalists and mystics, but nor should they simply be left aside. Because what we're really talking about is the care of significant occasions.

As a community, we should be firm when faced with attitudes that strip away meaning. It's not easy. Most are accepted socially. They are an expression of the fear of responsibility covered over by the poisoned inheritance of the cult of spontaneity of the "spirit of '68" and by the false "postmodern irony" of the '90s. Consider the self-deprecating sarcasm of a friend who is receiving public recognition. Or people's comments on the superiority of others during a solemn occasion in which they feel uncomfortable, which is to say, in which they do not feel they are at the same level as those around them and are afraid of being rejected. Or the forced "humor" of the person celebrating a birthday who has to be "funny" when asked to say a few words. They are self-denying attitudes that should not exist in a community where all respect themselves.

That is why evoking values, the meaning of the things that we make, and the stages we pass through in our personal and collective life means having the courage to allow ourselves a minimalist ritualism of small gestures and everyday routines, and to develop a ceremoniousness that reaffirms values and commitments in the important moments of the cycles of work and life.

For example, marking milestones in time is important because it helps us to not try to substitute some life tasks with others. If work fulfills us, it's easy to extend it, especially if we have unresolved issues in intimacy or in common conversation. In those cases, even though we fool ourselves, telling ourselves that we are providing more, we are really shirking our responsibilities to our other vital spaces and relationships. A small ceremony at the end of the day, like, for example, taking stock of our work, neatly separates the times, eliminating dynamics of substitution and creating a sense of very concrete meaning.

Even more modestly, a rotating toast at the daily lunch gives us a moment of peace in which to give meaning to what's been done and aspired to during the day. In the same way, having "private festivals" like celebrating the anniversaries and commitments that bring a community together, provide a temporary broader perspective in which each one takes stock not only of work, but of what was learned and experienced, valuing and taking ownership of the improvement of the whole.

As community, we have the responsibility for valuing what we are and we do together. Having a community project means keeping alive an empowering setting for everyone. But empowerment does not consist, at least not more than indirectly, of gaining technical abilities. To be empowered is to win serenity and personal and collective autonomy. It means gaining the strength to confront our personal life tasks and contribute to community. To do this, our brain has a complete tool box. Ceremoniousness is one tool, which is why we need it. And we should take advantage of it.

Transnationality

On the Internet, when a space opens up for conversation, the only barrier is language. In our experience, every time we've opened a conversational space in Spanish, people from Spain have joined spontaneously and almost immediately, but also from across South America: Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, Venezuela…

If the conversation only incorporates people from one nationality, and even more so from one region or city, it's either because you're making a deliberate effort to close the doors to the wider field, or because your focus and your topics are clearly national or local. It's as if there were only men or women in your conversation. It can't be a coincidence, and it can't lead to anything good. If your conversation is only with people "from here," you're doing something very wrong.

And participating in "international" events is not going to fix it, because **being international contains a trap**. When we find ourselves at an "international" congress or event, each person comes defined by the country that they "represent." It hardly matters whether the meeting is to talk about tropical fauna or to play a Go tournament: the young woman in the back immediately becomes "the Greek girl" and the guy that we met in the bar will be the "German guy." So, a whole series of national "us" is established, which separates us, and all the stereotypes and expectations about national interests and States policies begin to weigh on each of us. Because *we all know how "Germans" are, and you oughta see what they're doing to those poor Greeks…*

What we don't know is whether the guy we met in the bar could work with us. And if we see him through the national filter as a representative of the "German Federation of Go" and a carrier of some sort of diffuse "German-ness," we won't find out.

But that's how things are. In international organizations and events, everyone participates as a representative of a nationality, and it's inevitable. That's why there's no need to make any effort to do anything "international." It doesn't make things easy for what interests a community. If we want honest communication, we have to move all those contexts to the background and simply see the people we have in front of us. We have to think and do transnationally.

But transnationality is not only an alternative way to hold events "with outsiders." It is a way of conceiving of our network and our own community.

Large corporations talk openly about social capital and create strategies to make it grow and align with their economic objectives. And we all know that the spiritual wealth of a person is intrinsically linked to the diversity of the settings that s/he knows and frequents. Our relationships can shrink us, make us more petty and narrow, or can enlarge our view with new perspectives and knowledge.

And it works the same way for a large corporation as it does for each of us: it makes the most valuable treasure of a community its relationships.

When the government of a country or the executive team of a business is made up only of men, we immediately know that, regardless of what they say, there is an unspoken ideology underneath: machismo. We understand that whether forming a government or choosing a management team, the person in charge looks for the best people available in their setting. And if he can only find men, it's because his social setting is built on prejudice.

The same thing happens with communities. **If all the communards have the same geographical origin, we have to wonder whether there is a prejudice operating underneath**. Because it's safe to say that homogeneity of origins leads to the impoverishment and self-absorption of community in a local setting, in a short-sighted view that will very likely end up undermining their well-being and their autonomy.

In contrast to life in the days before the knowledge society, where the scarcity of social relationships took time to have an impact on economics, social poverty today—measured in terms of numbers, but more importantly, of diversity—limits our creative capacity, our capacity to be in the world, and has an immediate impact on our professional performance.

That was the great change at the end of the twentieth century. Before, communities, like businesses or non-profits, were linked to a local or national geography. But with the social blossoming of the Internet, the possibilities have changed: the social space in which new ideas and communities are born is no longer the setting of a physical place. They are conversations on the network. Shared paths, ideas, affective bonds, and projects are born from the first moment of a "dance" that continuously crosses national borders in emails and posts. The economic impact is huge. It is no coincidence that the communities born in the twenty-first century that offer the best indices of well-being are transnational both in their composition and in their implementation. And that applies both to agrarian communities and those that produce immaterial cultural or technological goods.

Until then, the typical path of a business had been: growth, consolidation, and entry into international markets. The great industrial worker cooperatives did the same thing. Glob-

alization of the small, which breaks the corporate globalization model in favor of a host of SMEs from peripheral countries, soon leads them to outsource their production. This is done, as it was said in Mondragon at the time, to "internationalize defensively." But there is no common conversation with their new workers, and they do not include them as members. The model of the large industrial cooperativism of the twentieth century faces a crisis of principles when it reaches countries in development.

The transnational model of community that is characteristic of this century, instead, goes from conversational affinity to professional collaboration, and finally to integration, because the process itself is a conversation. It doesn't matter what city or the country they happen in. Each one brings their network and their own setting of relationships. The social capital of the community is expanded and the result of that growth is more transnationality and more reasons to keep moving forward.

It also means more capacity to listen in more settings. And more tools to put people in contact with each other and weave networks not only for the community but for those around it, wherever it acts or wherever one of its members is from. Transnationality is expressed in the form of a network, and a distributed network allows many nuances, great sensitivity, and because of that, a large capacity for transformation on the ground, on any ground.

Transnationality is first and foremost a way of being and seeing together, which requires looking directly at situations and real people without allowing ourselves to lose sight of the global framework. It establishes honest communication and begins relationships that evolve over time and which are the natural way for a democratic organization in our time to grow. Growing does not only mean incorporating new members, but entering a cycle in which a greater diversity creates new points of reference and with them, new ideas, products, projects… and places to be. And every transnational community has, at least, a nomadic heart.

Language

In the large majority of communities, the founding group, whether they met face to face or virtually, has the same mother tongue. This is not because we can only understand each other and “really” share values with people that speak our own native language, but because it turns out to be easier to find peers and be recognized by them when we can express ourselves with true naturalness. And that, in turn, biases the groups in which we’re inclined to converse. This is why language barriers are much more resistant than State borders.

But communities grow. And sooner or later, we realize that there’s no reason our peers always have to be found in the same settings. Or it may simply be that we meet someone who wants to join our community, but doesn’t speak our language with great skill.

Because the truth is, you’d think that being able to communicate in language of the other would be sufficient. But no. Nothing creates more asymmetries of power in a group than the language of discussion being a life-long language for half and a learned language for the other half. The natives will inevitably appear more reasonable, more judicious, more clever, and smarter than the others. Their statements will have more nuances—because they have more vocabulary—their expressions, more grace—because they have more skill—and their arguments, greater complexity—because they have more rhetorical tools. And if the language is English, where television has taught us to distinguish accents of origin, class, and intonation, even the non-English-speaking participants will feel that some were smarter or better informed than others.

And here’s something that’s also interesting: when we debate in a language that we haven’t spoken since we were little, we listen more actively. We make an effort to understand the other and we find great pleasure in feeling that we’ve succeeded. We celebrate having connected with him or her. And that’s a big deal. But if it happens in a collective that’s divided between native and non-native speakers, the result will be well below anything we would consider desirable for an egalitarian community.

That’s why there’s a renewed interest in neutral languages in more and more communities. Once more, Cabet and his proposal for a “language of the whole Earth” can be considered a precedent, and the kibbutzim as an experiment on a massive scale. From very early on, they made an effort to substitute the native languages of their creators—German, Yiddish, Polish and Russian—which were homogeneous inside each community, with the then recently created modern Hebrew. Perhaps this option wasn’t the most accessible, but the

fact of having a neutral language that put everyone on the same plane created a kind of new understanding, gave a new value to the collective conversation, and helped to meld the different groups in the debates.

But there are better alternatives than Hebrew: synthetic languages—regular languages created from elements and vocabulary of others. Synthetic languages are not difficult to learn at a level almost equivalent to one's mother tongue. But when we listen to the other, we still have to make that small extra effort at comprehension, among other things because there is no correct accent. We have communication at the same level with others in which we also receive a small prize each time we listen to them and understand them.

Esperanto, certainly the best documented of all, can be learned at a "native" level for a speaker of Indo-european languages in less than six months, and in less than a year for a Chinese speaker who doesn't speak any other language. If the student has studied historical languages, and even more so if they use them with a certain frequency, the times required to be able to convince and seduce—the two most appreciated linguistic abilities—will be even less.

For once, a moderate effort brings an extraordinary result: enjoying transnationality beyond language barriers, allowing us to be on the same plane and, more importantly, really enjoying listening.

Organization

Space

The communitarian movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was fundamentally a movement of settlers. They bought virgin or abandoned lands, occupied them, and made them produce. So, the image that a community offered in its first weeks was a collection of tents, and its first objective was to build sleeping quarters. The first battle for abundance of the Icarians, kibbutznik, and North American communards was the construction of houses, and they usually went from shared sleeping rooms to separate bedrooms for couples, then to the construction of individual bedrooms, and finally to building houses, first for families and then for single people.

For a long time, the "bungalow" and the single-family house were the symbols of community prosperity. An egalitarian community "living together" didn't imply, and generally didn't include, sleeping in the same house.

However, many "spontaneous" communities that appeared with the crisis started exactly this way, sharing housing among friends that shared all or some of their income to reduce costs and cover each other against the risks and shortages imposed by low wages and temporary work. The majority of these communities dissolve when their communards see permanent improvements in their work situation. For them, it will have been a temporary form of resistance that, even among scarcity and precariousness, shows how sharing housing can still reduce costs.

As with so many other things, the "sharing economy" has turned this "voluntary reduction" into a sort of business imposed on many middle-class youth. "Co-living," in the end, is nothing more than a convenient, touristy, "low-cost" experience. Much of the middle class would have had a hard time enduring the thought of their children facing scarcity if these practices hadn't been turned into something "cool." This is a good example of how culture and styles can help a society adapt to bad times by valuing "experiences" and community values.

But putting it in context shouldn't mean that we don't learn from it. Economic crises also affect productive communities, and "falling back" can be a useful strategy. Community nomadism, moving from one city to another for a project or indefinitely, also advises phases of shared housing with lower costs while getting to know the new city better.

But above all, in life, there are situations that make shared housing desirable. Not to save, but to put special care at the center of daily life. When a communard confronts a grave or chronic illness, or when the upheaval of child-raising arrives, and everyone's tasks are readjusted and redefined to support the parents, physical proximity is vital.

In these cases, agrarian communities once again have the advantage of space. In urban communities, on the other hand, it's hard to enlarge a house or to be lucky enough for the house next door to be available. At times, new kinds of spaces are needed—a yard, an accessible bathroom—and the most sensible thing is to look for a new house to live in. Surely that's why "regroupings" are more common in urban communities than rural.

The curious thing is that, with a certain frequency, many of those who regroup, once past the need that led them to share spaces, choose to remain together in the same house. Perhaps because they learned to maintain individual intimacy in less space, or simply because when communities mature, they learn to enjoy another kind of coexistence.

Deliberation

Consensus is the Holy Grail of all kinds of communities. Dozens of books teach methodologies to a new generation of organizers of learning groups, cooperatives, schools, and eco-villages. But consensus is rarely the result of "engineerable" processes or democratic mechanisms. Preformatted mechanisms and dynamics can only make pre-existing consensus visible or reach equilibria based on a common minimum. And while the idea is widely accepted that any kind of community can only settle in and function if it's capable of substituting majority rule with consensus, the reason that only a few are able to do so apparently remains a mystery.

As movements like 15M or Occupy demonstrate, not deciding, listening to everyone and holding all positions and none, doesn't work either. A shared emotion can allow us to maintain the hope of community for a time. But if common positions are not taken, if the debate does not gel into decisions that allow collective action that everyone is willing to commit to, the result will be equally frustrating in the medium term, and the community will dissolve or will decompose in bitterness.

There doesn't seem to be a halfway point. Communities either last decades with no apparent expiration date, or they shine for a season, a couple of months or a couple of years, only to sink into melancholy and begin to break down.

When you visit a successful community anywhere in the world, the first thing you notice is the taste of the communards have for discussing all manner of topics among each other. The same capacity they use to make a point of simplifying discussion of practical matters in the day-to-day becomes a true philosophical passion when they talk about the news or chat after work on everyone's reflections.

What's interesting is the naturalness with which these discussions take place: there's no strategy, and no attempt to persuade beyond the conviction of the speakers about their own sources and ideas. Everyone takes part, giving arguments, and no one feels that the objective is to "win." Nothing is pursued beyond sharing an original idea, a glimmer of meaning, and the enthusiasm it produces in the one who's telling it. The culture of philosophical debate and the concern for "the meaning of things" is what defines a functional community. To put it another way: for a community to work and grow stronger, it must be, first and foremost, a community of learning.

Conversation that encourages and allows learning is not a procedure. It cannot be learned like a recipe. It is the result of a culture that includes and surrounds all the members of a

community. We could list a thousand small details that will mostly vary from one community to another. However, there are features that appear wherever deliberation works to the satisfaction of all.

Because it can't be any other way, the topics tend to be linked to common concerns, creating "dictionaries"—not always written—of nuances, terms, and references; common contexts that grow over the years and are sometimes surprising to outsiders who are unaccustomed to seeing a conversational group gain so much autonomy from the mass-media narrative.

Successful communities join frank conversation about "what to do" and "what we are" with permanent learning about anything and everything. This **permanent deliberative process** is, in turn, responsible for the community evolving in consensus, without breaking the internal cohesion down into a dynamic of majorities and minorities, or stagnating out of fear of being fractured if it makes decisions.

Deliberation is the first product of every community, the most immediate way of materializing the way it is, its "ethos," its capacity to respond to the needs of its members. That's why the **key to making a community work cannot be reduced to a group of methodologies, because it is an ethical issue**: does the community allow us to think, learn and build together? Does it lead each one to be more responsible and make commitments to others?

Replicability

In the discussion about community in recent years, especially in the English-speaking settings of the "sharing economy," but also among the ecological and degrowth movements, the idea that communities can be created by recruiting people around a model has appeared and gained strength.

The idea of replicability is typically corporate: what a startup does will have a future if it has a lot of success with a lot of people, and can repeat and scale up the model in a lot of places. This is true whether it has a cola factory or a coffeeshop in Seattle: the more people who prefer their product and the more places they can open a factory or franchise, the more money it'll earn, and the better business will be. But do the same consequences and meanings apply when we talk about life in community?

Replicability, in the corporate worldview, implies that "people" are more or less interchangable, both workers and consumers. And the truth is, if we think about what "people" means in relation to a product, it's fairly true. Human diversity is irreducible, but when it comes to each little concrete example of consumption, also fairly limited: "people" like 23 different kinds of spaghetti sauce and around 15 kinds of cola, and after that, the cost of remembering the nuances between flavors means no one worries about it too much. And this is important for big investors and their problems of scale.

Something similar happens in the corporate structure: if you're hired to make deliveries or wait tables, all that matters about your character and your vision of the world is limited to something pretty concrete: your ability to bring and take things. That's why replacing a laborer with another with similar qualifications is easy. What matters for a concrete task is general productivity, which shows regression to the mean again and again. Human resources directors at big companies move workers every day by the thousands.

But the idea of community involves many more things, more dimensions of life. Living in community affects our whole lifestyle. It's unlikely that the diversity among people considered with all their choices and beliefs will be as limited as if they are considered from the point of view of the consumption of goods or the performance of a task within a macro-organization. So, it's problematic to think that in "creating communities," people's role is limited to fitting in, to being pieces of a structure, as if it were a marketing or staffing plan in the corporate world.

Also, having replicability as an objective would mean that, in a rather corporate way, we considered it more important for others to live in community than for us to live in a real

community.

When someone is asked to imagine how their life would be in a community, it's not common for them to imagine a community in the abstract. Very, very rarely do they describe a set of rules. In the large majority of cases, they imagine sharing a big house and a creative professional life with their friends, people they know, appreciate, and with whom they've already shared vital conversations. Universalism is almost always wished on others. For oneself, the concrete is always most important.

Additionally, the procedural way of thinking, which this approach arises from, has consequences for the way we develop, establish, and think together.

Procedural logic minimizes deliberation, reducing it to a footnote in the steps to a standard procedure that could serve to create a program or develop a corporate plan. It must not be forgotten that both in software development and in the implementation of corporate strategic plans, what the different divisions of the business or groups of developers do is a translation of an ideological proposal and global objectives created by the upper echelons of the organization. The workers participate in a global design that is not theirs, but rather, comes from management teams and their consultants. Their job is to "lower the muses into the theater," which is to say, take predesigned reflection on objectives and strategy and come up with the procedures and tasks that turn them into reality. The result is that…

- The decision about the best method replaces reflection on the best objective. Discussing points is not discussing their relevance or where they lead, but whether they work better or worse to accomplish the goals that have been received.
- Checklists and oversight of task completion become prominent, because what's being developed is not what we know, which is to say, learning, but what we do, which is the execution of pre-established objectives.
- And contributions are measured by the number of tasks completed and hours used to carry them out, since their value is relatively equivalent: time of execution.

The community model that has come together during the last two centuries places collective deliberation at an earlier stage. Projects are "established," sometimes during long periods of general theoretical debate in which new terms are defined and adjusted, or common definitions are refined so that, by consensus, they come to have a more precise meaning. These glossaries are the result of a long, collective debate, not the clarification of a key necessary for the development of the tasks in a plan.

Strictly speaking, in this model, there is no "plan." Deliberation is not just an "earlier stage" that communally takes the place of a management team in a corporation. Deliberation inundates the whole process, and can be confused with consensus-based "doing," because it produces the knowledge itself needed to be turned into execution, and because it's not necessary to "distribute" tasks when the conversation has matured into a new consensus. Tasks are not doled out as burdens, like something you get "stuck with," but rather, are "auctioned off," because you really want to do them and test out what we think we just learned.

The procedural system goes far beyond a debate on business management. When it's applied to community settings or tries to "create communities," it affects the very nature of community, what it means, and how we live it.

Corporate proceduralism, just as it reduces cooperatives to "legal structure," needs to strip a community of knowledge and deliberation to make it into something predictable, synthesizable in a set of procedures that eliminates what is most sought after when the community becomes productive: the sense of having learned something substantial each time we do a project.

The challenges of community

The main challenge of a community is, without a doubt, to learn to listen. The first striking thing in a community that works is that there are never two people talking at the same time in the same space. There's no need for moderators or someone to designate who has the floor. There couldn't be any such thing in a working group or in meals together. Everyone's objective is to listen, and when someone speaks, they know how to give way to others.

Generally, the most difficult thing is to learn to interrupt and allow oneself to be interrupted. It's a small art that can take time to learn. But once it happens, it's a sure thing that it will come together soon, because it really makes everyone feel better. The one who interrupts needs to listen actively to know when the other has ended their argument, and build from there. For the one who is disrupted, it's a matter of passing as elegantly as possible and understanding that if they want to offer a new argument, it will have more impact if they make it a contribution to another statement.

Conversation comes to be treated like a team sport, something that is being done by everyone, and where good "passes" are enjoyed and valued, and it's considered bad to hoard the ball or take the ball from a teammate.

And, of course, it's not the objective for only a few to carry the whole weight of the game. To learn to listen also means asking others meaningful questions and incorporating them into the conversation naturally. Many people lack trust in their own strengths and capacities. They devalue their own opinions and prefer to be quiet. To ask them in the middle of the conversation about aspects on which we know they can contribute will help them, over time, to change the expectations they have about their own contributions. And most importantly, over time, we will see how this new trust in themselves will start to transcend into other settings.

The second great challenge of every community is to banish blame and guilt. There is no infallible person or team. But normally, the more responsible a team and its members are, the less guilt they'll feel and show when mistakes happen. The reason is that the culture of blame is the enemy of responsibility. So, in communities that work, blaming does not happen. Nobody wants to blame anyone, and everybody feels uncomfortable if someone blames him/herself for a mistake.

To be able to develop in freedom, we need to trust in others, knowing that no one is going to discredit anyone in front of third parties, or reproach them, or lash out with sarcasm

when they least expect it to “make them pay” for an earlier mistake. Everyone knows they don’t have to make excuses or explain mitigating circumstances. When this culture is established, it allows everyone to share the best information, as clearly as possible, without sweetening or dramatizing it. From there, correcting negative results is a common task, and learning for next time is everyone’s responsibility.

Doing away with the culture of blame makes it a lot easier for everyone to overcome the fear of personal failure. The fear of failure is the great enemy of every collective project for two reasons: first, it tends to create self-fulfilling prophecies, self-sabotage, and stumbling blocks for oneself; second, it cancels out personal autonomy and is capable of stripping meaning from the most democratic system of organization.

We carry fear in our cultural DNA. It’s a holdover from thousands of years of authoritarian social organization. Authoritarianism needs our fear: our fear of the gods, our fear of nature, of science, and above all, our fear of others. Fear makes dependence more acceptable, and makes the renunciation of our responsibilities seem vital to liberation. Fear is the path of submission, of fatalism, and of blind faith in leaders, all of which is the opposite of personal autonomy. Fear leads us to ask the strong to take care of us and protect us, to accept misinformation, and make us irresponsible. Fear portrays us as helpless beings and powerless communities in a catastrophic world in need of strong powers. Fear is the main enemy to beat.

And that’s why the **third great challenge is know how to enjoy honest, well-done work as a success in itself**. We communards are quite lucky: our work expresses our values and serves to build the life that we want. This is not only because it provides us with money. Feeling responsible for, and proud of our work is our main success, and we have to preserve it as well as enjoy it.

Becoming overwhelmed is counterproductive, and can easily block results. Who has not been part of, or at least known of overwhelmed teams that spend their lives meeting and debating without having a free minute to be able to carry out any of the projects in their portfolio? Certainly, no one can guarantee continuous success, just as no one can be sure of avoiding failure. But more important than success or failure—in sales, in results, or in reception by the public—is accepting that with anguish, we lose joy, the enjoyment of living, and the pleasure of doing things with meaning… which is what unites us as a community.

That’s why we should accept imperfection. Not everything will be perfect on the first try. Rather, we should be sure that our work is honest, which is to say, not try to pretend it is

what it isn't, or can solve what it can't solve. If our work is honest, and we feel that we do it well, that the result is consistent with what we set out to do, each reason that we find to improve it will lead us to learn something new. And we will enjoy each improvement.

That's why having the courage to be imperfect and the strength to do honest work will allow a team to go over something again and again until it sees it in a new way and get the best result within reach. Only from the acceptance of imperfection can we aspire to overcome anguish. We will keep believing that the next attempt, the next proposal, will be better. But above all, we will feel proud of all of the things that we've built to get to where we are, and we will know that there's no better reason for serenity.

The web

It is almost impossible to think of an egalitarian community born in this century that is not due to the Internet. A community is born of a conversation between peers. We would be mistaken if we took for granted that the people with whom we can share searches, conversations, and learning are going to necessarily live in our neighborhood. The neighborhood on the network is the neighborhood of subjects and concerns, of focuses, of sources and ways of discussing and learning.

But if the Internet is fundamental for a network that is being formed, it is no less important for a mature community. When economics is integrated into community life, and it goes from sharing a conversation to sharing life "as a package deal," the nature of community changes. Discussion tends to be the basis of productivity, and sometimes matters related to production threaten to occupy an excessive part of the time for debate. Without meaning to, we become "specialists" and our conversation becomes esoteric.

It becomes vital to open it, make it public, share our debates and nurture each other. That's the meaning of the **blog**. It's not about proselytizing—which is just another way of devaluing the meaning of community—or submitting the debate to the opinion of the first person who passes by. Rather, it's a matter of creating a broader environment of conversation that helps us to not lose perspective, to learn from new sources, and to feel the pulse of everything around us.

A **blog** is much more than the representation of a community. By making an effort to write and communicate the things we're learning or that concern us, we document them, we connect things consciously. We reorder the world, and reappropriate it for ourselves. The blog is the main tool we have to better understand what surrounds us and to be more autonomous. The blog is an open site where discussing freely means establishing ideas before transmitting them, where the objective is not to impose or convince anyone, but to learn together.

Although the community has been formed in online debate, a **blog** also means **courage and responsibility**. Courage to overcome the fear of writing, fear of not being up to it. Responsibility to maintain regularity in publications and with it, constancy in the search for references and ideas.

The blog is a world that makes clear and obvious the "logical consequences" of our inconsistency and laziness. If we stopped writing, for any reason, not only will the discussion be impoverished, but the outward image of the community will be associated not with what

we are, but with the name of those who continue maintaining the effort to publish. Some will sense that their feelings of inferiority are confirmed by not being taken into account by the setting, and others by feeling alone in an open field. The blog is first and foremost a battlefield where we encounter our own fears.

That's why it's worth the trouble. A blog makes us better because it makes us face the uselessness of "good intentions" and self-deception. It forces us to take internal conversation seriously, because it's normal to need weekly "writing meetings" in which to share topics and think of focuses from which to build stories in common. If it's being done well, if we all manage to give each other courage, the blog is surely the most important tool of personal and collective empowerment available to a community.

Little by little, a community blog will establish relationships with other people and groups. It's time to create a space dedicated to a broader and more spontaneous kind of conversation. It may be a forum or a GNU-social node, and ideally, it will be linked to the blog without being constrained by it.

Life is made also of small things, of anecdotes that can be illuminating, of a thousand changing connections and sources that grab our attention. Sharing links between ourselves and with our broader surroundings, and starting conversations with them is as important as sustaining deep reflection on the topics that concern us. In fact, in the end, that everyday conversation, which seems light, is what's going to put us on the track of topics to investigate and new things to learn.

While it may not seem like it, blogs are very similar to the groups that philosophers organized in Antiquity. First, because of their spirit: establishing before discussing, discussing to learn together, and learning to have a more serene, productive, and happy life. But also because of their development: to learn, in the final analysis, is to understand the meaning of things, something that we make through words—words that, as we learn, will become more precise. With debate on the blog, we will refine our own language. On the basis of sharing and discussing, the central terms will mean more concrete things, which will relate to other things in increasingly precise ways.

There is nothing more rebellious or against the grain than philosophizing. Social trends shows a constant hollowing out of terms and their meanings. Any idea, as innovative as it may be, is simplified to the maximum to make it "understandable by anyone"—which is to say, transmissible without demanding any intellectual effort—to the point where many different interests put their hopes in it, and it first turns into a buzzword, and then progressively into anything anyone wants it to mean. At that point, it can become a useful fad

for the corporate world which can redefine anything to suit its interests through the overwhelming ideological firepower of the press and television. That's why, taking the easy way, consuming ideas and knowledge "made easy," is to isolate oneself and submit. Philosophizing, something that only makes sense with others, in conversation and community, is to gain strength until one can stand up alone.

Also, defending the meaning of terms, of contexts that we use in debate, is the first step to being able to bring in anyone to the discussion who accepts the challenge of reading the definitions. That's why blogs that have been able to bring together a certain learning and use it to contribute new things usually have glossaries and small vocabularies. We call them **contextopedias**, and there is no better project for a collective blog than creating one of its own. It's not a matter of competing with online encyclopedias or creating a specialized dictionary to be as detailed as possible. It's about having a useful and linkable tool that saves us from continuously explaining and debating the foundations of the discussion. The idea is to make the terms accessible and linkable in a simple way that gives meaning to the ideas in debate. And, of course, contextopedias, like meaning, evolve as we learn, so they should be updated once in a while.

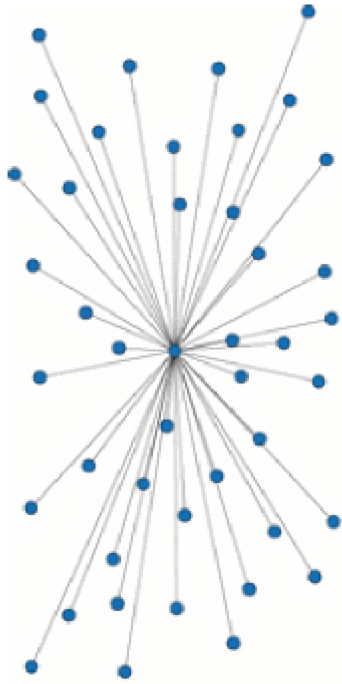
With just a blog and a GNU social node, we have the structure necessary to be able to philosophize and chat in the middle of the greatest "library" in history. There is no university in the world that comes close to what it offers, or one that charges less. And most importantly, not only do we have access to the sources, we have teachers from whom to learn and peers with whom to do it.

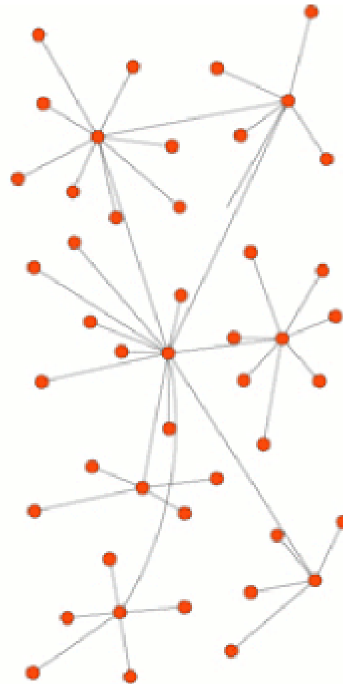
The Internet is not a "place" to be, it's the only "way" to be for a community in this century.

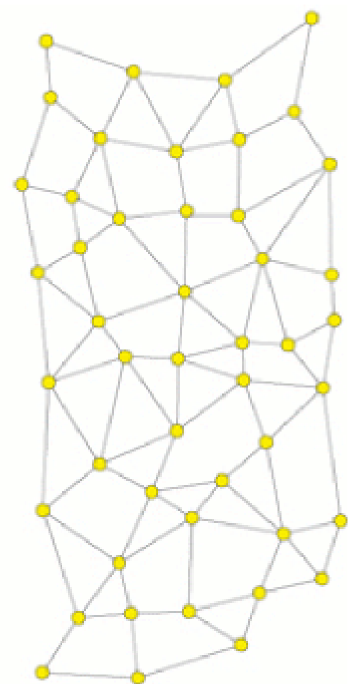
But the "way" a network is depends on its architecture, the way its nodes are connected among each other. It's not the same being part of a centralized network, in which if the central node is disconnected, all others will be isolated, as it is to be part of a distributed network, where no one depends on anyone else exclusively to remain on the network.

The web was born as a distributed network, but its history is the story of a powerful corporate movement dedicated to trying to recentralize it—and therefore, control it—to be able to gain monopoly benefits.

That's why the choice of tools deserves special emphasis. Having a blog is not the same as having an account on the server of some business. Having a blog of your own, on your own server, using Wordpress for your publication tool is not the same as having a blog on WordPress.com. Sharing a GNU social node with your friends is not the same as publishing


Centralized network


Decentralized network


Distributed network

on Twitter or Facebook. Blogger, Facebook, Twitter or WordPress.com are centralized services, easily controllable and terribly vulnerable to corporate or governmental decisions. They are the product of big businesses, born of overscaling of corporations and capital, against the current of an era characterized by the individualization of production. They are the past dressed in colorful electronic clothes. They are a trap that endangers the network that we mean when we use the word “network”: the distributed network.

In the end, the Internet as a distributed network is based on something as simple as each community having its own server. If you don’t have any hackers around, you may find it a chore. But it’s a basic tool of freedom and sovereignty. And there’s nothing worthwhile that doesn’t require learning. So, if there’s one thing every community should learn, it’s to control and operate a small server and use it to run the tools that will allow interconnection with others like it. Simplifying things considerably, they should have two free programs: Wordpress and GNU social.

Running these basic tools is as important as owning and operating a print shop was for the religious revolutionaries of the sixteenth century. For them, it was the way they participated in the alternative global debate of their time without depending on the generosity of the Inquisition and its printers. Today, we don’t have the Inquisition, but the NSA that Snowden uncovered for us is at least as dangerous. Today, Facebook and Twitter let us publish without royal approval, but they take what we write and share, scan it for intelligence, close down services every so often, and don’t hesitate to negotiate with the worst dictatorships in the world if it gets them several million more users. And what’s even more common, and over the long term, worse: by turning over the vital infrastructure of our communities to save a little money, we let them not only control the information, but define the relationships and the culture of our community and our time.

The blog is our main tool to find our peers in an open world and philosophize with them. That’s why leaving the corporate fold, the playpens of the great Internet recentralizers is, day to day, the most radical and profound way of affirming autonomy. And without that autonomy, learning, discussion, and the impact on our surroundings will be compromised.

Politics

If we inquire what is the furthest thing from friendship, and the most fruitful of aversions, we see, simply, that it is politics.

– Philodemus of Gadara

The Epicureans knew that a community must protect itself against many of the partisan battles of the "polis." In the end, they are no more than games played by teams with their own logic, where there is little to learn, and where one can easily compromise their own serenity. They also created an overwhelming defense against the great theological stories. Today, those gods have evolved into "imagined communities": homeland, class, gender… But their effect is the same: to force the individual to show loyalty to imaginary beings with whom conversation and negotiation is impossible. And since conversation is impossible with a divinity, a country, or a social class, all of them are replaced with magical-symbolic objects of different kinds. There's not that much difference between reading the entrails of a crow to learn the will of Zeus and interpreting a historical or cartographic story to deduce "national interests" from them.

From the community point of view, the result of the logic behind both is the same. If we allow power struggles or the stories of imagined collective identities to interfere with the community, the result will be a loss of autonomy both for the individuals and for the community as a whole. In fact, it will no longer be a community made up of responsible and sovereign individuals. It will be a group made up of representatives of parties, nations, sexes, age groups, and, in the case of particular religions, an invisible divinity which is only comprehensible to its followers.

But the law is different. Epicurus said that

> Justice does not exist in itself; instead, it is always a compact to not harm one another or be harmed, which is agreed upon by those who gather together at some time and place.

That is, things are not just in themselves. Justice is a social consensus that varies over time, that is manifested in the law, and that is settled at "some time and place." It is those times and places we'll have to be interested in. Surely more times than we'd like.

In our time, there exists a gigantic State that has influence on every moment of our lives, and powerful interest groups trying to capture it for their own benefit. That's why, often

times we will have to publicly defend consensus on what is fair from new laws that try to restrict long-standing freedoms or restrict others that technological development makes possible for the first time.

In our experience, we know also that, in that logic, the relationship with the surroundings will create commitments to other groups, institutions and causes. But if we have internalized true community logic, the approach of any communard to any of these institutions will be **pure contribution**: We will accept concrete and measurable responsibilities but, apart from obvious need, we will avoid positions and functions that are not clearly limited over time.

Communards are the ideal volunteer for any social organization. We concentrate on strengthening its mission and its contribution to the surroundings, putting our whole capacity into it, but without committing ourselves to the inevitable power struggles that plague every open organization, and which simply don't interest us. That is, messages towards the institutional settings in which a community participates not only have to be constructive, they must distill community spirit.

We must never forget that we're not in other organizations to defend the lifestyle that we like, we already do that in the community. Nor are we in them to enjoy any privilege—it's part of our lifestyle to reject those, and instead, affirm everyone's responsibility. And we're obviously not there to get recognition, we already have that from our peers, and we don't need anyone else's.

We are in those spaces to defend freedoms that matter to us, and the only way we should try to distinguish ourselves is by encouraging an ethic of courage and contribution. That is the ethic that is fundamental to social cohesion and that creates a common language where we will be able to recognize ourselves in others.

So, should communities participate in politics? If "political" means the partisan struggle for political power, the answer is clear: no, that's not what they're for, and they can't be subjected to that type of dynamic. If by "political," we also understand occasionally participating in public causes and trying to change or defend social consensus from the particular point of view of each one, the answer can only be affirmative.

In fact, throughout its whole history, communitarianism has demonstrated itself to be a movement that is uninterested in power, and yet that has not prevented it, in different contexts, from getting involved and contributing in effective ways to the great causes of every age.

Growth

The dominant culture is a culture of over-scaling. The first question asked of a business is how many people it employs, not how much productivity it has. It only seems to matter how many people it occupies, not the wealth per capita its members create. With a non-profit, it's the same: the question is always how many people are "engaged" rather than what kind of commitment unites its members. It's an inheritance from the decentralized world in which reaching "people" had to happen through intermediaries, and each intermediary was worth as much as the people it "represented."

But a community is different. First, it has a size limit. This isn't a "mistake" on the community's part, but a limit on the scale of our species. It seems that what we call the "human scale" is recorded in the DNA in our brain.

In 1993, anthropologist Robin Dunbar published a study comparing the size of the groups of different species of primates with the volume of the neocortex of each one. The correlation was clear. He extracted the resulting function and using that, predicted the maximum size of a human group. The result, 147.8, is known as the Dunbar number. In his article, Dunbar interpreted this value as "cognitive limit in the number of individuals with whom any person can maintain stable relationships."

But if the maximum number of "people who matter to us" that our brain can process is 147, only a community formed by orphans and in permanent isolation could reach that size without exceeding it. And in those 147 cubbyholes, our brain has to find a place for our families, our circles of friends, the Go player that ended up telling us his life story, and generally all the people we think about, worry about, and relate to most intensely. The remainder is what's left for our elective community.

That's why, in practice, the Dunbar number only appears in the persecuted and isolated communities of the Hutterites, in the demography of Amazonian and Polynesian tribes, and in egalitarian communities of "colonization" like the Icarians or the first kibbutzim. All the rest are smaller because, in a normal situation, we all belong to more than one real community.

But, if we analyze size throughout the history of groups without middle management in armies, guerrilla bands, artisans, religion, or business, a series of numbers smaller than 147 appear, which would seem to indicate "spontaneous" equilibria in communities that are not the only community their members belong to.

This is what's known as the "sub-Dunbar series": 6, 12, 20, 30, 60, 80. By contrasting these values with the history of all kinds of egalitarian communities, they come to roughly correspond to what the communards themselves describe as "thresholds" at which they implemented different types of reforms in the organization, or changes happened in the group culture. It's difficult to know whether these matches obey economic logic related to scale, physiological restrictions like the Dunbar number, times of cultural adaptation or, simply biases in memory and the story.

In any case, we know that these numbers are also present in the traditions of those communities that, like the Epicureans and Mithriacs in Antiquity, the artesian workshops in the Middle Ages, or the Hutterites up to our day, automatically divide when they reach a certain size.

In fact, the tendency toward "horizontal growth," which is to say, to schedule the division of the group before exceeding a certain size, can be understood much more clearly from Dunbar's logic: faced with the material impossibility of maintaining the care "of all, by all" beyond a certain number of members, these community cultures preferred to renounce what, in their day, must have been important economic advantages of scale, and divide in two.

Which reminds us that a community of a hundred communards is no better than one of a half-dozen. The number does not bring us closer to or further from our objective, because, once again, the objective of community is the community itself, the enjoyment of its way of life. The number, the decision to grow or divide within the parameters that our biology appears to enforce, in principle, should only depend on the productive and emotional considerations of the communards. Growing, "being more," cannot be a community objective in itself. If we decide to grow, it should be because collectively, we need it, and we feel capable of committing ourselves. And it's no small commitment: it means creating abundance for one more.

Many communities in the US and Europe put out public calls that are not very different from want ads. In Germany and Austria, open meetings are organized much like "job fairs": in a festive setting, communities present themselves, pick up resumes, and choose who they accept to begin the process of integration.

In agrarian communities, most of the work doesn't require too many qualifications, so what they look for is people with the disposition to coexist and a balanced character. Living in community has to "do good" for each communard, but that doesn't mean it's a universal panacea or that we have to take responsibility for the emotional problems of everyone who

knocks on our door. The function of communities is not to create therapeutic settings for people with problems. That's why these first phases of the selection processes seek to weed out "crazies," "troublemakers," and those who have a compulsive need for attention, recognition, or power.

In communities whose economy is based on technological products or professional activities that require certain specialized knowledge, this first selection takes into account their prior achievements, or at least capacities for learning, of the would-be members. In las Indias, we were pioneers in creating an "itinerary," a system that is already expanding beyond the strictly communitarian setting in groups in which writing and common debate is an important part of their evolution. The itinerary is really training for conversation. The "iternerant" must comment on his blog—and therefore open one if s/he does not have one—on a series of novels, essays, documentaries and articles, giving their own interpretation and starting a conversation with it. The results are neither right nor wrong. It's just about integrating the practice of grounded conversation while accumulating references that are common in community debate and whose lack would probably make them feel like cultural outsiders.

Beyond the itinerary, the process of integrating new members has many common elements in all current egalitarian communities. Normally, there is a series of fairly long visits. These evolve from tourist visits to the real experience of the day-to-day, which is always less glamorous, so that the "iternerant" can see if, beyond the conversation and work, the lifestyle turns out to be attractive.

If it is, community must unanimously accept the new arrival. When this happens, it begins a one-to-two year period of getting to know each other in which the aspiring communard is already "one of the family" for almost all practical purposes. However, they continue to be considered "on probation," which is to say, no long-term commitment to the community is required, but neither does the community have a long-term commitment to them.

And being integrated into a community, even a cooperative, takes time. And "giving and taking time" reflects something important: integration into a community is very different from the selection process in a business. It's not about "winning praise." Integration is a process of getting to know each other in which both parts try to get to know each other to find out if the other will make a productive, emotional, and conversational contribution.

Also, from another perspective, that of someone hearing all the phases of this process for the first time and learning that they take almost three years in most cases, it seems too long

and tedious, too difficult. The truth is that it's not tedious, but it is long, and it certainly isn't easy to be integrated into an egalitarian community.

Also, in this, communal logic is the opposite of the logic that characterizes religious groups: in a community, it is difficult to enter and easy to leave. If you declare that you want to go, certainly that will make everyone sad, but no one is going to try to convince you otherwise. In community logic, that would simply be a lack of respect. Additionally, almost all communities have systems of economic support for the communard who decides to strike out on their own or change their life by leaving the community. Some even have different ways of supporting aspiring members who don't end up completing their period of integration.

Integration demands at least as much from the community as from the new arrival. That's why many communities stop growing by their own choice for long periods. In the poorest and smallest, the economic and emotional effort of integrating someone may simply not be worthwhile to the communards, and a conservative consensus can stretch on for years. But the fact is, sooner or later, a community must grow, even if only to have generational turnover. The alternative to growing is not, in the medium term, remaining stable, but being more isolated, being less flexible. In other words, growing old.

Failed integrations

Almost all young intentional communities have high rates of failed integrations. Surely, “learning to grow” is one of the most difficult community tasks. In their first years of life, a high percentage of new members will end up leaving the community, and not always lovingly.

The difference between a conventional work setting and a community is vast, and not only because the hegemonic culture and the Christian ethic has prepared us to “put up with” a job until it’s almost unbearable and accept it as a “sacrifice” or a “punishment.”

The shock that the new member feels as a result of the real equality and horizontalism in a community is usually underestimated. As much as most people talk about how bad hierarchies are—which is what you find in a traditional business—when we reach an egalitarian setting, we feel lost. Hierarchies also function as a protective element, as a way to avoid responsibility, and as compasses. In a hierarchical setting, we’re not masters of our own destiny. The direction and the pace are set by the “higher-ups.” That’s where we get instructions on what we have to do, when, how, and even why. Not even in the case of not following instructions would we be responsible for remaining in our job or not, because it would be “higher-ups” who fire us.

In an intentional community, however, equality works in all senses. Freedom from having a boss causes vertigo. Everyone is equally responsible, everyone sets the course, and everyone decides what will be done, when, how, and why. Nobody is exempt from taking responsibilities.

This leads to the most common cause of problems in integration: a recent arrival feels frustrated by not becoming “one of the family” as fast as they’d like. It’s normal. Besides learning to swim in equality, a community is a group of interpersonal relationships that are built among everyone and that already have many levels when someone new arrives.

These understandings and tolerances, this “knowing how to appreciate” the other, even in their worst moment, without questioning them, is something that develops over time. It’s not acquired all at once. The recent arrival easily picks up on the depth of the relations around them, but also feels the lack of that depth in their own relationships. They feel more “clumsy” socially and in work, miss contexts, and lack experience. They need to “get with” the dynamic, and feel they can contribute more to the collective work. They need to feel they can improve, and overcome those inevitable shortfalls faced by everyone who joins a team that’s already formed.

But they are not always able to do so, and the community is not always able to act accordingly. On the one hand, the result will depend on the resistance to frustration of the new person, and their capacity to resist that "private logic" that tells them they are doing something wrong, or aren't good enough. But on the other hand, it also will depend on the ability of the community members to detect the problem in time and support them.

Adlerian psychologists characterize the behavior of children who do not feel included in the family community as using four "mistaken goals" or "mistaken strategies." Curiously, fairly intense and sophisticated versions of these four goals appear in practically all case studies of failed integrations that communities share with each other… and unfortunately, this is usually related to the problems of integration that the aspiring members had in their family communities when they were children.

However, those four mistaken strategies are easily detectable early on, and should serve to establish frank and direct conversations that help the new arrival to overcome them. Rudolf Dreikurs called them attention-seeking, power, revenge, and helplessness.

We can all think of people who seem engaged in looking for acceptance at all costs, again and again, turning any debate on ideas into a personal vindication or demands. This anguish is insatiable however much attention the person receives. The problem is really unsolvable as long as the person does not change their private logic, so whether the requests are ignored or the person gets more attention, they will only feel more and more frustrated.

And when the need for attention is not satisfied—and as we've seen, it's impossible to satisfy—a recent arrival will attempt to enforce dynamics of power.

They will establish imaginary relationships of superiority and inferiority with the other members. Later, they will feel hurt, frustrated, and unfairly treated as they see again and again that those whom they feel are superior "recognize" the contribution of those they consider inferior. It's the same thing that happens with little siblings: it always looks like Dad and Mom let them get away with more, treat them better, and love them more.

So, they will attempt to exert power over others, making derogatory comments and compensating for their insecurity with declarations of superiority over some peers, applying imaginary hierarchies, trying to "compete" by "being right" or trying to make others look bad. Many times, they will compromise everyone with public shows of community chauvinism and declarations of the superiority of their community in their own circle of friends. Others will do just the opposite of what has been asked or what was expected of them, simply to be contrary, once again, exerting power.

However, in an egalitarian community, it's not at all easy to establish power over the community or any part of it. The really established power is the power *of* the community, so attempts to do so sooner or later come up against powerful antibodies. Frustration with not fitting in, not finding a space, and not feeling valued after first trying to draw attention and later exercising power, becomes even greater when they feel rejected.

This is when the desire for revenge appears. Usually, it coincides with the stage immediately before and after the frustrated individual leaves the community. The accumulated and unrecognized frustration can lead to anything. In the least serious cases, they malign the community, creating a story that justifies their failure. In the most serious, the failed aspirants are capable of stealing things, whether material or immaterial (customers), as a way to try to compensate for not getting something they felt so close to having. It's also common to try to "replicate" the model and recreate the social setting of community, but with what they value as a measure of success: being bigger. However, for the same reasons that they failed to fit into the community, they will also not be able to create any viable community. The frustration of their revenge will then lead to resentment.

An alternative strategy in people who don't end up fitting in is trying to free themselves of what they expect to fail at, showing fatalism, passivity, disconnection from their surroundings, or refusing to take responsibilities due to a real or imagined inability, to avoid requests they fear. This is usually accompanied by demonstrations of sensory isolation, psychosomatic illnesses, playing the victim, complaints about their own abilities, and demonstrations of dependence. Dreikurs called this attitude "passive violence." And in fact, even though it seems less stressful than the earlier ones, it easily becomes permanent emotional blackmail.

For the community, it's important to detect these situations soon, and try to encourage the person to overcome their lack of comprehension about the situation and be patient. The cycle made up of attention-seeking, using power, and attempts to do damage usually lasts between a year and a year and a half. That's why most cooperatives laws throughout the world allow probationary periods or temporary associations of up to two years.

But we shouldn't harbor illusions or prolong everyone's suffering until the end. In most cases, if things reach the phase of asserting power, there's little to be done. The underlying problems in the large majority of these cases can't be addressed without professional help. It's not the responsibility of a community to try to fix psychological or emotional imbalances in everyone who wants to join it. And in any case, it's not even possible. When someone isn't integrating, but taking the path of mistaken strategies, it's better to have a calm conversation in which alternatives for the relationship are explored based on a blunt

acceptance of reality: the community cannot give the recent arrival the type of recognition that they need.

Another very common case in problems with integration into an egalitarian community is the fear of conflict, which is more widespread than it appears. In a real community, conflict is something natural… and it lasts approximately five minutes. But it's necessary. And if it lasts more than five minutes, it's because the underlying problem is more important, which is not to say it's irresolvable.

What should never be done is avoid conflict. If it's avoided, all that does is ensure that the snowball of frustration will end in bitterness and discouragement. Young communities that don't take this point into account and try to avoid conflict so as to "look good" to the outside world and to new members are destined to have conflicts that will be impossible to resolve.

Normally, the aspiring communard will avoid having conflicts that directly affect them and will suffer terribly watching conflict between other members. In fact, they will feel more or less the same as a child watching Dad and Mom fight. This is particularly true of people who unconsciously associate with an egalitarian community with a sort of mystical attitude about life, the universe, and everything, and can't understand how the peaceful and harmonious paradise they always dreamed of could be stained by an argument.

Obviously, this is a big mistake, for which we can once again blame '68, "flower power" and the "New Age." In a community, people love each other—a lot—and in the real world, love is demonstrated with action, not passivity. It is demonstrated by struggling every day to grow and build together, by staying on our toes, by progressing. It is demonstrated by being responsible and taking charge of others. And when there is action, there are disagreements, discussions, and annoyances. To resolve a conflict, you need to put problems on the table and make sure everyone pays attention to them, even if it's tiring, even if it makes people growl. If we can't growl at our brothers and sisters, who can we growl at?

It's difficult to explain all the little things in communal coexistence. But it's important. One of the most striking postulates of the military doctrine of T.H. Lawrence was to assert that the Arab army "could not afford casualties." The reason was that their Bedouin units were, in reality, real communities based on fraternity, and not on military discipline:

> [M]en, because, they being irregulars, were not units, but individuals, and an individual casualty is like a pebble dropped in water: each may make only a brief hole, but rings of sorrow widen out from them.

Trying to avoid that sorrow is what, during World War II, made the soldiers of vanguard units famous for their coldness with new recruits.

In the ’70s and ’80s, spending a few months on a kibbutz became part of the dream of thousands of progressive European and American youth. The turnover of these temporary kibbutznik was high. It didn’t take long for them to earn a reputation. The youth felt the distance between them and the communards who they looked on with admiration, and inevitably felt rejected. But if you asked the communards, they would curtly answer you with “they’ll leave,” with a look of “how can you not get it?”

And we could go on telling similar stories. In a community, every failed integration, as consensual and amiable as it may be, has an undeniable emotional cost for each and every one of the members. It is surely failure that hurts most. Because when the doors of a community are opened for someone, each member also opens to receive them. And that’s the main danger of failed integrations: they hurt, and make integration more difficult for the following aspirant, because no one wants to repeat failure, and everyone will be at least a bit more cautious and distant.

But the essence of community life is overcoming fear and learning to confront uncertainty with serenity. There is no other option but to open up again and recover the courage necessary to grow. Although, when you grow, almost inevitably, your joints will hurt you a bit.

Friends of the community

Communities have friends. We may meet them in virtual conversation, on our trips to the market, or possibly in the personal surroundings of the communards. It may even be that they come in “package deals” when other communities appear in our social life. Sooner than later, the community will have a conversation of its own with them. It will be a conversation of friends, much more intimate than reflection on the world and much less practical than conversation about doing things. The center, as in every friendship, will be on affection.

But these relationships have something particular, something that makes them different, a special kind of “care” that’s different from the care for others that everyone knows how to practice with their friends. These relationships are born of mutual learning and will continue while it exists. That doesn’t mean there is an increasing ideological affinity. It could well be that the opposite happens. It doesn’t matter. We don’t enjoy our friends because they have made the same choices as us, but because we can enjoy them in everything that makes them different from us. We don’t need excuses to find them. Friendship is an end in itself, both for each person and, especially, for the community, which is itself, in the final analysis, a “society of friends.”

But it’s important to understand that if we don’t bother to follow their reflections and progress, if we lose the connection that made the relationship emerge, the relationship will end up fading. And even though conversations may come and go, or have more intense times than others, it’s still important to be attentive and care for conversational space on the network beyond learning, and not to look down on either inconsequential get-togethers or “catching up” on what the other is doing, because something valuable lives there, even if modestly.

But neither are relationships exclusively virtual. They are personal relationships and as such, need physical presence. To the extent that distance allows, they have to be face to face, and to have space for stories and trust, for the enjoyment of the other without adornments or conditions. And yet, even if only for purposes of time management, it will be tempting to take advantage of events or commercial travel to meet up with them. But even in cases where there’s no other choice, friends are friends, and need a space and a time for them. The community must create them just as each one creates times and spaces to enjoy their childhood friends.

Let’s be honest, the most frustrating thing about organizing events—and all communities

organize them fairly regularly—is that what drives us to do all the work and the trouble that it takes is the promise of seeing friends, but most of the time, keeping logistics moving and attending to other guests is so absorbing that we barely have time for them.

Among all the organizational tasks of a community, creating spaces for its friends is usually the most neglected, and yet it creates much more meaning than many other things that, in the final analysis, are only instrumental.

Economy

The naturalness of communal life

When you live in a community, you see it as the most natural and spontaneous thing in the world that everything is shared, that everything must strengthen everyone to work… and precisely because of that, it never seems like a big deal, and doesn't seem to have special value. It's "spontaneous" and "normal." But when you go visit the everyday institutions of society—businesses, communities of neighbors, administration—it's hard to find an iota of the things you take for granted, and you wonder if it's really as "natural" as it seemed to you.

But if we think about it a bit, that "naturalness" is quite present in our culture. All languages have a specific word for communal work: in Spanish, using the Asturian word, we call it *andecha*; in Portuguese, *mutirão*; in Euskera [Basque], *auzolan*; in Russian, *toloka*; in Finnish, *talkoot*; in Norwegian, *dugnad*… There are also words for community property: the traditional *procomún* of peasants and brotherhoods of fishers, or *comunal*, as it began to be called in the fifteenth century, is equivalent to the Japanese *iriai* or the English "commons."

That's because the agrarian and hunting commons are the original form of ownership and work, long predating State property and private property… and for the time being, they remain more persistent: common institutions remained vigorous throughout the world even through the Middle Ages, and resisted Modernity with relative strength until the "amortization" of nineteenth-century liberalism forced them to evolve into modern cooperativism. But don't be misled, still today, there are large European regions, like Galicia, where more than 25% of the territory is made up of mountains and common lands. We have always been surrounded by communal property and community values. Our culture kept more than just the formula for us.

If it wasn't enough to observe the survival of large expanses of communal land and herds on all continents, it must be said that in all of our community experience we've never found a single case where problems arise because someone had consumption patterns that endangered common resources. In community life, there are problems and conflicts, but in

our experience, that's not one of them, and if it does happen somewhere, it certainly isn't frequent or relevant.

"The tragedy of the commons" contains a trap. It's a theoretical model created in 1968 by Garrett Hardin, an neo-Malthusian ecologist, a forerunner of what would later be called "degrowth," obsessed with what he believed to be an "excess of population." Hardin starts with a definition of the behavior of individuals according to which they would look only at their short-term interests, but would be blind both to the social result (which is to say, the impact their actions would have on the sum of individual results) and on their own total results over time. The model also means that the commons in question is not reproducible (with free software, this isn't applicable, because it doesn't run out if we use it more).

With these initial restrictions, according to which people literally behave as if there was no tomorrow and there were no other people—surprise, surprise!—the result is that the shared resource runs out. The results are implicit in the conditions of the game, and the result is the one that was desired: the "demonstration" that the reality that surrounds us doesn't exist, because it is "irrational."

This is a very different path from the one followed by the classical economists and Marx himself. They had not used an abstract and self-reinforcing model, but had had to explain and model why commons existed in a good part of the arable lands in Europe and, above all, why the peasants didn't want to privatize them. The history of the nineteenth century in large countries like Russia, Spain, or Italy is the story of governments like that of the Spanish minister Madoz, trying to privatize the commons by force, with little success. It was a drama for the liberals of the times, who thought that without individual property rights, the countryside would never become technological, nor would enough labor flow to the cities to make industry viable. It was a theoretical problem for Marx, who was continually asked by those in Russia what to do with the countless peasant commons there, and whether they could evolve "directly" to an economy of abundance without going through privatization.

But, by 1968, when Hardin writes *The Tragedy of the Commons*, the commons is no longer a political problem. It's simply a settled reality that economic theory could explain easily, without the need to include internal or external regulations, whether with game theory, modeling the commons as Nash equilibria, or even with neoclassical theory, including the way that would make Gary Becker famous, models of long-term rationality.

Only in the Anglo-Saxon world, where the nineteenth-century amortizations were really effective and put an end to common ownership of the land, could Hardin's story come to be "common knowledge," because by 1968, nobody in the USA or Great Britain had

experience with common lands and shared usage. But in reality, these were part of the everyday geography of millions of inhabitants where the liberal revolution hadn't totally triumphed in its agrarian policies, nor had Soviet or Chinese socialism been imposed—a large area which included, on a continuum, places as disparate as Indochina, Galicia, Mexico, la Araucania [Chile], or South Africa.

However, in 2009, the Swedish Academy gave the Nobel Prize in Economics to a political scientist, Elinor Ostrom, for having "challenged conventional wisdom [*sic*] by demonstrating how local property can be managed by a local commons without regulation by central authority or privatization." Ostrom soon became a sort of patron saint to all those in universities who were interested in the community experience in general and the commons in particular. The central idea they took from her work is that the management of the commons requires a complex set of norms and equilibria that remain "artificial," products of a very sophisticated social construct.

This is true, but their political-academic claim is not disinterested: when a social organization is described as "artificial" and "sophisticated," it is implicitly being argued that it's necessary to have "special," academic, or "technical" knowledge to make it work. Ostrom thus became an excuse to argue for the guardianship of groups of theoreticians and academics over the social process, with their consequent industry of advanced degrees, courses, and seminars to train "specialists."

But 2009 was also the first real year of crisis in Europe. Millions of people were left without work. In countries like Greece, Spain or Portugal, thousands and thousands of families lost their houses. Spontaneously, the social network—first, families, and then communities—started to reorganize for survival. Hundreds of small "communes" appeared, houses that were shared between families that had been left without regular income, in which everything that was obtained went into a common fund. Nobody needed to design or certify a sophisticated set of rules. While it was a precarious response to an emergency situation, the "naturalness" of the process is noteworthy. The model was already there, in the cultural inheritance and in the traditions of the working classes.

And that's really the key: the community is, in point of fact, a sophisticated cultural construction. And what's more, so are the traditions of sharing that are profoundly embedded in popular culture. When an egalitarian community is born, when we create a new commons to be shared, we're not starting from zero. We are putting into "production" all that code, all that community rationality that we inherited from the learned reactions and ways of managing common belongings in our families. That's why we experience it as "spontaneous," why it feels "natural," and why it appears again and again in such different

environments all over the world. Our "rationality" is definitively not what Hardin and the neo-Malthusian theoreticians of degrowth attributed to us when they presented the irrational destruction of non-renewable resources as a product of our "nature" and not as the result of over-scaled corporations dedicated to looking for rents at all costs.

No, to understand the shared economy, to work together to manage the needs of all in a community economy, we don't need big treatises, or consultations with university technicians. We just need to go back home.

Abundance

The big lesson of the twentieth century for communards was to discover that collective decision-making is a "lesser evil," a response to scarcity that must be limited to situations in which this is inevitable. It's not necessary for everyone to vote on a uniform if everyone can wear what they want. It's not necessary to agree on a menu if several different things can be cooked that will completely satisfy everyone.

That is, **where one person's decision does not drastically reduce others' possible choices, the sphere of the decision should be personal, not collective**. Collective choices, democratic methods, and voting are ways of managing situations where there is a fairly explicit conflict in the use of resources. They are a "last resort" imposed by scarcity. The point is to avoid, as much as possible, the homogenization that they involve.

That's why, in a community committed to **abundance**, the wealth produced is measured by the extent of the personal decision-space. It's no good to create more goods and income if that doesn't have an impact on everyone's decision-space. It's no good to defend individuality if resources are not created to make it possible without conflict.

To gain ground against scarcity, build abundance, and therefore continuously enlarge the material base of personal decision-space is the objective of the economic activity of a working egalitarian community. **We want to be more efficient and more productive to be more free**.

One of the ways that commitment manifests economically is in **prioritizing the needs of the community and its members over the business**. It sounds nice, and it is. It's also difficult, but not for the reasons normally imagined. In an egalitarian community, no one will hesitate to sacrifice opportunities or savings to support members, their families, and others around them. That's not where problems come from. The issue is that producing is absorbent. And we tend to forget that the cooperative is a tool that serves the community, not the objective of the community.

We all know people who needlessly dedicate more hours to work than they should. Many times, it's a form of refuge. To allow oneself to be absorbed in work is a more or less unconscious way of not confronting insecurities about one's family, partner, or friends. A similar thing happens to communities as a whole. When a community doesn't "notice" priorities other than those of business, it's no different from each of us when we "substitute" time on those life tasks in which we feel most insecure with work hours. By doing so, we are evading part of our responsibilities to ourselves.

That's why the cooperative "spontaneously" tends to be the central concern and to enforce its logic beyond what's advisable on things that are only instrumental. This is why almost all communities establish principles to detect, as automatically as possible, cases in which collective decision-making prefers to be "anti-economic" and take on, with different scopes, a rationality that is different from business in favor of their members, family, and surroundings. This principle applies to schedules, spaces, time dedicated to children, funds for training on topics not linked to production, and even about the choice of lines of business.

The magic of a community lies in its capacity to make us feel abundance through personal improvement and the enjoyment of sharing. The most everyday way is learning: feeling that we are learning new things, and that this knowledge makes us more autonomous and wiser. The most subtle is coexistence. If a community is functional and its deliberation prospers, its members will shine more and more as they overcome their fears and stand out through their contributions, wherever they are.

But the economy also contributes. The meaning of what we make is not only born of the fact that the knowledge it incorporates is available all over the world as free software, blueprints, or cultural objects. Nor is it limited to the radically different way our products are made, or the human relations that make them possible while "bringing a new world." We have to feel that our work and our contributions ensure the welfare of those we love and improve the life of those around us. And that won't happen if we don't go out into the market.

Producing and saving in common

Today, in the majority of what are called "intentional communities," the members do not earn a living together. Some share the income their members make working for third parties or producing and selling on their own. In others, all that's held in common is the properties on which they are settled or the services that maintain them.

However, the idea that the viability of a community is the direct consequence of its capacity to collectively produce enough to satisfy the needs of its members is as ancient as communitarianism itself.

In the fourth century BCE, Epicurus bought a parcel of land not very far from Athens and built a place where he and his fellow philosophers could live a stable life together. The community, formed by men and women on an equal basis, stopped working for third parties. Some took care of the farm, others cooked, and some set up a furniture workshop. Not only did they share ownership of the garden (the famous "Epicurean garden") and its buildings, but also of the workshops. It was the first egalitarian community born so that its members could live a life in accordance with their ideas.

With the appearance of modern cooperative theories, the idea of sustaining a community with common production, which was kept alive one way or another by Christian monastic institutions and a few dissident groups of the Protestant Reformation like the Hutterites, reappeared vigorously. The egalitarian communitarianism of the nineteenth century is, from the first Fourierist "phalanstery" (1832) to the first kibbutz (1908), a constant statement of this principle. Egalitarian communities are "micro-societies" sustained by a common productive economy.

The twentieth century would not change that definition, even though the practice of the self-government of communities would erode the democratic idea, which centered on decision-making processes and therefore on voting and majorities. Little by little, it would start giving more importance to the practices of deliberation and consensus, and that way, not without a certain irony, recover the spirit of the original Epicurean ideal.

The communitarian model was then defined with five pillars: ownership, production, revenue, consumption, and savings.

There is **common ownership** of all economic means, from lands, buildings and machines necessary for production to work tools, kitchenware, and the furniture in the houses; joint

production, normally organized through one or more worker cooperatives, such that **revenue is shared** right from the start, **communitizing common consumption**, leaving a part for the expression of individual needs and dedicating the rest to a **common savings fund**, normally managed by the same cooperative through which the community is organized.

In its simplest form, an egalitarian community is a group of friends organized as a worker cooperative, who, rather than dividing up the surplus into ever-higher salaries, decide to make the cooperative work as the collective owner of whatever they own, and have it directly provide everything necessary for their well-being: health and educational expenditures, housing, food, clothing, cultural consumption, travel, and in general, all the needs of a comfortable life.

The community members collectively decide the main limits of the expenditures they will make through the budget of the cooperative. The basic divisions are the reserves of the cooperative: consumption and housing costs, health and education funds, and "purses" to subsidize social or environmental activities in the broader community. It is fairly common, after a certain level of development, to organize funds to cover emergencies for families of community members or to invest in external projects.

Having dealt with common expenditures, both those necessary to maintain and develop production and normal costs of living—houses, food, etc.—the community makes distributions in accordance with the needs of individual consumption. All the rest will be put away as "common savings," because one of the few freedoms one has to renounce to take part in an egalitarian community is individual savings. The idea that all savings are held in common is one of the social and economic pillars of community life. Only if the community is also a "community of savings," which adds and capitalizes all surplus created among everyone, can it become the basis of the "general mutuality" that the economic structure of the community wants to be.

But the objective of maximizing savings in common doesn't mean that individual consumption is restricted, or that there are not differences between the guidelines of consumption of the different members of a community.

Individuals have flexible margins to define the costs that meet their needs. In general, the relationship of members with the budget is not very different from that of the members of a couple with theirs. In the couple, income is held in common, and both know the limits of free disposition of each without the need to establish complex accounting systems or divide up the money for expenditures into separate shares. In a productive community, the only difference is that the income is produced in the cooperative that serves, among other

things, as a common checking account. When one believes that they are approaching the limits of individual disposition dictated by good judgment at a given time, they consult with the others.

Also, all communities distribute, regularly or on request, a certain amount of money among their members for personal expenditures. These amounts should not be understood as a kind of salary, but as a way of guaranteeing the existence of intimate spaces that are exclusively individual and whose economic expression doesn't need to be shared. For example, receipts immodestly tell what your Christmas gifts cost, and hotel bills from a weekend getaway can reveal a new couple. So, respect for intimacy of each of the communards advises that in addition to the expenditures made from common funds, transfers also be made from the common account to individual accounts.

This money at individual disposal, hidden from the eyes of others, has only one condition: it must be used for consumption, it cannot become savings. Of course, it's an individual moral commitment: no one has the right to look at others' checking accounts to see if they are secretly accumulating a small fortune.

This may seem naive, but the truth is that in our experience, it's never produced a conflict. Egalitarian communities are formed within defined cultural environments, with relatively homogeneous consumption patterns. Some communards will consume more, others will consume less, but generally, a minimalist taste predominates. Nobody has either a passion for austerity or a desire to be ostentatious. Everyone pursues "meaningful consumption," which really satisfies, and not consuming either a lot or a little.

The result is that when the accounts are balanced, the average individual spending of a commoner in "abundance," consuming without restrictions, is usually below the average salaries in the place where they live. Individual differences in spending, when they continue over time, are easily explained by things like having children, having family in other countries, or having certain habits that raise average personal spending—all those things that range from smoking or going to the gym to having a hobby or going out to dinner with friends every weekend. But why would anyone save, if the community is effective at providing for all their needs and those of their family?

We humans need to feel that each movement of our lives is leading somewhere. We need to glimpse a flash of authenticity in the result of each effort, because there's not a day that goes by that the human experience doesn't try to overcome anxiety and uncertainty about the next. And we know that we really only have the opportunity to feel good about the

workday if we use everything that we are and everything that we have to turn our efforts into results with value that goes beyond the immediate.

That's why work is so important in everyone's life. If we can orient this work, if, beyond serving us through what we produce, we can decide to push it to produce things that serve all we believe and all those we love, then we'll find true meaning in it. And if, rather than settling for "it's mine," we can say "it's ours," and if the meaning of each task, of each workday, is shared with those who are looking for the same thing we are, then every day of battle, every moment of learning, will make us feel more capable of shaping the following day.

That's why, when ownership and responsibilities are shared in an egalitarian way in a community, producing together opens new worlds that would otherwise be short-lived. It is then that sharing consumption or saving in common stop being a social experiment, and become a way of life.

Vacations

Who hasn't felt the pressing need, at some point, to go running out of their job, slam the door, breathe deep, and not come back for a long time? The need to disconnect and to clear your mind is most people's goal during their two weeks of vacation. Despite being such a wonderful thing, having a break from work life has been relegated to concentrated periods at occasional times of the year. The rest of the time, everyone tries to deal with long days, which are sometimes amazingly unproductive, with exhausting results.

While it may seem counterintuitive, each of us should aspire not to need those periods of total rupture called "vacations." These protracted sessions of rest were born of the need for a very concrete structure of production: the big, industrial machine of the twentieth century.

France, 1936. Faced with the fear of a workers revolt, businesspeople, with the agreement of the government, made it possible for parliament to approve a regulation that provided for 15 days of paid vacation. Along with this social benefit, the French government added a railways discount for annual vacations. The first summertime departure of workers was estimated at around 600,000 people. It was the first such mass exodus in history. They were given rest as a way of placating the revolutionary mood, but it was also a way of syncing the rhythms of production by minimizing the losses caused by official administrative breaks, the practices of general inventory, or technical stoppages of the factories. So, vacations were born as a concrete response to a need imposed by the nature of work, which was time-intensive, and took quite a physical toll. Life was a cycle of transportation, work, and rest: "Métro, boulot, dodo." And above all, it was subject to a large, industrial, corporate machinery for which timing was vital, because reaching production expectations depended on organizing shifts without gaps.

Between 1936 and today, almost all countries in the world have officially established mandatory annual paid vacations. This right is listed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. There are still many professions with very difficult conditions, but when we imagine the future, we can't help thinking that work times will be much more flexible, that everyone will organize their productive hours as one more part of life, not organize life around a pre-established work schedule. In a word, we imagine a future closer to Lafargue's "right to laziness" than the possibilities in the Declaration of Human Rights.

And to a large extent, that's how it goes in egalitarian communities. Communards see following a schedule as another inheritance from the industrial world—an inheritance to

improve on. While the community movement of the nineteenth century was the first to really implement the seven-hour workday, communitarianism of the twenty-first century seems to want to put an end to the division between leisure time and work that Pekka Himanen could see in the ethics of hacker culture.

Today, only a few communities in the US continue to use the "Labor Credit System." This model is based on the commitment of each communard to work a certain number of hours per week, with the ability to choose what to do from within a classification that includes many activities which, outside of Twin Oaks or Acorn, would be considered "hobbies," "learning," or "social life." Of course, no one controls the hours that everyone reports having done. And the results, after almost half a century, are generally very positive. However, most communities after '68 work with an even more lax system: general consensus on objectives and autonomous teams to accomplish them. Nobody measures time, not even the people working. If the burden turns out to be unbalanced or too heavy, the objectives and the times are reviewed. The result: on average, egalitarian communities have greater productivity than that of the traditional businesses they compete with, and this difference is even greater when there is more value added in their sector, from agriculture to consulting to technological development.

The root cause: there's a clear and direct relationship between work and the welfare of community, but also between what's being done and the values that united their members in the first place.

For decades, they've called us utopian, and the results of kibbutzim, communities, and groups of hackers were discarded precisely because of "having an especially committed population," but for several years now, leading businesses seem to have understood that what it's all about is just that: workers, like us, not seeing a distinction between "life time" and "work time." Because, when this happens, productivity multiplies. Although, of course, it's not clear this can go on indefinitely in an environment of wage relations.

In any case, it's no longer strange to find companies that practice an active policy of no vacations. Richard Branson was one of the latest businesspeople to incorporate this trend in Virgin Group. A few months ago, he announced that his 160 employees could spend their time the way they felt most appropriate, as long as they didn't neglect their work responsibilities. Branson said he was sure that this measure would not lead to abuse, but rather, would allow increased performance and general happiness, with positive repercussions on the businesses' result. Netflix was another pioneer in the establishment of "no vacations." It makes a big deal about having the simplest possible corporate policy, with only one rule:

no rules. Their whole strategy is based on selecting people with a priority on the criteria of freedom, responsibility, and commitment above all else.

And it's no small responsibility to decide to take some rest time, to find the moment to bring a workday to an end, or to take advantage of a few days after the end of a project to dedicate to other things apparently not related to your functions, like visiting your parents or taking a trip. The danger, rather, is usually in not knowing how to stop, in finding the balance that allows us to enjoy every day of what we do. Meeting commitments creates satisfaction, but productivity and its commitments are not our only life tasks. In fact, sometimes they're not even the most difficult or challenging. But certainly some cannot be substituted with others: frustrations with your partner or friends can't be fixed by spending less time with them.

Finding the balance between the time for transforming the world—and that, and nothing else, is what work is—and the time for games and enjoyment without objective—which is what laziness is—fundamentally depends on our capacity for being responsible, which is to say, for not trying to compensate for life tasks in which we feel more insecure with others that we do well. If we know how, if we learn to be responsible, they will not be opposed. And that's when you stop taking vacations, but you also stop thinking about what you do with your loved ones for the market as "work."

The importance of selling

In a working, productive community, it's everyone's responsibility to go out and "make the sale." Selling is, to most people, the scariest form of communication there is. The culture in which most of us are raised radiates fear of entering the market. It's yet another residue of the authoritarian society. In this case, our "conscience" and the "private logic" will join forces to tell us "we are not good at it," and that this "it"—selling—is very close to deceiving. But this is false. **Selling is a radical act of empathy**: it requires us to put ourselves in the other's shoes, understand her needs and honestly explain to her why and how we think our work can help her in what she is trying to achieve.

But it has another side, which is even more difficult and intimate: facing our own fear of being rejected, of not being valued. Our products are a projection of ourselves, of our values and of our work. They have value, and in the end, this value is instantiated as a price. Defending a reasonable price, which covers all costs and reflects the value to be received by the client, is not easy. We need to empathize with the person we are dealing with. At the same time—and quite reasonably—she attempts to make the most of her money, which is, after all, the result of the effort of her work or that of her organization. For her, trying to reduce the price, is her way to show respect for herself and her colleagues. For us, showing firmness on the value of our offer, reducing the amount of work associated to a reduced price is the way we, as sellers, respect our own work and that of our partners. But it's not easy. Our sense of inferiority will surface in the tension associated with negotiation, and our fear of losing will try to take control to make "a sale at any price" or, even worse, "a pilot," "a free sample"… to make a sale into an involuntary gift will only make things worse.

The trouble with selling is not in the act of selling itself, it's in us. Selling requires courage. Courage to be firm in our honesty, to not doubt the value of our community's work, and our own. **Selling requires us to be virtuous.**

The salesman of folk tales, the charlatan, the fast-talking con man who "sells a comb to a bald man" reflects the archetype of another counterproductive strategy: the survival instinct. Talking without pausing, constantly trying to take the buyer by surprise, offering her something different at the first sign of doubt… all these are expressions of fear. And no, they don't work. As many combs as we might sell, can you think of any charlatan that ever managed to achieve a comfortable life?

We live in a society where the word "merchant" is derogatory. Like many derogatory words

rooted in tradition and religious culture, it's really trying to achieve a sort of exorcism. Demeaning the basis of one's personal autonomy in an area as important as the market allows the person pronouncing it to escape a challenge he or she is scared of. The more desirable the person sees this autonomy, deep down, the more they will be comforted by demeaning it.

A small or medium enterprise, a family business, or a community that starts producing, needs to secure a diverse client base as soon as possible, but selling is also a true test that challenges everyone's moral fiber.

Selling honestly and respectfully, selling with meaning, attaching the appropriate value to human labor, is an act of self-improvement. It requires confidence in ourselves. It requires consistency with our own commitments. It requires us to overcome our fears. And in a community, or an SME trying to bootstrap itself, it simply must be a shared responsibility, something that everybody needs to be able to do, with everyone else's support. So, nothing reveals the solidity and the intimate strength of a community like its positive attitude towards its commercial, mercantile activities.

Translation of this chapter originally done by Alberto Cottica and Noemi Salantiu

Contexts

History of communitarianism

Epicurus

Epicurus of Samos was a Greek philosopher who lived between the years 341 and 270 before our era. He was a materialist, which is to say, he argued that every natural phenomenon can be explained exclusively with natural causes. He was not the first to promote this idea. Before him, Democritus had already said that everything in nature was the product of a chain of causes and results that didn't require gods or supernatural beings. The problem is that to Democritus, that meant that there was only one possible way for things to evolve, so what happens is the only thing that could have happened. Epicurus would rebel against this fatalism, introducing two new elements into his vision of the world: randomness and spontaneity.

But in so doing, he completely changed our place in the world. If reality can be many ways, and our acts also shape it, then our freedom, and how we use it, matters. And it matters for what is most valuable to us: happiness. He will be the first thinker to put happiness at the center of philosophy.

Before him, the main philosophical tendencies of Antiquity had ranged between hedonism—which equated happiness with immediate enjoyment of the senses and material things—and the idea that both that enjoyment and social conventions separated us from the truly valuable things in life.

For Epicurus, happiness does not require excesses or ascetic resignations; it's simply the product of a balanced set of good choices that allow us to enjoy life, knowledge, and little everyday pleasures—from philosophizing to eating—without guilt or torment.

His is a minimalist ethic, a prudent strategy of the search for pleasure—which is fundamentally intellectual, though without disparaging the enjoyment of the senses—that rejects

excess and admits that it is fitting to exchange painful effort in the present for greater pleasures in the future.

Epicurus cannot accept that effort is, in itself, a virtue. That's why the Epicureans included asparagus among their symbols, a food that wasn't raised at the time, but rather grew "spontaneously," which made it no less exquisite and simple. So important did it became in their modest ceremonies that we owe the first techniques for freezing food to them: in the middle of the civil wars that put an end to the Roman republic, Epicurean communities organized giant networks to transport the coveted food from the Alps and store it in refrigerators of rock and ice, to have it available for the great community events of the year.

For Epicurus, what characterizes true happiness is serenity. To be a serene person doesn't mean not feeling emotions, or appearing unmovable to others. Epicurean serenity is not born of anesthesia or self-repression, but of autonomy—personal and community sovereignty built on the knowledge of things. As Carlos García Gual points out:

> For Epicurus, philosophy, much more than theorizing and objectively knowing, is a personal attitude, an activity that provides happiness to life; that, like medicine for the body, contributes health to the soul. Philosophizing is not a luxury, but a vital urgency in a chaotic and alienating world.

And knowledge is not the result of contemplation or loneliness, but of shared reflection. Fraternity is thus the cause and product of wisdom. Epicurus:

> Of all the things that wisdom offers us, the greatest is to be able to earn friendship.

Pleasure in learning together, in discovering and understanding the world, contributes serenity: "ataraxia." Nothing could be further from the alienating struggle for social recognition and civic honors that have defined the Greek man. The teacher advises:

> Free yourself from the jail of personal interests and of politics.

And, as Philodemus de Gadara, one of the Epicureans from whom we have the most fragments, observes:

> If we inquire what is the furthest thing from friendship, and the most fruitful of aversions, we see, simply, that it is politics.

With this analysis of happiness in hand, Alain de Botton reminds us, Epicurus makes three important innovations:

> Firstly, he decided that he would live together with friends. Enough of seeing them only now and then. He bought a modestly priced plot of land outside of Athens and built a place where he and his friends could live side by side on a permanent basis. Everyone had their rooms, and there were common areas downstairs and on the grounds. That way, the residents would always be surrounded by people who shared their outlooks, were entertaining and kind. Children were looked after by turns. Everyone ate together. One could chat in the corridors late at night. It was the world's first proper commune.
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> Secondly, everyone in the commune stopped working for other people. They accepted cuts in their income in return for being able to focus on fulfilling work. Some of Epicurus's friends devoted themselves to farming, others to cooking, a few to making furniture and art. They had far less money, but ample intrinsic satisfaction.
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> And thirdly, Epicurus and his friends devoted themselves to finding calm through rational analysis and insight. They spent periods of every day reflecting on their anxieties, improving their understanding of their psyches and mastering the great questions of philosophy.
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> Epicurus's experiment in living caught on. Epicurean communities opened up all around the Mediterranean and drew in thousands of followers. The centres thrived for generations–until they were brutally suppressed by a jealous and aggressive Christian Church in the 5th century. But even then, their essence survived when many of them were turned into monasteries.

Epicurean communities were called "gardens," and their members, simply, "friends." In their commitment to creating a conducive environment for fraternity and philosophical knowledge, the gardeners not only preach being apolitical, but also, when they exceed a certain number of members, dividing their communities. The movement grew.

Diogenes Laertius, five centuries after the death of Epicurus, tells that while he was still alive, "the number of his friends was so large that they could be counted by entire cities." Today, there are those who put the number of people who came to live simultaneously in those first communities at the peak of the movement at 400,000. Given that the population of the Roman territory in the first two centuries looks like it was around five million, Epicurean communitarianism appears to have gathered into an alternative, egalitarian economy, without division of sexes or slavery, around 8% of the population of the then-nascent empire.

Although these statistics are difficult to confirm, they point to the importance the movement came to have in Antiquity. However, from the strictly communal point of view, what's really surprising is that, for the first time, the community identified the five elements that continue to define communities today:

1. Epicurus understood that the only way to be able to live outside of the political battles in the city was to gain **productive autonomy**. That's why the garden produced practically everything needed for a comfortable life of the times: a varied diet—vegetables, olives, milk and cheeses after a while—and furniture and wooden objects.
2. However, even though production and its consumption were communitarized, Diogenes Laertius tells us that "Epicurus didn't establish the **community of goods** like Pythagoras, which made friends' things common property; since this is done by faithless people, and among these, there cannot be friendship." That is, the "friends" of the garden enjoyed everything they produce with others, but did not contribute their assets to the commons, even if only to be able to enjoy sharing it later.
3. From the quote from Diogenes, we can infer a rejection of the religious idea of community of the Pythagorians. For the Epicureans, **knowledge** was not in the least esoteric, nor was it to be expected that it would be revealed to us. Just the opposite: knowledge is open. It is not pursued to gain social recognition. Knowledge pays, because understanding the nature of things and our role in them makes us truly better, more happy, and more autonomous. The shared development of knowledge is, therefore, the ultimate objective of community.
4. That's why the community rejected the *paideia*, the educational process as the Greeks understood it. The education system, they said, transmitted values and technical knowledge on the basis of inciting competition to "be better" and gain recognition. But children, like anyone, needed to enjoy knowledge and value it for the serenity and autonomy that it provides. This wasn't a first "alternative pedagogy," it was the path that led them to value the autonomy of children and therefore to be the first in **community child-raising**. Attention to children was one more task on the list of common labors, and children had their own collective spaces and responsibilities.
5. The radical rejection of the *paideia* denied the social identity inherited from the *polis* and imposed by the educational process. One became an Epicurean, and therefore "apolitical," because one was willing to reject the patriotism of the *polis*. And if does not recognize oneself in socially established identity, neither will one judge others according to it. This radical attitude would lead them to what, at the time, was most scandalous about the "gardens": the practice of **egalitarianism**. García Gual underscores that "people of all social classes were admitted, even women, both from free life, like the courtesan Hedeia, and of honest conduct like Temista, the wife of Leonteo, and also slaves."

The contemporariness of these five elements is surprising, to say the least. On the one hand, a good part of what we know today about the Epicureans is due to bibliographical

and archaeological discoveries in the second half of the nineteenth century, which were not accessible to the pioneers of contemporary communitarianism.

On the other, in spite of the quote from Alain de Botton, while there could have been occasional transformations of "gardens" into monasteries, it's difficult to find elements of continuity between Epicureanism and Christian monasticism. Celibacy, "mortification," and the practice of penitence were central to monastic life of the new religion from the very beginning. The Benedictine Rule that was gradually imposed on all of Europe as of the sixth century was considered, in its day, a real relaxation of the mortifying emphasis of the earlier rules. Nothing could have been farther from the Epicurean spirit.

However, secular community spirit would be reborn in the European Middle Ages, recovering many Epicurean values and "reinventing" fraternity in the least-expected place: merchants.

Merchants and heretics

In the tenth century, merchants didn't yet have the glamour of their Renaissance descendants. They were really little more than nomadic gangs. We can imagine the horses and wagons at the center of a circle of men who advance, trudging on foot, sword in hand. They go slowly and have miles left to cover. Journeys are long. In an economy of local products, more distance generally means more profits.

Their life was fragile, and they knew that they need each other to survive. They called each other "brothers." There were no hierarchies, only "*commites*," a standardbearer who, in some places, were called *gonfalonero*, in others, *Hansgraf*, and in others, *Deán*, who could speak in the name of everyone and had voice command in situations of crisis. Goods were bought and sold in common, and profits were distributed in proportion to the contribution made by each to the association.

They were a foreign body in feudal society, nomads in a world where every person "belonged" to a land or property, freedmen who break the social ladder, upstart children of servants who "improve without improving their blood." The trader, says a text attributed to Saint Jerome, can hardly please God.

"They were foreigners everywhere," tells us Henri Pirenne, the famous European historian:

> No one knew the origin of these eternal travelers. Most came from non-free parents, whom they abandoned very young in order to live a life of adventure. But servitude is not prejudged, it must be proved. The law establishes that a man that cannot be assigned to a master is necessarily free.
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> It so happened that it was necessary to consider traders, most of whom were undoubtedly sons of servants, as if they had always enjoyed freedom. In fact, they became free by losing their attachment to their native soil. Amid a social organization in which the people were tied to the land and each member depended on a lord, they presented the unusual spectacle of going about without being claimed by anyone. They don't demand freedom: it was given to them as a result of the impossibility of showing that they did not enjoy it. In a way, they acquired it by use and by prescription. In short, just like the agrarian civilization had made the peasant a man whose habitual state was slavery, commerce allowed the merchant to become a man whose habitual state was freedom.

Thanks to the first stable markets, the nomadic merchant eventually settled down, but didn't abandon life in community. Enter the arts. Their aim was to consolidate, through economic equality, what originally had been a close cooperation between different "bands" of merchants/artisans to ensure survival. Within each art, competition was regulated to the point of making revenues and the way of life equal for all members. A whole structure of brotherhoods and "*charités*" was born. The brotherhoods collectively took care of widows and orphans, and developed a whole religious ceremoniousness around the patron saints of the guild. The first medieval cities breathed, according to the new expression in style, **fraternity**: *Unus sbveniat alteri tamquam fratri suo*, "One shall help the other like a brother."

Subject to the feudal princes in whose territory it was built, the city of the arts would end up struggling openly for its own autonomy. The road to urban democracy was paved. In Liege, it would succeed intermittently starting in 1253 and definitively as of 1384; in Gante, intermittently during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries until the fifteenth century.

This brought about a novel form of political legitimacy: the judges of the boroughs exercised power on behalf of the *communitas* (community), or the *universitas civium* (all citizens), and not on that of the civil Prince or the Church, but neither on that of the fraternity or brotherhood that bound the artisans together and built an obligation to belong to a trade to exercise full citizenship (as in the Florence ruled by the arts). The community, however, was not defined in a trivial way. On the contrary, it required an identity and strong material relationships of each to the whole. Pirenne tells us that,

> In the cities where there were courts, as well as in those lacking them, citizens were a body, a community whose members were all in solidarity with each other. Nobody was a bourgeois

> without paying the municipal oath, which linked him closely with the rest of the bourgeois. His person and property belonged to the city, and both could be, at any time, required if need be. You could not conceive of the bourgeois in isolation, nor was it possible, in primitive times, to conceive of man individually. At the time of the barbarians, one was considered a person thanks to the family community to which one belonged, and one was a bourgeois, in the Middle Ages, thanks to the urban community that one was part of.

Fraternity, which was born as the characteristic relationship among caravan traders, had grown to define the foundation of the body politic. The result in Liege—according to Pirenne, "the most democratic system that ever existed in the Netherlands"—required that

> All major issues should be submitted to the deliberation of the thirty-two guilds, and settled on each of them by recess or *sieultes* (verbal process through which the discussions of the diets are deposited.)

Urban *communitas* was actually a confederation of arts in which, while the commitment of each one is to the whole city, deliberation and decision remained in the space where relationships did not require mediation or representation.

The ideas of fraternity and community now had a new definition. Now they were a political myth, a generalization of the mutual aid between medieval merchants and artisans. It meant bringing the logic of the arts, which is openly and strongly cohesive, to the government of the bourgeois city.

That political myth would remain present throughout the Renaissance and Baroque period. There would be glimpses of it among the communards of Castile, but it shone in the communitarian branches of the Protestant Reformation that raise aloft the idea of the "community of goods," from the Hutterites—who have maintained their egalitarian communities from 1527 through today—to the English "Diggers" of 1649.

If we think about it, that religious connection with fraternity was logical: the two dominant Western religions, Christianity and Islam, talk about the "early Christians" and the three first generations of Muslims, the "Salaf," as examples of community and fraternal life. Both are the model of life that each religion proposes to believers. Doubtlessly, it must have created a strong sense of identification in the inhabitants of the bourgeois *communitas* and the peasants that surrounded it. That's why—and not just as an anti-merchant reaction—the commercial revolution of the eleventh and twelfth centuries was accompanied by a call for "poverty" that often emerged as an open demand from the "community of goods."

The medieval Church, a impressive intellectual machine, reacted by rescuing Aristotle and redefining the meaning of fraternity. Today, we find it natural that the narratives of both religions extrapolate the feelings of the people who lived in those small communities of first believers onto their two large constructs: Christianity and the Umma. We simply see those feelings as "pious intentions"… and therefore, unattainable.

But equating the feelings in a small community whose members share a purpose and strong interpersonal relationships with an imagined community of millions of people who don't know each other is not an obvious thing. It's a problematic conceptual leap. Even more so for small, pious communities that saw nothing of that spirit in the acts of their "most Christian" kings.

The *fraternitas* of our merchants resembled Epicurean "friendship," because it was based on experience and personal relationships. Fraternity according to Aristotle is just the opposite: it would be based on relations of equivalence between the abstract ideas that inform things. That is, it would be based on those characteristics that we have in common with others, and would live naturally in imagined communities where the intended members can't all meet each other, but do recognize and imagine each other by having features in common.

Sharing a passport or a cultural origin would make us compatriots, sharing a sex would make us fellow men or women, sharing a certain age range would make us part of "youth," "adults," or "seniors," etc. And most importantly, the idea of the nation to which we belong, that of masculinity or femininity, that of youth or old age, would define our interests, how we are, and even our affections. From that point of view, the guild mutualities were little more than selfish, the democratic government of the Arts, necessarily partial, and the community of goods, sectarian.

One could say, with Antisthenes the cynic, that the concrete, real horse is one thing, and the abstract idea of "horse-ness," is another, and that, in the same way, it's one thing to have fraternity in the bosom of a real and concrete community of Christians, Muslims, or retirees, and quite another for Christianity—the imagined community formed by all Christians—the Umma, or "senior citizens" to produce—not to mention finance—fraternal relationships among people who don't know each other for the simple fact that they share a given characteristic.

The two concepts of fraternity are defined in opposition. For the descendants of Aristotelianism, from the Sun King to Lenin, by way of Hegel and nationalism, community is a spirit that does not take shape without kings, party leaders, states, or external super-

structures that are fairly coercive and ostensibly "participatory." For the descendants the Epicurean idea of fraternity, from the democratic boroughs to the Protestant Hutterites, community is the natural space for direct cooperation between peers without any mediator being necessary.

This dichotomy would emerge again, in new terms, when industrialization began to develop, and critiques started to emerge that raise "the social question." On the one hand, theories would emerge that would find an imagined community and a promise of fraternity in the working class. On the other hand, new "heretics" that would seek productive colonies and settlements of a new kind in which to develop the radicalness of the community idea.

Fourierism

Beginning in 1808, Charles Fourier developed the foundations of contemporary communitarianism. His ideas established a vigorous current from which cooperativism, mutualism, and European federalism would be born. But while his texts on the phalanstery could be considered the first practical design of a social model based on free association, Fourier himself did not participate personally in the first attempts to make them a reality, though he was a contemporary of some of those created by his followers.

This first generation of communitarians put the master's models into real practice in places as diverse as Cadiz, Entre Ríos, Brussels, Rio de Janeiro, Romania, and New Jersey. The majority of these attempts lasted no more than a few years. In the United States, after almost thirty attempts, only two phalansteries lasted more than five years. Productivity was consistently lower than what had been laboriously calculated in their plans, and the inevitable scarcity quickly produced tensions that dispelled any hope of finding the famous "harmonization" that the master's model promised.

They suffered from basic design problems: all the colonies were exclusively agrarian but had been created by urbanites. The scales were generally smaller than those of the original design. What's worse, decreeing equality between sexes and turning the master's criticisms of the institution of marriage into rules, which were implemented without the slightest thought about what that meant in practice, increased conflict until it became unbearable. An old, implicit inheritance of mercantilism and liberalism was falling apart: it wasn't enough to change the rules for everything to be "rearranged" and harmonized. Skills, values, and ways of relating don't change overnight, just because the normative framework changes. And in the meantime, it's easy for everything to come crashing down.

Although one phalanstery, Oneida, in New York, was able to make the seven-hour workday and equality between men and women a reality, new attempts decided to leave some of the more difficult rules for the future, especially full equality between men and women and the reform of marriage.

The movement, which trusted that the dissemination of the proposal would bring in volunteers who would form community spontaneously, then became a true experimentation machine based on trial and error. The result looked less and less like what they hoped community would mean, but everything was sacrificed to pursue "results," which is to say, a minimal internal sustainability. The "Conde sur Vesgre" colony, for example, was refounded three times between 1832 and 1860.

The consequence of all these negotiations with reality and all the successive failures was the formation of a richly documented literary and theoretical base: Fourierism. Perhaps its best-known figure is Jean-Baptiste André Godin, the creator of the familistery of Guise.

Godin was a successful inventor, a consensus-driven local politician, a renowned businessman, and above all, a convinced Fourierist. He was willing to give everything and work tirelessly to compensate for the lack of commitment of his own workers to his idea: turning his own business into an "association" with the workers, where they would participate in the profits. To begin, he built the familistery—the first worker housing that had all the health services that, until then, had belonged exclusively to the bourgeoisie. He strengthened his industrial base through his own means, putting his savings, his business, and his name on the line to convince new investors how good the system was and to carry out a transformation in which most of the benefit would be shared among the workers. This means that he skipped over the idea that the investment necessary to build the phalanstery be made by all its future members. Seen from our days, this was a textbook error: the workers "found themselves" with new rights, but had not had to do anything to get them except hope that it would all work. This is a logical consequence, if the idea is accepted that activists can "create community," which is to say, gather other people with less commitment, exempting them from part of the responsibility for effort, and trust that community spirit will emerge spontaneously.

In following that logic, Godin had to make more than a few concessions. Reading his story, one can't help but wonder how he could think that so much determination to incorporate cooperators that hadn't had to put up anything of their own for an "association of capital and labor," could end well. Shortly before his death, he lamented before his workers:

> I also hoped to find in you dedication and active participation, but on this point, I was wrong.

> I had to create, by myself, from nothing, the functioning of our association; and zero was the perseverance that you dedicated. Only in the industrial setting did I receive help. In that, I admit, you offered me support and dedication. But what I hoped in 1877, that sufficient love for the association would awaken in you, that you would join me to support the preparation of this work: in that, I have received only your indifference. In these conditions, I can say that in spite of you, I created the association. And I still hope that in the future, you show the support and dedication that you lacked in the past.

Finally founded in 1880, Guise's familistery kept the democratic and innovative spirit, in spite of everything, until 1888… when Godin died. While it would survive as an association between capital and labor until 1968, the eighty years between the two dates will see a constant degradation of that Fourierist harmony. The workers themselves, by reinforcing the idea of the "labor scale by seniority" and deciding to give priority to their children when it came time to get an apartment in the phalanstery and get a job in the factory, created a sort of "internal aristocracy" that would poison the relations between them over the long term.

Fourierism had experienced both egalitarianism in cooperative communities of small agrarian landowners and industrial "association" between owners and workers. The first had tended towards disintegration, the second, towards passive violence between workers and investors and among the workers themselves in which the Fourierist managers, committed first and foremost to preserving Godin's work, remained systematically on no one's side. The result was an environment that was both conservative and resentful, which made it harder and harder for the joint business to stay in the market.

Updating Epicurean gardens, which Fourier tried to turn the factories of industrialism into, did not work on the terms that he wanted. A community needs a common economy to consolidate, and in that he was right, but they can't remain cohesive if there are divisions that, in the end, make equality of responsibilities among all impossible. That is to say, different kinds of access to property make it impossible for everyone to recognize each other as true peers.

Some advocates of Fourierist egalitarianism would not take long to recognize that it needed the **community of production goods** that Fourier had rejected in his rivals Owen and Cabet. The most lucid disciples, like Fernando Garrido, will soon absorb the lesson without renouncing the momentum and the libertarian framework of the master. That's when a new movement was born, child and heir of the older one: worker cooperativism.

But beyond the evolution of the movement towards cooperativism, what made the "failure" of Fourierism more fertile was overcoming the dividing line between utopianism and

modern activism. This line was not drawn by positions or ideas, but attitude: **the utopian starts with a plan and tries to impose it on reality, the activist accepts reality and builds on it**.

While Fourier updated the bases of communitarianism, the experience of Fourierism taught us to stop being utopian and become cooperators. And the final big lesson of Fourierism, its epitaph, is that **a community can't be "created" by will, so it does not make sense to push anyone who lacks enthusiasm and willingness to commit**. Cultural changes are not born of passive acceptance of new rules, but of conversations between peers that lead to common convictions and shared commitments. True egalitarianism can only exist where everyone accepts everyone else as an equal in responsibilities.

The Icarians

In 1839, Etienne Cabet returned to France. He was not a young man, he was fifty-one years old, and had published a number of books. In his baggage, he carried the manuscript of a new essay: *Voyages et aventures du Lord Wiliam Carisdall en Icarie*. Afraid of censorship and French repression, which he was already quite familiar with, he would publish it in England with the help of his friend, Robert Owen, the inspiration for some of his main ideas.

The book soon found success in the republican parts of Paris. Cabet launched new editions, four in total, and a newspaper, *Le Populaire*, which reached a circulation of 4,500 copies (massive for the times), which inspired groups to come together in Toulusse and Leon. The idea of making Icaria a reality began to take shape. He launched a new newspaper, *Le Village*, looking for participants for the adventure. Robert Owen suggested he look for land in Texas, a new state recently incorporated into the USA, out of the reach of the political turmoil that could already be felt in Europe. The tenth of October of 1848, the first pioneers left for North America. Hundreds more people prepared in the port of Le Havre.

Travels to Icaria, as the continental editions were titled, was able to touch on the egalitarian aspirations of the artesian middle class and provide a solution to their fears—nascent industrialization—and give a radical response—the community of goods—without promoting a revolutionary movement. Its influence soon extended throughout Europe, captivating young democrats across the continent, like Narcís Monturiol or Ildefonso Cerdà, who translated the book into Spanish and published it in installments in *The Fraternity*, one of the first Icarian newspapers outside of France.

Cabet spoke of “community,” but was really talking about enlightened universalism. His idea was not so much communitarianism as it was “constructive socialism”: Icarian communities were presented as a means, not as an end in themselves. Their material success would demonstrate that the abolition of property and the widespread application of democracy would make it viable to have a society in which each one would contribute according to their capacities and would receive according to their needs, a society of communities that was associated for the first time with a fateful term: “communism.”

Seventy-nine pioneers arrived at Denton, Texas, the 31st of May of 1848, to discover that the lands purchased for the colony were not on the Red River, as promised, but almost five hundred kilometers from the water. Even worse, the lands were not even contiguous, but in the form of a checkerboard, separated both by State parcels and by others reserved by the promotional company itself, a concessionaire of the Texan government. The communal settlement was simply unworkable with this distribution of the land. Worst of all, the better part of the group contracted malaria along the way, and some died. In August, a second group joined them, only to feel the same frustration and discouragement. They decided to abandon the place and go back to New Orleans where, meanwhile, the bulk of the “Icarian society” had arrived.

January 19th of ’49, an decisive assembly took place. Cabet managed to convince the majority of the 485 adult male settlers not to dissolve the society. But the vote did not avoid the first schism. Two hundred eighty men, 74 women, and 64 children remained in the Americas. The remainder returned to France, where they would (unsuccessfully) try to sue Cabet for fraud.

Those who stayed moved to Nauvoo, Illinois, the former capital of the Mormons, who, persecuted by local militias, had abandoned it in 1846. They bought the ruins of the Mormon temple for $2000 and fixed up a collective dining room, a school, and a building for bedrooms. Single people slept in a large collective room. Married couples had apartments with two rooms. The lands were fertile, and colonization went well, fed by new settlers, both French and Americans, who continued arriving until December of 1855. But by that time, discontent had grown. Among other regulations, Cabet had prohibited smoking and restricted public conferences. There were more and more who thought the system was too narrow—“liberticidal,” even. The assembly finally opted for change and overthrew the founder by a vote of 219 to 180.

Cabet had lost power, and in October of 1856, left Nauvoo with 75 men, 47 women, and 50 children with the intention of creating a new base in Saint Louis. He died after less than two years, and Mercadier, who succeeded him as president, decided to leave the settlement,

buy a new property in Cheltenham, and establish a community there. It was May of 1858. The Icarians of Cheltenham continued for ten more years, struggling against land infested with mosquitoes. They dissolved in 1868, ruined by the economic consequences of the Civil War.

Meanwhile, J.B. Gérard, who succeeded Cabet in the presidency of Nauvoo, decided in 1857 to move the community to Corning, Iowa. There was another schism: some decided to go back to France, others remained in Nauvoo, and only a few followed Gérard. We don't know exactly how many left, but we do know that in 1863, in Corning, there were only sixty settlers.

In spite of the drop in numbers, the results were good, and the colony attracted old Icarians who had been lost along the way. Occasional visitors and travelers highlighted the economic success and quality of life of the communards, based on the contrast between the internal decommodification of the colony and the commercial success of their grains and crafts in the surroundings.

But Icarianism went from schism to schism. In 1876, the "young Icarians" confronted "the old" in the defense of women's suffrage. They had evolved towards a democratic egalitarianism close to anarchism. They lost by 31 to 17 in the assembly… and decided to move to a new settlement a kilometer and a half away, taking eight wooden buildings with them. This time, the schism was fatal for the majority. The community of Corning was unviable without the young people, and closed, due to bankruptcy, in 1878. The youth, for their part, gave themselves a new constitution—until then, they had continued using Cabet's—in 1879.

The new constitution led to a new schism. In 1881, Armand Dehay, one of the young Icarians, curious about the news of the rise of socialist ideas in California, left to visit his brother Théodore. There, he met Émile Bée, the leader of the "Socialist Labor Party," who encouraged him to create a new Icarian colony on the West Coast. Dehay wrote to Jules Lerroux—brother of Pierre Lerroux, the French socialist philosopher—and mobilized one last consignment of European pioneers. Together, they explored Napa Valley, though they decided on another village, Cloverdale, to experiment with the cultivation of vineyards, to which they dedicated 18 hectares, out of a total of 358. The remainder was divided among two hectares of fruit trees, 40 hectares of wheat, and fields for cattle. The community of Carling provided the credit that made the settlement possible, but by 1883, the Icarians of California still owed $6,000 of the $15,000 loan, and their capacity to reach self-sufficiency was called into question by the mother community.

At the end of that year, the Californians gave themselves a constitution of their own, which was more conservative and included ideas from Fourier and Saint-Simon, and Corning withdrew its support. The third of August, 1886, Icaria Speranza dissolved officially, overwhelmed by debt, in the county court of Cloverdale. For its part, the community of Corning, isolated after the failure in California, and ever-closer to anarcho-individualist postulates, remained until 1898, when it decided to dissolve, dividing up the land and mixing with their neighbors.

Both Nauvoo and Corning were quite similar in their structure and culture to the kibbutzim that would be born only ten years after the final dissolution of the Icarian movement.

For the first time, institutions appeared that the kibbutzim later "rediscovered" for themselves: from Europe, they bring couples and divorce, but in the Americas, they discovered the "communal dream" of children—everyone slept together—and the "community of the small"—the little ones had a space for responsibilities and assemblies of their own; the priority on education; the emphasis on developing a rich and continuous cultural life, including publications, stage shows, and investments in stock (the Icarian library in Nauvoo was the biggest in the state, with 4,000 books); a distinctive ceremoniousness with regular festivals and regulated spaces for conversation; and finally, equality of the sexes. Finally, fourteen centuries later, an experience seemed to prove the feasibility of updating the Epicurean garden for the industrial era.

So, the story so far is half a century of reincarnations and restarts. The Icarians did not fail economically, as their critics predicted. On the contrary, despite multiple schisms, the main cores achieved standards of living above those around them right to the end. Their internal revolts did not reject the community of goods, the foundations, or the "sharing everything," as critics in France predicted. Just the opposite—the assembly that overthrew Cabet demanded more individual freedom, and the younger generation, which pushed for change in Corning, broke over a demand for greater egalitarianism. In fact, as some authors point out, they were committed to "inventing" anarchism for their own society.

The failure of Icarianism was the product of the inability of the community to stabilize and find a way to learn and evolve together in each community and between different communities that were separated from each other. If only the different settlements had created systems of mutual support, the crisis that followed the Civil War first, and the generation gap in Corning later, the Icarian lights wouldn't have gone out one by one. Additionally, if Corning had not expected Icaria Speranza to use a constitution identical to its own, and had maintained its support a few more years, it's very likely that Icarianism

would have survived several more generations. Why were they incapable of something so apparently simple when they had successfully faced building an economy?

Underlying the argument and proposals in *Travels to Icaria* was an enlightened democratic ideal common to the republican movements of the times: if everything is decided for everyone in an egalitarian system that, by definition, has no conflicts of class or interest, Reason will be liberated and a new consensus will lead to general progress, making mandatory what is good and prohibiting what is harmful.

Today, it's clear to us that however democratically such decisions are made, their result can only be the artificial creation of scarcity, and therefore an oppressive restriction of individual freedom: in Icarian communities, as in the fictionalized Icaria, everyone wore the same clothes, had the same furniture in their rooms (which had identical shapes), read the same newspapers, etc… Homogenization, born with absolutism, the "revolutionary" battering ram of nationalism that flooded Europe in 1848, was still part of the "democratic ideal," a consequence that was accepted as inevitable in the rule of Reason in politics. It continues to be striking that when Cabet argued that in an Icarian society, freedom of the press is harmful, the Fourierists, with whom Cabet's followers debated continuously, had nothing to say.

The problem is that this enlightened universalism also affects the very definition of community. By that logic, all debate is a zero-sum game: some are "right," others are not. There is no common learning or consensus developed over time. There's no reason to even seek them. They either "appear" spontaneously in practice, or there is a difference that forshadows the whole system coming into question.

While Cabet reduced fraternity to homogeneity, it was because from the viewpoint of universalist Reason, there's no legitimate place for other principles of truth, for other viewpoints on the "common good" that do not hide a partisan interest or a benefit to a caste or class. Of course, this logic, inherited by the Marxist story of ideology as expression of economic interest, is also not very different from its "inclusive" version in liberal democracy: if dissent by the minority is allowed, it's because private interest is considered legitimate and needs to be given a space, in spite of its distance from the truth that the "common good" expresses, which is organized in the State and guided by popular majorities. Giving space to minority opinions does not mean that their arguments are considered legitimate "social truths"—far from it—so it's not at all necessary to concur with them.

The formation of the original group of French Icarians, like that of all kinds of human groups today, followed this logic: if people of similar ideas unite, it would be enough to

democratically "decide" the path to follow for community to exist, and if there are differences, it's because someone is mistaken or myopic… or harbors secret interests. It's a self-confirming view, of course, because it gives an explanation for every possible course of events. But, above all, it's doomed to disappointment. As the first Icarian dissents showed, community does not appear automatically by gathering people with similar ideas or aspirations. Epicurus' "friendship," Adler's "sense of community" or Urrutia's "taste for being together," which is to say, the foundations of communal fraternity, appear when belonging is presented to each person as a shared process of learning.

There is no true belonging in dogma or competition between dogmas. Or better still, there is an inverse belonging: people "belong" to the truth, to the "common good"—a set of values and a way of doing things that is unique and supposedly accessible through reason, if we free ourselves of the bonds of private interest. That's why the narrative of the "common good" is necessarily totalitarian. Enlightened universalist reason is nothing more than the latest version of the monotheistic God.

The "common good," if it exists, is not a self-evident truth, which is why it doesn't work as a reason for community. Quite the opposite, the universal "common good" is necessarily exclusive in the concrete and real world: if the reason for community is to lay the foundation for a new society that must be able to welcome all Humanity, then "the correct position," "the right path," will be more important than the real peers with whom we debate. The universalism of the "common good" desubjectifies community, moving the focus from real people to the imaginings of "Reason," and annuls pleasure and the utility of learning together.

If the "why" of community for each person is not learning together, and if that learning is not a source of happiness, an engine and link of interpersonal relationships, then each difference will be a conflict, each minority will be heretical, each discussion will produce a schism, and doing things in common will be condemned to permanent frustration.

The Icarian settlement in the Americas was surely the longest, most profound, and most successful community experience of the nineteenth century. In its practice, it discovered the basic institutions of egalitarian communitarianism and was able to create prosperous and diversified economies on different scales in places that were the least conducive for doing so.

But it was born burdened with the enlightened idea of universal Reason, a principle of unique truth that carries with it the artificial creation of scarcity and strains the community with an impossible contrast to its own homogeneous and unanimous "ideal." Its main

legacy is to remind us that **the basis of every real community is not the "common good," the father of all totalitarianism, but that taste for learning together, that passion for knowledge**, that makes it possible for consensus to be more then mere arrangements or precarious equilibria.

The kibbutz

In 1905, Palestine was divided up into several minor administrative units of the Ottoman Empire. Communications and modern infrastructure were non-existent, the general backwardness was oppressive, the government was every bit as corrupt as can be imagined, and more and more fields were being abandoned because of insecurity or how hard it was to make them at all productive. The Muslim population, a half-million people, were predominant. Only 25,000 out of more than a million Jewish refugees who have fled the massacres in Eastern Europe for the West had settled in the region.

The Zionist dream that motivated the minority that emigrated to Palestine included creating a new kind of independent farmers. The formula, the *moshava*, was similar to today's ecovillages: a cooperative that works the lands, creates some minimal infrastructure, and later divides them up among the members, who are transformed into individual proprietors of a given parcel. The *moshavot* were mostly financed by the Jewish Colonization Association (ACJ), which was dedicated to creating farms for refugees in Argentina, Canada, Turkey, and many other places, and the National Jewish Fund, founded four years earlier. But these organizations, until 1920, would only buy land that was barren or had been abandoned by local landowners. The assets purchased with these funds were no more than a collection of rocky fields, swamps, and plains that were hard to work. The *moshavot* were sustained thanks to continuous infusions of capital from international solidarity, and to top it off, the type of cultivation possible—mostly orchards and vineyards—meant hiring labor, both Jewish and Muslim, in conditions that shocked the small movement of organized Jewish workers.

This nascent workers' movement was reinforced by the arrival of a new wave of emigrants—the "second aliyah"—fleeing from the pogroms and repression that followed the Russian Revolution of 1905. The recent arrivals joined socialist convictions with the Zionist ideal. The youngest were integrated into the first "preparatory farms" of the ACJ. The objective of these facilities was to teach them the work of the day laborer and the hired hand as they acclimatized to the region. They shared houses and spontaneously pooled their incomes. They began to be called *communes*. There emerged among them a feeling of fraternity in-

spired by how hard the work was and their vocation of becoming "conquerors of the land," which is to say, those who, by clearing rocky fields and preparing the land for cultivation, made their later colonization possible.

But they were very critical. They were disgusted by the *moshavot*, their dependence on international aid, the constant supervision by managers… Run-ins with the administration of the Zionist movement and with the settlers became more and more frequent. A Russian emigre, Manya Willshevitz, Shohat, proposed that they be granted self-management, which is to say, that they be considered an autonomous work unit, the *kvutza*, which was hired as a unit to clear and prepare a territory for colonization as if it were an outside provider. The idea of making them into worker cooperatives was not innocent. Shohat had been trained in the Socialist Revolutionary Party, the heir of the Russian revolutionary peasant tradition, and thought that the future was in creating egalitarian peasant colonies… which, at that point, was little more than heretical, both for the Jewish worker parties—who thought that worker colonization would create small rural capitalists rather than an agrarian proletariat—and for the Zionist movement—which was convinced that the future was in a broad class of independent farmers, not social experiments.

But by 1909, the situation of agrarian colonization was cause for hopelessness for almost everyone. Working conditions were very hard, hygienic conditions lamentable, waterways precarious. Attacks by Bedouin bandits—which had already led to the abandonment of no few Arab villages—claimed more and more Jewish victims. Illness and bad food decimated settlers and workers. Discouragement spread, and desertions multiplied.

One of those groups of "conquerors of the land" was the "Hadera commune." They were called this because they went on strike at a *moshava* of the ACJ by that name. The administrator, Ruppin, suggested they leave the settlement, but later reconsidered, offering them work as a *kvutza* on a piece of land called *Um Juni*, next to the Sea of Galilee. They were barely a dozen boys, and their average age is 18. They didn't think they'd be up to it—the place was especially difficult—and turned it down. Finally, another group of six people went. When they finished their contract, a year later, Ruppin again offered the boys the work. The tools would be financed by the ACJ, and they would have to live on what they could get from the land and pay their debts with any surplus created. This time, they agreed.

It was the fall of 1910. Although they formally continued to be a "collective employee" of the Zionist movement, the mood was changing. They proposed to demonstrate that "a worker can live on the fruits of their own work." In August of 1911, when the first grain

harvest was in, they changed the name of *Um Juni*. Now they would be called **Degania**, grain flower.

They bought the first cow in the Golan Heights. Miriam Baratz, who had been around as long as the commune, cooking and cleaning, asked for the job of taking care of her. It was a daring idea. So far, women had not participated in "productive" work. She was rejected. Miriam became friends with a Muslim woman from a nearby village. She taught her to milk, make butter, and care for cows. One night, she milked the cow and did all the work before anyone from the kibbutz got up. When they did, the milk was already boiled and ready for breakfast. The assembly of the kvutza recognized its error and declared women's right to productive work.

In 1912, the settlement moved within the property, decided to renew the contract, and became a stable settlement. The first kibbutz started to take shape with the harvest. The new installation, which still exists, debuted with the wedding of Miriam and Yosef Baratz. Shmuel Dayan proposed then that there be no more marriages for at least five years. They were very young and were afraid that the formation of couples would endanger the most valuable thing they had: community life. But it was Shmuel himself who broke the rule within a year, when he fell in love with Dvora, a young immigrant recently arrived from Russia.

In 1913, the first child of the first kibbutz, Gideon Baratz, was born and in 1915, the second, Moshe Dayan. Work was very hard and at first, barely provided subsistence. More than half suffered periodic bouts of malaria. The sense of isolation was overwhelming, newspapers rarely arrived, and cultural life was almost nonexistent. The stories and memoirs of those years are moving, full of an intense energy and fraternity that turned dramatic when, in November of 1913, one of them died in a Bedouin incursion.

With the children, new questions arose. What to do with them? Were they only their parents' responsibility? Miriam went to milk with her son on her back and sang happily while the boy, his face full of flies, watched his mother work. The kibbutz discussed whether to fire the Hebrew professor, the only cultural luxury they could allow themselves, to hire a nanny. By 1916, they'd already spent two years enjoying their first machine, a thresher, and there was a small surplus.

Yosef Bussel made the proposal that would give definitive shape to the kibbutz: **collective responsibility for child-raising**. The children and their associated costs would be community expenses, paid for by the general fund. During the adult workday—from dawn to dusk—one or more people (it was part of the list of rotating activities) would care for

and educate the children. After work and the adults' dinner, the children would have their separate time with their parents. In contrast to what would be common in other kibbutzim, in Degania, they would always sleep with them in their rooms.

Full political and productive equality of women, the acceptance of the couple as a fundamental institution of the kibbutz, and the communitarization of child-raising were the three decisions that allowed the kibbutz to stabilize and establish a model that was defined by the communitarization of production, consumption and permanence in a given place. The land continued to be "national," which allowed them to be accepted both by the Jewish worker movement and by the Zionist agencies as part of the movement, and over time, as a valid model for the future of colonization.

The key was economic viability, which was all the more urgent during the years of the First World War, in which European and US donations and financial contributions grew thin. The kibbutz, with the strength of volunteerism, and thanks to the extra efficiency provided by sharing everything, had gone much farther than small owners, and in the following years, would go farther than the classic cooperative models born of the *moshava*.

The first expectation was growth, "scaling" the kibbutz to accommodate the new wave of refugees and emigrants. But in 1917, the residents had serious doubts about the scalability of their model, and would continue to for many years. The first attempt at growth had not gone well. From the original dozen, they had grown to almost fifty people, and it wasn't turning out to be easy. The gap between the founders and the recent arrivals was serious. The "youth" had rebelled to demand full membership, and at the beginning, the founders gave in. But this did not bring stability. The original residents felt that the rapid growth threatened the nature of what they shared with others. And in 1917, they made a speech that would result in their losing leadership and prestige: the kibbutz was not for just anyone, they asserted, community life demands an attitude that can't be taken for granted in every new person that arrives. They established a rigorous system of selection, a long probationary period, and a maximum size of ten families.

That doesn't mean they ignored the new emigrants. In the first place, they understood the improvement of their model as a contribution, and dedicated time and effort to training those who would have to be pioneers of other "small kibbutzim." And, as a community, they dedicated hours to creating public utilities for immigrants, like a orphanage for war victims. These commitments were not just talk: in 1916, during one of those trips, crossing the Sea of Galilee in a sailboat, a sudden storm surprises Bussel. Immobilized by an attack of malaria, he cannot swim, and drowns. With him dies the proponent of the most imaginative solutions of the kibbutz model.

But criticisms of the model of the "small kibbutz" didn't take long to appear. Kinneret, an early attempt at a colony that had failed and taken Degania as a model, decided to practice rapid growth. The result was a lot of turnover in the people in the *kvutza*, making it impossible to gel as a community. Between one thing and another, economic viability was resented harshly.

A similar thing—though with much more complicated contexts that are not relevant here—happened with the model of the Gedud. The Gedud, which was a national organization of workers, hoped to become a large network of kibbutzim capable of generating financial scale and a division of labor that would allow it to function as a parallel economy, and in the future, "unplug" the kibbutz economy from the capitalist world.

Some of the criticisms that had been at the base of the Gedud model were relevant and ended up helping to shape the kibbutz. Its author, Shlomo Levkovitz, Lavi, began by criticizing the "anti-intellectualism" that the Degania residents had developed in their rejection of the ineffectiveness of leftist European Zionism: "they've made a revolution, but their thought is as poor as before." The kibbutz of the Gedud has a sort of blog of the times: "community newspapers" where members debated, told their own experience, and accumulated learning, and in that way, created common contexts and the embryo of a kibbutz culture.

Lavi denounced the confusion between the lack of space for individuality, a necessary product of extreme scarcity, and community life. Greater space for individual freedom would be born of higher productivity, he correctly asserted. And to reach it, he proposed combining agricultural production with industrial… for this, with the technology of the time, it was necessary to grow, and grow a lot. Lavi dreamed of a kibbutz, or a network of them, of 3000 members, so he sharply criticized Degania's refusal to open as a "fear of the outside," without understanding its real basis. But had put his finger on something very important. The Zionist obsession with agriculture was justified by the need for territory to sustain the future Jewish state, but an economy that wanted to provide an egalitarian society with a certain well-being couldn't be centered on the fields, but rather wherever the most value was created, where abundance could at least be glimpsed on the horizon.

At that time, the path was industry. The issue is that, with the technology of the time, that was not possible without going beyond the sizes at which community life is viable. So, Lavi and the Gedud incorporated a structuralist narrative that reduced community to common funds and institutions, denying interpersonal relationships as the foundation of community.

By reducing the probationary period to three months and approving admissions by simple majority (compared with the unanimity demanded by the "small kibbutz" model), volatility and turnover increased immeasurably. The Gedud felt, in the end, that it had become a school that trained people for other initiatives without ever actually growing itself. The investment in training was rarely recovered, and it ended up demanding the Zionist movement provide it with some sort of compensation. To the further disgust of the founders, members, emotionally pained by the constant arrivals and departures, ended up creating an ideal of the "authentic person of the Gedud," which, in practice, meant hardening the admission criteria.

While the perspective of abundance had demonstrated its necessity, the importance of interpersonal bonds and the need to really build community could not be ignored.

The synthesis of all these debates in the first decade of the kibbutz was imposed by economic needs, but also by the experience of false growth.

Without grand theorizing, the centrality of the community experience and—at least in the first decades—a clear awareness of the limits of scale can be rescued from the Degania model. But additionally, it gives an awareness of the need for spaces for the creation of common culture and the search for technologies and productive sectors that create more and more value through work and community production, which Lavi had defended.

Among Degania and the first generation of kibbutz that stabilized, the convergence in lifestyle and organization emerged with practice, just as happened with the forms of government. In the first stages of a kibbutz, there is almost no division of labor in management, and all decisions are made at "the table." So much so that "table" becomes synonymous with community in the kibbutzim youth. But when the number of communards grew, the table was no longer operational. They go to a model of weekly assemblies with specific area leaders that change each three or six months. The work of administration, accounting, and the voice of command in emergencies join the list of tasks—like the jobs of "kangaroo" or dairy jobs—which the communards carry out in turns. Everyone does everything, everyone learns everything.

The creators of the kibbutz were not influenced by the story of egalitarian communities that preceded them. Nor by ideology. They were uprooted youth, activists and anti-intellectuals. Their references—Zionist nationalism and a generic socialism—did not incline them towards communitarianism. Quite the opposite. The kibbutz was a practical response, not the materialization of a prior ideology. And their organizational peculiarities, even more so.

Sometimes it looks like each new generation of the community movement has to learn the same things the hard way: the centrality of community, the market as a source of sovereignty, the need to remove the artificial creation of scarcity, the limits of scale, the impossibility of instantaneous integration, the need for permanent deliberation…

That is why the kibbutz is much more than an experiment, and its importance far exceeds the historical and geographic limits of the state of Israel. The kibbutznik were not communitarians, and in fact, took many years to accept that the Degania system was much more than a transitory state. To recognize that was the life they wanted for themselves and their children meant stopping thinking of community as another means for the "greater cause." And it wasn't easy. Looking back over their history, it's easy to see that radical honesty permeates all its developments and debates, a legacy that forms the heart of the community experience of the twentieth century.

Postwar period

During the '40s, the genocide perpetrated by the German state eliminated the foundations of the growth of the kibbutz: the youth movements of pioneers, leaders of the resistance to the Jewish Holocaust, were practically all massacred, and between German control of Europe and British control of the Mediterranean, only a few thousand young pioneers managed to reach Palestine. When Israel achieved its independence in 1948, setting viable borders for the small, new nation-State in the war that immediately followed it, the "colonizing" objective of the movement lost relevance. The development of a modern and diversified national economy on an urban base limited the economic weight of the movement, making it just one more sector, important but not central, within the agrarian world. As a consequence, the kibbutz movements lost political weight within the new State, and the importance of their own identity became ever more doubtful.

If the contradiction between nationalism and communitarianism in the movement wasn't already obvious by then, the setback in Israel would be matched during the '50s with international recognition and prestige that were unprecedented for a community movement. In the '40s, while the USSR still supported Israel, the kibbutz, with its constructive and volunteer spirit, became a model praised equally by European social democrats, liberal Americans, nationalists and communists. The '50s saw the first international volunteerism programs. To spend the summer working on a kibbutz became the dream of thousands of progressive youth across the world.

Meanwhile, in the US, anti-consumerist ideas that reject the North American model of well-being and mass culture of the postwar period began to gel into what would soon be called the "counterculture." A new generation of writers, the "beatniks," prized the subculture of jazz musicians and their followers, the "hipsters." At the beginning of the '60s, they were established in the two iconic neighborhoods of American bohemia—Greenwich Village in New York and Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco—and they began to be called "hippies."

The '60s and '70s were, from the point of view of communitarianism, though not only, a true disaster. They were years in which, in apparent prosperity, the "crisis of the kibbutz" is brewing, but above all, the years of the "spirit of '68." Our generation has had to deal with the complacency of a comfortable intellectualism that considered the student leftism of these years its personal "party," glorifying it uncritically for decades with television specials and nostalgic magazines. But above all, it has had to recover a multitude of demolished meanings. It is no coincidence that, to date, the word "commune"—meaning egalitarian community—is full of negative connotations in many languages. It became, often times to the surprise of those that grew up in them, synonymous with lysergic clubs, and other times, purely and simply with cults. We basically owe this phenomenon to two youth movements that tried to "reinvent" communitarianism in that period: European students and US hippies.

Hippies were really little more than a style, a label applied by the press to the growing spirit of rejection of the values of the American dream among university students, mostly children of the comfortable classes. Such a diffuse "movement" invites many reviews. The most critical remarks were on its absorption by mass culture through the consumption industries with the consecration of popular music as an industry, the "dress how you want," and the new iconography of sex. The most positive reviews talked about the US "cultural revolt" in acceptance of the civil rights movement, the rejection of the Vietnam War, the rise of pacifism, the birth of environmentalism, and the appearance of a new social sensitivity with feminism and the LGBT movement that would have been unthinkable without the so-called "sexual revolution."

The "summer of love" in 1967 was, first and foremost, an artistic movement: the consecration of the rock and folk music of the counterculture as a mass phenomenon. But it was, above all, a media phenomenon: it was the media that labeled the hippies and gave them the capacity for mass mobilization. More than 100,000 youth went to San Francisco, encouraged by the stories in the press, making sure to wear some flowers in their hair, and many of them also handed them out on the street. The media are experiencing and enjoying their power to create self-fulfilling prophecies.

Needing to find content for an ethical-aesthetic movement that was being defined more and more by an external narrative, a broad sector of the "hippy scene" started to propose going "back to the land," using part of the iconography of the American pioneer and the social prestige of the kibbutzim as a counterpoint to the ever-stronger association between hippies, drugs, and sex that scandalized the middle class. The cover of TIME in July of 1969 documented this conversion of the hippie into a new pioneer. It was dedicated to the "Family of Mystic Arts," a group established in Oregon in 1968. Once more, the media "pull" worked, and it was calculated that the total population in "intentional communities" at the beginning of the '70s may have exceeded 700,000 people.

Lacking an economic model and a common purpose, and based on little more than a desire to prolong the party of '67 and youthful experimentation, the majority disappeared soon. Only a few, associated more and more with the environmentalism of the mystical, New Age perspective that a good part of the counterculture ended up in, were able to develop a stable base. Some are still going today, though diluted in their definition of "intentional community" or in the "ecovillage" movement, which is to say, renouncing or never having developed a community economy.

Meanwhile, in Germany, Rudi Dutschke became the leader of the SDS ("Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund"), a group born as the student branch of the social-democratic party, which had become so radical that it had been expelled from the original movement, and which led mobilizations against the Vietnam War. The SDS was the heart of the so-called "new left." Marcuse and Dutschke tried to find an alternative to the proletariat as the protagonist of revolution. They talked about "new social subjects" represented by the Third World, feminism, and a whole host of movements that light up their followers.

These ideas, convergent with those practiced by Bourdieu, Castoriadis, and the Situationists in Paris, led some to the "criticism of everyday life." Dutschke proposed creating an "experience," an experimental commune which, through psychoanalysis, would make it possible to discover the elements of the bankruptcy of the German "bourgeois family." He got ahold of the apartment of the writer Hans Magnus Enzerberger and recruited a group of volunteers in which he himself was not included. So, in 1967, Kommune 1 (K1) was born. Under the slogan "Das Private ist politisch!" (the personal is political), the group soon forgot all about psychoanalysis and dedicated itself to "humorous warfare"… to the delight of the right-wing press. Dutschke labeled them "neurotic," ejected them from the SDS, and encouraged a second "communal experience": K2. He himself directed psychoanalysis in meetings with the communards, but the methodology turned out to be frustrating and "doesn't reach any special knowledge." K2 dissolved in summer of 1968.

There would follow, throughout Europe, hundreds of student "communes" that endlessly discuss the "radical" political movements of the times in housing shared outside university campuses. They were true places of initiation into ideological debate, sex, the nascent drug culture… none of which was anything new. Student housing has been that way since the times of nineteenth-century Bohemia, and whether or not it was that way in the eighteenth century, there are even stories of very similar things since the Middle Ages. Was it really necessary to gut the meaning of the political vocabulary written so laboriously since the French Revolution? In any case, no one seemed to show any remorse. We're talking about the university of the '60s: there were tall tales and a hodgepodge of ideas in the air. Marcuse, Reich, and psychoanalysis were mixed with Mao, Trotsky and Enver Hoxa in a promiscuity that's difficult not to look back on as pure "posturing." In the '80s, a good part of those young and "hyper-ideologized" '68ers would abandon maximalist narratives and join the political elites of the new Southern democracies with Miterrand, González, Papandreu and even Craxi as models. In 1980, Germany, where the generational turnover of the group in power was not as obvious as in the Latin countries, would create a political-generational expression of its own: "die Grünen," the first European environmental party.

The kibbutz, meanwhile, had gone through a general crisis. Following the Six-Day War, from the Zionist viewpoint, the kibbutzim were more and more "anachronistic," tools of an era of colonization and struggle for statehood which is now closed. With the arrival of massive waves of non-European immigration, culturally distant from the ideals that gave it life, the kibbutz lost more and more demographic weight and was more and more insulated within the society whose construction was its objective. In '77, for the first time, the labor movement lost electoral hegemony to the heirs of "Revisionism," the Right organized in Likud, and the ideological crisis became obvious: the dream of a State based on a kibbutz economy must be recognized as impossible.

The partisan voices of "evolve at the pace of the rest of society" would express themselves more and more openly. In the '80s, Israeli hyperinflation created massive debt for the kibbutzim. The quality of life dropped compared to the average for educated Israeli classes. The youth left. Some kibbutzim introduced reforms in the model: in the middle '70s, the "dream community" was eliminated, and children began to sleep with their parents in most settlements. Starting in the '80s and especially after '89, the communal economy on most kibbutzim was transformed into a cooperative system with a "social salary," a "safety net," or mixed formulas that included a salary differential. Only the richest kibbutzim, those that have leading industries in some field, could allow themselves to maintain a completely communitarised economy without creating internal tensions. By the time the movement turned a century old, Degania, the first kibbutz, had gone to a system of differential salaries.

Even with all this, today, 20% of the kibbutzim retained or have opted for the original system and prosper under a completely shared economy of production and consumption.

Lessons from the twentieth century

Communitarianism spent the better part of the twentieth century under the powerful example of the kibbutzim. Their crisis teaches us the need for cultural and ideological autonomy that every community needs to be able to endure over time. **To accept nationalism means sooner or later accepting the subordination of the real community of work, life, and affections to the imagined community of the nation**, its demands, and its sacrifices. The inevitable result is conflict or implosion. The same thing would happen with other universalisms and their corresponding subjects: class, race, gender, youth, the imagined community of believers in a religion, or of speakers of a language.

For centuries, the great monotheistic religions openly preached against the autonomy of people and communities. The universalist narrative discredits every subject that isn't universal, and therefore abstract, as self-interested or petty. Thinking in terms of a real "we," a "we" that means real people whose names and faces we know is, we were always told, "elitist" or "selfish." This perspective was inherited eagerly by the absolutist State and blessed by a good part of the European Enlightenment, thanks to which the nation-State that succeeded dynastic absolutism learned to speak of the supposed "common good" (now turned into "national interest") that churches have talked about since the *Ancien Régime*. What no one has said for a long time is that the "general interest" or "common good" of an abstract subject like the nation or the class doesn't exist and can't really be expressed. It can only be defined in terms of a concrete organizational structure—the State, a given party, etc.—with interests as private as any other human group.

What the community experience has learned the hard way, its true contribution, is that **the real community, people with names and faces that form it, is not only a legitimate objective in itself, but cannot be subordinated to any other.** There is nothing more valuable than the people we love and with whom we build and live.

So, if the members of a community want to give themselves a "broader objective"—whether building cooperative surroundings or having a clean environment—their role in the achievement of that end has to be clear, concrete, and articulated in a strategy that allows their contribution to the desired objective without questioning the way that the life

and needs of the real people it's made up of always take priority. Communitarianism, in the end, means giving priority to real people over any abstract category or narrative.

But while a lot can be learned from the history of the kibbutz movement, the spirit of '68 and the more than fifty years of aftermath, traumas, and taboos that it left behind also has something valuable to teach us: the disastrous effect of the trivialization of language. To think in common, we need to share the terms and expressions that connect the conversation. Additionally, we need them to have clear and well-understood meanings for all. That's why the deliberation of a community over time so often takes the form of a vocabulary in development, of a particularly accurate lexicon on the topics that are the basis of its reflection, whether that's technical issues or social phenomena.

When the students in the Sixties used the term "commune" for the shared housing they occupied, they were looking to associate themselves with what "commune" and "communard" had meant until then for an average European: the urban revolts against monarchy, and above all, the revolutionary government of the city of Paris in 1871. But the reality that they had to offer was much poorer. The result is that, decades later, the first definition for commune in the most common dictionary in the Spanish language references those stories, putting a curious emphasis on the idea of a "sexual community." That phenomenon, so characteristic of the disaster of '68, has assorted local variants—we already talked, for example, about how the word "anarchism" was gutted in Germany. And of, course, it wasn't original, either (nothing in '68 really was). Platonics and Christians, many centuries before, had already made "Epicurean" synonymous with "hedonistic," against all evidence.

But in our days, the conscious, political destruction of meanings has multiplied with the attempts to recentralize the Internet by dot-com businesses. First, "social networks" went from being the basis of interpersonal relationships in a society to becoming, in media language first and in common discourse shortly thereafter, a string of web services from big businesses. Corporate interests and fads use the media to besiege the meaning of things as basic as "shared housing," an expression that used to mean something quite different from renting a room or a touristy apartment on a specialized online service. And let's not even talk about the word "community" itself, which, as we've seen by this time, can mean almost anything.

The social destruction of the meaning of the words we use to think about ourselves not only isolates us more effectively than any censorship, it also takes away our capacity for learning. To defend language is to defend our own sovereignty, the possibility of shaping our life and all that surrounds it. That's why '68 was more than a failed social experiment. It was a big meat grinder that gutted the meaning of profound and useful ideas that had

served to give continuity to the reflection and efforts of generations of thinkers, activists and pioneers. The only thing left from all that is to learn that **to defend language is to defend ourselves from disaster**.

The main strength of communitarianism has always been its volunteerist, constructive, and competitive nature. Communards do not propose to use laws to impose community life on anyone, but build the lifestyle and the economy they believe is best for them, here and now. Because—in contrast to monks and ascetics—they do not live separate from society and the market, their forms of production have to compete with those existing in each place and time to provide them with what they consider material and cultural well-being. And because of that, in spite of not trying to impose itself as social model, when a communitarian movement has become economically established in a society, it becomes an engine of transformation and innovation. The real implementation of equality between men and women in work, the seven-hour workday, education for objectives and the "republic of children," frozen food and drip irrigation, while all on very different planes, are innovations born in egalitarian communities.

The big lesson of communitarianism throughout history is the tremendous capacity for learning of human groups organized in egalitarian relationships. That learning happens in diversity, and produces diversity, and yet has created a certain amount of convergence in ways of doing things and organizing themselves. For example, coming from different histories and origins, most of today's egalitarian communities have adopted systems of government by consensus based on conversation and permanent deliberation, and have discovered that the ability to maintain their autonomy is based on their productive development as well as on having a true sharing economy, and that every living community is first and foremost, a community of learning that develops a distinctive communal culture.

The twenty-first century

The current global community scene would be lacking if its sole point of reference were the "traditional" kibbutzim. Despite malnutrition and the imposition of the students of '68, the disastrous '70s also gave rise, both in Europe and in the US, to committed groups that were able to overcome the shortcomings of the environment at the time and build communities that endure still today. They are the main reference points of current communitarianism in Europe and North America, and it's worth taking some time to look at them.

In 1972, Switzerland, like all of Europe, was boiling over. In Basilea, there were two groups, one Austrian, “Spartakus,” whose members had taken refuge in the country from extreme right-wing raids; and the other was a local group, “Hydra7.” Both agreed on the rejection of the terrorist drift of the spirit of ‘68 and promoted self-management. That same year, Hydra7 set up a whole fund-raising apparatus for the workers in Schirmeck, Alsacia, who finally became owners of their factory and successfully cooperativized it. The unification of the groups was reinforced by the arrival of Roland Perrot, “Rémi,” who had the aura of having been chief of security during the students’ occupation of the Sorbonne. Rémi proposed the idea of creating “European pioneer towns” that could serve as refuge in the case of a deterioration in the political climate.

Forty people were appointed. They found land in the French Alps, on a hill close to the town of Limans. Thus was born **Longo Maï**, which, in Provençal, means “may it last long.”

Although Hydra7 put its fund-raising machinery at the service of the new project, the beginning was hard, and the pioneers’ diet, scant. Also, the first stage continued to be weighed down by the spirit of ’68: during the first years, couples were prohibited, which created internal problems and defections… and still worse, led them to face accusations of sectarianism, to which they responded with a lawsuit that dragged on for years, until they finally won in the courts in 1995. Additionally, the environment became tense with the neighbors, who rejected the “hippy outsiders,” and the tension sometimes led to small violent confrontations. In the ’80s, Longo Maï, faithful to its original objective, supported and gathered not only deserters from East Germany, but more than a few Kurds from the PKK. Growing pressure from the authorities, who try to deport the refugees, culminated in a raid in 1989 that, while it ended up coming to nothing, did temporarily close down their free radio, then the oldest in Europe.

A short time later, Longo Maï began an internal reform and a generational change that meant, de facto, breaking with the original ’68-style framework: the first marriages happened, and the initial settlement, where, until then, “collective child-raising” had gone through school age, battled to reopen the public school of the town, winning over the neighbors for the first time.

With agrarian activity going well and a decent annual flow of donations, which, in the ’90s, reached five million Swiss francs, the miracle was complete: Longo Maï had grown to 260 members, organized into five agrarian settlement-cooperatives, and had recovered abandoned mountain areas of low productivity.

Its commitment to political refugees took on a new form: they created an agrarian community for 200 people in Costa Rica, mostly exiles from Turkish Kurdistan. In the '90s, Longo Maï was already a point of reference: *Le Monde Diplomatique* presented them as the possible historical link between the new anti-globalization movements of the times with '68 and even with the Fourierist tradition.

Currently, Longo Maï has communities in Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Ukraine, France, and Costa Rica, all under ownership of a foundation with headquarters in Basilea and used by what is, to date, the oldest organization to adhere to the "European Cooperative" formula.

Meanwhile, back in the '70s, it was more and more clear to the survivors of the German student Left that violence was a dead-end street. Dutschke's pacifist ideas regain popularity, and from Denmark, he resumed contact with other old movement leaders. In parallel, since 1970, a small back-to-the-land movement had begun among some sectors of the student movement that begin to take seriously the creation of communities, no longer as an "experience," but as a life option for the long term.

Meanwhile, anti-nuclear marches and demonstrations against military bases and the deployment of US missiles in Europe had become mass movements of a new kind that seemed to confirm, years later, the theory of the "new social subjects." Demonstrations against nuclear energy and social alarm about acid rain created an environment in which some of theorists of '68 begin to proclaim, still in Marxist terms, that the "fundamental contradiction" of capitalism was no longer between capital and labor, but between capital and natural resources. During this crescendo, in 1978, the newspaper *TAZ*, and in 1980, "Die Grünen" are born. That same year, *TAZ* begins to publish a self-managed supplement that begins to form links among the settlements created during the prior decade.

Beginning in 1985, different groups connected with the Greens turn those links into a more solid network that finally meets in person at the commune in the castle of Lutter in 1989. In 1990, eight communes—Finkhof, Lutter, Zorrow, Dhrontal, Prezelle, Heinigen, Projekt To, and Kaufungen—have local newsletters; in 1991, they take another step and create an internal news bulletin, and in 1992, the magazine *Kommuja*, which will give its name to the network.

In 1995, Kommuja began to manage a mutual aid fund between communities, and in 1999, started organizing "Los Geht's," big open meetings that, aside from connecting communities, also operated as job fairs where people interested in joining a community could get to know the network and apply for inclusion.

Currently, Kommuja gathers almost 500 people organized in 34 communes in the German language, the first 32 in Germany, and the most recent two in Austria. The vast majority sustain themselves through agricultural work and share both production and revenue, though it also includes several that are only communities of shared income.

It's noteworthy, however, that in their statement of principles, it is insisted that community "is not an end in itself," giving way to a sort of relaxed definition of "constructive socialism." Because, even though the different communes are on the Left, including fairly distinct environmental, anti-fascist or feminist perspectives, none of them offers a strategy for global transformation or a place for community movement in it. In this, Kommuja reflects the way in which the German Left has tried to survive the digestion of '68: rescuing the novel parts of that time in some vectors (non-violence, anti-fascism, feminism, environmentalism, etc.), and leaving political reflection to "specialized groups," hoping that their developments and implementations create a global change by themselves through aggregation and cultural percolation.

Nearly fifty years after the student movement, in Kommuja, like in the German alternative movement in general, the tone does not show a political reflection or concern beyond the feelings, arguments, and cliches of the European Left. In any case, from the perspective that interests us, their position does emphasize a clear, egalitarian communitarianism based on an economy of shared income.

And while in Europe, the legacy of '68 was being reworked for better or worse, in the US, a community network, the FEC (Federation of Egalitarian Communities), appeared and became established little by little. Its origin was independent of both the hippies and the student movement in those disastrous years.

In 1948, the famous behavioralist psychologist B.F. Skinner published *Walden Two*. The name is a tribute to Thoreau's *Walden*, but in contrast to it, and despite sharing an emphasis on the simple life, it could hardly be considered a libertarian work. Skinner's dream is to establish an "experimental" community where economic planning, a non-consumerist ethic, and behavioralist child-rearing, in the framework of a system based on cultural engineering, would produce a socially stable, balanced, and basically happy life.

In 1967, eight pioneers decide to try to put the behavioralist utopia into practice. They buy "Twin Oaks," a property of 500 hectares in Virginia, and move to it. The beginnings, as always, and especially in agricultural settlements, were hard. Especially since none of them had any prior agricultural experience. One of them, Kat Kinkade, left us a story of

the evolution of community in two books and in a series of articles published on her death, in 2008, in the magazine *Communities*.

Though Twin Oaks soon stopped defining itself as behavioralist, the center of their system continues to be Skinner's proposal to create a system of work vouchers. Each member has to do 42 nominal hours weekly. Following Skinner, at the beginning, one real hour doing the least desired work counted for more than one nominal hour. However, upon growing and crossing the threshold of forty members, they realized that, when jobs can be chosen, an equilibrium that is satisfactory to all can be found where the nominal hour always equals the real. Traces of behavioralism can also be found in the decision-making processes, which is inspired by consensus-creation methodologies, but still democratic and very formalized.

"Twin Oaks," which has had around a hundred members since the middle '90s, supported the formation of a new community, "East Wind," in 1973. In 1976, both joined with "Sandhill," which had been founded independently in 1974, to create the "FEC" (Federation of Egalitarian Communities). On the initiative of Kat Kinkade, in 1993, it donated land to a new community, "Acorn," which inherited the "work voucher" system and the dual economy of the older community, but began the adoption of the consensus method for internal governance, becoming the first member of the FEC to adhere openly to a libertarian ideology.

In 1996, the EGFS (Emma Goldman Finishing School) was founded in Seattle. It was the first urban commune in the FEC, and, in turn, encouraged the founding of another libertarian urban commune in Columbus, Ohio, in 2008, "The Midden." Both are "communities of consumption": the community lives in the same house and shares purchasing and costs, but does not produce together or have community businesses. Like many communities of this style throughout the world, the common fund is kept alive thanks to a payment of a certain percentage of members' incomes.

As a group, the communities of the FEC add up to almost three hundred adults, who share a basic insurance system and organize the "Communities Conference," an annual congress of US communitarianism in Twin Oaks every summer.

Currently, Acorn is encouraging the creation of a new kind of urban and productive community. It will be the first case in the Americas of a phenomenon that began in the twentieth century in Europe.

Within that process, Paul Blundell, of Acorn, journeyed through Europe in the summer

of 2014 and visited a half-dozen communities. The objective of the tour, funded in part by the FEC, was to study new forms of urban communitarianism and the functioning of consensus mechanisms in egalitarian communities of large size.

In the series of conferences and presentations that followed his return, he included this table that compares the forms of social and economic organizing of the European communities that he visited with others from the FEC.

	Name			Location	Population	Governance	Economy	Labor	Group Interpersonal Process?
FEC (USA)	Twin Oaks	Kat Kincade	rural	Virginia	100 adults, 15 kids	consensus inspired bureaucratic democracy	dual economy	labor quota	no
	East Wind		rural	Missouri	70 adults, x kids	majority rule	dual economy	labor quota	no
	Acorn		rural	Virginia	30 adults, 1 kid	consensus	dual economy	labor quota	yes
	Sandhill		rural	Missouri	5 adults	consensus	full income sharing	conversational	no?
	Emma Goldman Finishing School	Urban (EGFS)	urban	Seattle	<12 adults	consensus	formulaic taxation	labor quota	no
	The Midden		urban	Columbus, OH	7 adults	consensus	formulaic taxation	labor quota	no
Europe	Svanholm		rural	Denmark	80 adults, 60 kids	consensus	formulaic taxation	full time	no
	Kommune Niederkaufungen	Kassel (Knk)	demiurban	Kassel, Germany	60 adults, 20 kids	consensus	common economy	conversational	no
	Villa Locomuna		urban	Kassel, Germany	16 adults, 5 kids	consensus	common economy	conversational	yes
	gASTEWERKe		rural	Kassel, Germany	<20 adults	consensus	common economy	conversational	no?
	Lossehof		demiurban	Kassel, Germany	18 adults, 7 kids	consensus	common economy	conversational	yes
	Las Indias		urban	Bilbao, Spain	6 adults	consensus	common economy	conversational	no?

In the table we can observe how consensus has become the predominant form of government in today's communitarianism. In the organization of the internal economy, all European productive communities have fully communitarized their economy, which is to say, they save in common and each one receives according to their needs, following the old Icarian formula.

In communities of consumption, in contrast, contribution of payments based on percentage of income, in the style of the privatized kibbutzim, seems to be the dominant form—only Villa Locomuna, a member of Kommuja, practices shared income and the use of the common fund in accordance with individual needs. The dual system, which is relatively common in the reformed kibbutzim, seems to be confined to the groups born of Twin Oaks, like the division of tasks and jobs through work vouchers, which in practically all other cases is "conversational," which is to say, consensual.

The phyle

Some economists, like Kenneth Boulding, had warned as early as the ’50s that the technological development of the postwar period was gradually reducing the optimum size of industrial enterprise and services. The corporate model that became hegemonic in the Sixties accumulated inefficiencies, thus reducing the capacity of the market to maintain a minimum efficiency in the distribution of resources. Over-scaled corporations tried to capture the State to top off their advantages with monopolistic rents.

The first place where this process took on dramatic overtones was in the Soviet bloc, where businesses and industrial conglomerates had national scale. But in the ’80s, the situation in Europe and the US was no less dramatic. A new political school of thought, “neoliberalism,” came to ideologically represent the capture of the State by corporate interests. Its program was basically centered on increasing the scale of markets to justify the size of corporations. The two main ways it did this were the development of finance—the new leading sector in the economy—and a deliberate policy of expanding free-trade zones and the movement of capital.

Following the collapse of the Soviet bloc, this policy took the form of a new, widespread globalization. Supported by a whole series of new communication technologies, corporations soon discovered that the small businesses at the periphery were more efficient than they were. The strategy immediately became outsourcing. The result was the breaking of value chains: production was divided into phases that were subcontracted to different producers in different countries. Initially, the corporations recovered lost efficiency, even at the cost of the deindustrialization of the central countries where they had their original factories. The social consequences led to strong resistance in Europe and the US, where “anti-globalization” movements emerged… But it was just a temporary phase. The social development of the Internet and the appearance of a low-cost transportation industry, both of people and goods, soon allowed the producers at the periphery to form productive and commercial networks of their own. It was the beginning of the globalization of the small, encouraged by the progressive appearance of the new commons: free software.

The final result was the greatest social transformation in the history of the capitalist periphery. Never before had so many people escaped poverty. The corporate answer in the West, in contrast, was to try to save the situation—which continued to be due to their over-scaling—by capturing rents from the State, both directly and by using the power of European and US governments to create new global monopolies. This is when we see the hardening of intellectual property and a jump in financial deregulation, the objective of

which is to avoid the consequences of the excessive scale of global capital, which would end up undermining the very basis of the market and produce the greatest economic crisis in history of capitalism.

This is, in general terms, the global framework of today's capitalism. On the one hand, there is a tendency towards the simultaneous destruction of the two main economic institutions of society, the State and the market, as an effect of corporate capture [of the State] and of whole social sectors that—so far—are linked to their interests, which end up displaced in the process. We call that tendency "decomposition."

On the other hand, there is the appearance of a new, small-scale, productive economy throughout the world, which is expressed as the direct economy, but also in the new forms of P2P production based on a knowledge commons that already goes far beyond software, and which even more drastically reduces the need for financial capital to carry out productive activity. The cultural change that these new forms are driving, in part as a response to the crisis and social decomposition, begins to manifest in a new form of public utilities provided directly by citizens: collaborative consumption.

Within this general framework, since the end of the '80s, a great many small conversational communities began to appear, linked by the Internet. Never before had such a phenomenon happened so massively. What's more important, in the space of the "Imperial languages" (English, Spanish, Chinese, French…), the composition of these groups did not respect political or geographical borders. They were truly transnational. In the framework of the globalization of the small, some of them made the leap to productivity in the digital world: a whole new world of small businesses of design, free software and copyleft content appears. Formed out of conversation among peers and based on a sort of capital-knowledge that rests on the digital commons, their organization was spontaneous and egalitarian.

Their transnational nature mades these groups very sensitive to the global development of instability and decomposition. With the period that begins with the attacks on 9/11 and the Argentine "*corralito*," the perspective of forming a market space and social coverage of their own for the long term, safe from political turmoil and corporate captures, grew stronger and stronger. A concept then began to congeal, in "las Indias," a young community born in 2002 out of the Cyberpunk group in the Spanish language, between Europe and South America—the concept of the "phyle," which would be adopted in the following decade by market-anarchist theorists like Kevin Carson and sociotechnologists like Michel Bauwens.

The idea is simple: the phyle is a transnational network of communities, cooperatives, and

community enterprises that share a “clean” internal market, without rents or advantages, an insurance and welfare structure of its own, and democratic mechanisms of economic management.

In taking the initiative of a phyle as a goal, the foundation of egalitarian communities is not the only possible response: the creation of small worker cooperatives and enterprises of direct economy, P2P production, or collaborative consumption are considered part of the same process.

Communitarianism is thus redefined as an option for life that, by expanding, promotes productive markets and systems of social protection that are independent of States and corporate interests. It makes possible a new kind of strategy for the development of community autonomy that begins by turning transnationality into a symbolic-cultural break with national identity, continues with the achievement of independence from the State through productive activity in the market, and works towards gaining independence from the market itself through the promotion of a broad cooperative, mutual, and market sphere: the phyle.

Two philosophers of the 20th century

Alfred Adler and Individual Psychology

Alfred Adler (1870-1937) was the first president of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society. He left it because he never accepted some of Freud's theories. Adler didn't think the source of neurosis was in the repression of the libido. For him and his followers, who founded Individual Psychology, it's not desire, but the need to belong to a community, where the source of most psychological problems should be sought.

According to them, we define ourselves and complete ourselves in a family community from birth, and we feel our deficiencies in relation to those around us. With them, we try to complete ourselves, compensate for deficiencies by developing other skills, and mature a through improvement and contribution, an ideal form of a healthy *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* – **community feeling**. In this context, our personality is built not only with desires, but with goals and objectives through which we grow and overcome our feelings of deficiency.

From the viewpoint of the family as community, Adler put the accent not so much on conflicts of the discovery of sexuality and desire as on the place of the individual in the structure of the family network. He wondered about the derivative roles of being a boy or girl, or the place in birth order, to reconstruct expectations and understand the feelings of deficiency and abandonment in the early phases of childhood, especially prior to eight years old.

For Adler, our behavior is oriented by goals and objectives that are formed in the first years of childhood. The point of departure is the "feeling of inferiority" of the child in its first community: the family. That feeling is not negative in itself, because, as Adler says:

> The behavior of all our life movements is to progress from incompleteness to completeness. Accordingly, all of our personal life path has a tendency towards improvement, a tendency to grow, seeking to be superior.

But if, for whatever reason, we don't feel part, if the family as first community of belonging doesn't serve to support us and overcome those first insecurities, a whole series of **wrong goals** appear that seek **wrong compensations** for the vacuum of meaning in life that come from not feeling community protection: the search for attention and recognition first, the need to exercise power over others later, and finally, when the pain makes the fruitlessness

of all these false goals obvious, bitterness and the desire for revenge. It is the pathological path, the path of inferiority complexes, empowered and exaggerated by a hierarchical culture of falsely competitive values, exclusion, and individualism.

Because, as beings guided by goals, strategies (right or wrong) appear when we're little. In the bosom of our community of origin and as a function of it, we give ourselves our first **life objectives**. It is then that our first prejudices also arise about others and about ourselves, which Adler calls "**private logic**." The joining of life goals (acceptance, belonging, recognition…) with private logic ("friends always fail," "no one loves me," etc.) will give shape and coherence to our sensations and feelings throughout our lives, and with them, the way we live, our "**lifestyle**," an important concept that Adler defines as

> the set of strategies of behavior and safeguards that orient us towards our successes and our failures.

The attempt to fit everything together and to justify avoiding some aspects of the four big fields of Adlerian relationships (work, love, sex, and other people) make up a **lifestyle** recognizable by its critical elements—among other things, by its moments of violence and feelings of guilt. These feelings, to Adler, are common-sense reaction to the inaction that private logic leads to. A healthy person, for Adler, does not have feelings of guilt: s/he learns and acts accordingly by contributing and making a renewed effort.

Adlerian psychology was developed in an era of large-scale industrialization and massive urbanization in Europe. The destruction of community settings brought with it the massive emergence of a series of personality disorders. This phenomenon was of such proportions that, beginning with World War II, psychological terms were incorporated into everyday language. Psychopathies and sociopathies fill the cinema and paperback novels. The diagnosis that Adlerian psychology made of the times remains current: **deprived of real community, the human experience can only be plunged into a lack of meaning, and the mistaken substitution of an interesting life with strategies of power and revenge**.

But once the experience of community is made possible, Adler's thought is optimistic and trusts in the way that personal strategies of compensation, within a healthy community setting, can build people who are more and more empathic with humanity in general. In an inclusive real community, it is our problems and deficiencies that help us grow and make our life interesting. Additionally, healthy personal development leads to expanding the borders of the family community towards a more and more extended real community,

towards friends and classmates or co-workers; and finally, to abstract forms and the generosity of the communal relationship towards being collaborative, frank, and generous in any context.

But what is it that makes our lifestyle fall on one side (the useless side, the side of wrong compensation) or the other (the useful side, which allows us to grow) for our whole life? **Courage** is the ability to confront our life tasks, and to go from the useless side to the useful side when we make adjustments and compensations. It is deciding to take risks and feel a sense of belonging.

It's not right to expect a life that is always free of distress. Distress is just the constant expression of our fear of failing, and therefore of being rejected. From childhood, distress points out challenges to us, situations in which we don't feel valuable or strong enough, clever or capable enough, to get ahead. That feeling of inferiority to others and fear of change is not, in itself, negative. Just the opposite—for Adler, the contrast between our limitations and our life objectives is the engine that gets our creative capacities moving.

If courage is not a daily part of our lifestyle, the fear of being wrong—amplified by social rules based on social punishment of error—will lead us to look for "wrong compensation," which includes fictitious, paralyzing goals, such as the "search for perfection" or compensation strategies that provide us with a destructive feeling of superiority over others (obsession with earnings, exercising power, "coming out on top," etc.). Perhaps, simply, we try to falsely compensate some aspects of life with others, as if success in certain objectives could make up for deficiencies in others.

Of course, there are also right compensations, compensations that help us to grow, but, once again, there is the crucial factor in the whole Adlerian perspective: the *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*, community feeling, the knowing how to grow with others that requires and produces courage.

Courage is nothing but overcoming of the fear of making a mistake, taking risks, and feeling like a part of something in common. It does not mean not being afraid, but overcoming it on the basis of intelligence, patience, constancy, and determination. Adlerian courage is a capacity that can be learned and be developed, a "psychological muscle" that allows us to grow by using cooperation and contribution when we understand that **the good of the people we love and with whom we build community is the ultimate meaning of life.**

The idea that community feeling can be learned and practiced is already present in Epicurus, even though, interestingly, some Adlerian authors recall the Confucian idea that

courage is tempered through “ritual, love of knowledge, and the development of a certain feeling of righteousness.” And that “community spirit,” which is principally an attitude, can be developed through the practice of **cooperation and contribution** until it becomes an “ethos,” and an inseparable pair of values through which the individual him/herself judges the coherence and utility of his/her actions.

What capacities should be practiced to “learn to cooperate?” Adler points to the ability to identify with others through learning to listen and to see others’ points of view, which we Indianos have always insisted on:

> Life presents us with problems that require the ability to cooperate to solve them. To hear, see, or speak “correctly” means dissolving the “I” completely in another person or in a given situation, and being identified with them. The ability to identify with others, which makes us capable of feeling friendship, empathy, sympathy, worry, and love, is the basis of community feeling and can only be practiced together with others.

But cooperating is only one of the aspects of the community life. The other is **contributing**. Contributing, for the Adlerians, means including the other members of the community in our effort to improve and get ahead. The desire to contribute is made clear only when it is understood that **there is no scorecard, no direct relationship between contribution and reward**. The path of personal improvement and of community spirit is about wanting to give more than one receives. The well-being of the whole is the basis of every contribution worthy of that name, and the improvement of one’s personal situation can only be secondary.

Why is the proposal so strong, so clear, so contrary to the dominant ideology about contributing? Because for Adler, **contributing is what truly empowers each of us**. By contributing, we feel useful, we value ourselves, and we build our self-esteem. If we make cooperation a way of life, it takes hold of us and contributes to our identity. To contribute, and feel that we contribute, is the type of individuation that strengthens us and makes us grow.

For Eva Dreikurs, surely the most influential Adlerian psychologist after Adler himself, the three life tasks of a person are

> Work, which means contributing to the well-being of others; friendship, which encompasses all social relationships with peers and relatives; and love, which is the most intimate unity and represents the strongest and closest emotional relationship that can exist between two human beings.

The classical Greeks distinguished between four forms of love: *storge* (the "natural" affection that we feel for relatives or the neighbors for the simple fact that they are who they are), *philias* (sympathy with those with whom we share ideas, situations, or objectives), *eros* (proximity based on what we get from a relationship, whether sex or any other thing) and "agape," unconditional and disinterested love that starts with identifying with the other. Needless to say, the Adlerians understand both friendship and the love of a couple or family as agape, and that, of course, the key that makes it possible to reach it is, once again, the practice of cooperation and contribution in the framework of a strong community feeling. The love of a couple, love for family, and fraternity with friends, are all sustained in the same way of relating—agape—and build, as a whole, the real community of each individual.

Dreikurs adds two more tasks, which she calls existential tasks: self-acceptance—knowing how to be alone and learning to deal with oneself—and belonging—finding a community through which we can create meaning for our own life. Both are especially important for the analysis of that dimension of our lives that the Adlerians call work.

Adler defines work as "any kind of task, activity, or occupation useful for community." It includes not only professional work, but housework, caring for loved ones, visits to friends, etc. Work is that space which is both personal and social through which we develop our life goals, and find belonging and mutual dependence. Even if you're unemployed, there is "work" in your life. The question is how it happens, and how much.

As for productive work, the Adlerian view allows us to understand why many people are identified with purely "functional" professional environments to the point of what some call "workaholism." The cold environments of the corporate world, which reduce our "contribution" to predetermined and identical tasks that don't really need conscious cooperation from and with others, make it possible to (easily and mistakenly) compensate for deficiencies in other life tasks… including those of one's own work.

But not even the most mechanical employment, within the most rigid procedures, protects us completely from challenges. And challenges once again give us that feeling of inferiority that forces us to improve ourselves or leads us to imaginary compensations. The more hierarchical and structurally unequal the relationships in a business are, the more incentivized the feeling of inferiority is, the more permanent it will become, and the greater the distress and fear of self-improvement will be. That's why, in general terms, the corporate world suffers from what the Adlerians call a "collective inferiority," a shared fear of the life task of work and belonging, which is expressed institutionally through the obsessive substitution of conversational processes with "procedures." The more rigid the procedure,

the easier it is to hide in it, and the easier it is to pass the blame when something goes wrong.

Of course, even in the most rigid corporate worlds, leaders appear from time to time who transform the environment, creating true community feeling, using intrinsic motivation (work that does good for community members) more than extrinsic (economic reward, status, or public recognition), strengthening cooperation and contribution rather than comparison and competition with peers.

But it's difficult: paradoxically, the more community feeling the individual tries to develop in a "traditional" work environment, the easier it is for another kind of wrong compensations, inherited from childhood through our "private logic," to emerge. That's when we see attempts to get attention (procrastinating, bypassing bosses, faking illnesses, deficiencies of all kinds, victimization, claims of incompetency, etc.), to exercise power (the tyrannical boss and his "fix that for me," the obsession with climbing the corporate ladder, etc.) and finally, rancor and different forms of verbal and symbolic violence (the aggressiveness of the vendor, the arrogance of the consultant, the bitterness of the functionary, the obsessive hatred of those who have been fired or chastised…).

Would "flattening" the business be enough to eliminate these risks? Would a cooperative, or a community company, be safe from "wrong substitutions?" Certainly not. "Flatter" businesses and cooperatives don't reach the extreme "feeling of inferiority" that the old structures create. It's easier for them to avoid or face the problems, but in the end, they're not safe from the "private logic" of their members, which is not born of the system of organization but of a "lifestyle" formed in the family experience during childhood.

What the Adlerians would recommend is to orient people towards contributing in those fields where they could make positive substitutions that reinforce them, insisting on "seeing with the other person's eyes" and right from the beginning, promote the objective of "giving more to others than we receive." All this must be within a general discourse that clearly unites the real community of each person with the objectives and outcomes of work.

And, obviously, they also recommend a different kind of job interview, starting with a certain comprehension of the lifestyle of the applicant, to wisely evaluate whether or not there is a capacity to integrate him/her, and whether or not the organization, such as it is, can provide him/her with ways to overcome his/her own fears. In the same way that a person cannot be friends with just anyone, not every enterprise, network, or community is good for the development of a given person… or the other way around. That's why the Adlerians who are specialized in team selection ask things as "strange" as whether the candidates see

the creation of meaning and life goals in the position they are applying for, and understand it as a way of improving others' lives and their own immediate surroundings. Because, in the final analysis, for the Adlerians,

> work is what we use to build our meaning of life and find our social and emotional belonging.

An common example of positive compensation is the redefinition of Beethoven from performer to composer, when he went deaf. It was a full neurotic crisis, and he even thought about committing suicide, but he came through it by compensating for this fundamental deficiency for the lifestyle and self-definition he had chosen by developing another latent ability (composition) and redefining himself on the basis of that. To be able to do so meant a good dose of courage, because all his life tasks, from being comfortable with himself to the relationship with his circle of friends and his family and wife, were affected, and certainly he must have felt fear of being mistaken.

Because courage is the key ability to be able to face these changes, several Adlerians highlight the figure of the "facilitator," a person (or several) from the surroundings that, through their interaction, demonstrate and encourage living life in their community in "agape." The question is how to transform an environment of coexistence in "facilitation."

When it comes to tools, once again, a classical reference appears in Adler: the Socratic dialogue. The Adlerian reading of the dialogue seeks to work with the other to investigate the feelings and fears behind their actions. The analyst or facilitator never asks "why," and attempts to keep the conversation on-topic through new questions and comments that remove the centrality of facts so that the "lifestyle" of the interviewee is expressed freely, becoming visible to both.

In many Adlerian texts, it says that "people need encouragement like plants need water," so the facilitator reinforces everything that points towards the "community spirit" of the other with positive comments. The objective is to reinforce the tendency towards "community spirit" if it exists, or simply to make sure to replace the tendency towards zero-sum logic. It starts from the psychoanalytical idea of helping the person to discover their own "private logic," prejudices and fears from childhood that are impeding change, as a way to gain the strength to overcome them. This can be summarized in "the" Adlerian question: "how would your life change if I had magical powers and could make everything you want real?"

Beyond this, Adlerian analysts have developed a whole series of tools, from questionnaires to ways of representing the family we grew up in, but dialogue has to be the device from

which the most can be learned outside of professional practice. This was an idea that Adler himself supported, since he always asserted that many of the problems that psychologists deal with can be overcome without their help. Surely his final hope was not to establish a form of therapy, but a practical ethic based on common sense that does not reject humor, paradox, or irony.

In fact, while Freud was pessimistic and denied the possibility of a non-neurotic culture and society, Adler understood the development of community spirit, *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*, not only as a basis for individual therapy, but as a form of **social transformation**, as a path that, if developed, would modify the way a society sees itself and change the way it manages its inevitable conflicts.

On the path of the development of community spirit, Adler, a product of his time, accepted that intermediate onion layers could exist between the feeling of belonging to a community and love for what is generically human: abstractions like national identity or class.

But experience leads us to think that, in general, imagined communities, and especially the nation, have a different nature. Recent empirical works in the field of international adoption show how the adoptive parents who are most resistant to giving a place to the biological mother in the story of the origins of the child, were the most inclined to include those same children in courses on the culture and national tongue of the country in which s/he had been born, even though s/he has no memory of its use, having been adopted prior to learning to speak. These same families are the ones that least often allow contact with the biological family to continue. The national story of the country where the child was born serves to substitute for the memory of the family of origin. A similar thing occurs where States drive strong nationalism: the family history, beyond a certain point, normally the grandparents, is confused and blurs with the official history of the nation and its myths. National identity seems like a virus that reproduces by inserting itself into community and family memories to be perpetuated using their own mechanisms of reproduction (domestic stories, the memories of living relatives, the stories of life, etc.).

But maybe the most suggestive of Adlerian contributions today is not his social hopes, but rather the fact that the logic of the goals and definition of lifestyles are the basis for a true communal microsociology.

We've known for some time that systems of industrial organization that practice participatory methodologies in collectives that don't share broad reflection and previous interaction, end up reinforcing charismatic or professionalized leaders as the only way to overcome the

risk aversion that transparency exacerbates. The result, in the end, produces those same indifferent attitudes that were criticized as characteristic of traditional systems.

That is why businesses, even the ones that seek democratic innovations, easily become sick communities. In the first place, because they are not usually formed out of the deliberation of their members, so generally there's no excess of community feeling. And when ideas are brought in from outside, the changemakers usually think that changing procedures or rules is enough. The results, logically, fall well short of expectations. In practice, the leaders themselves very frequently end up continuing mistaken strategies: anxiety for recognition, the need to exercise power to be affirmed… it's all very Adlerian.

It's no wonder that in other realms with similar problems, from neighborhood communities to foundation boards, courses and manuals on coexistence abound. And in all these collectives, that microsociology outlined in the Adlerian proposal seems to be clamoring to become community knowledge.

This is the least-developed line of Adler's ideas, but also, surely, one of the most powerful, above all if we accept the original Epicurean idea that sums up all his thought: the feeling of belonging to a community, and the experience of creating meaning from it, are basic for healthy personal development… at any stage of life.

John Dewey and participatory democracy

John Dewey (1859-1952) was a prolific and influential North American thinker. Considered one of the founders of the philosophy of pragmatism, together with Charles S. Pierce and William James, he began his academic career at Johns Hopkins University. His first wife, Alice Chipman, and his transfer to the University of Chicago inclined him towards pedagogy. It was at this university where, together with Alice, he founded the "Laboratory Schools," their own elementary school, where they could practice their method and experiment "with real children." In 1899, he was elected president of the American Psychological Association. After resigning from the University of Chicago over differences with the leadership, he moved to the University of Columbia, where he worked for almost 30 years. Dewey left a tremendous philosophical, pedagogical, and political legacy. In large measure, without his work, American postmodernism, "free schools," and the very idea of "participatory democracy" would be unthinkable today.

All his thought is very coherent, so to understand his work and how it's linked at all times to the idea of community, we'll begin by taking a look at his philosophy. In Dewey, there are four especially important concepts: uncertainty, experience, knowledge, and truth.

Uncertainty is central in the human experience. We live oriented to the future, because we have no choice but to confront it. We need to reduce it and narrow it to feel that we can shape what's coming, and as Sabater said, "to know what to stick to." That's why the future determines the present, what we do today. Surely as much as or more than the past, as the cyberpunk slogan went.

Experience. We need to know, and so, we study, we analyze what we experience, we make predictions, and we experiment. And each thing that happens to us, each concrete experience—not in the isolated sense of a scientific experiment, but with all the social and personal context that surrounds our lives—we turn it into stories, into more or less orderly ideas that we try to make work for us to overcome the uncertainty of what's coming.

Knowledge. That's why knowledge, which is the distillate left to us by experience, is the way the present joins the past and the future, the tool with which we confront the uncertainty of life and become owners of it. Knowledge is the result and the central tool of the human experience.

Truth/s. Because what moves us to knowledge is necessity, knowledge that we will judge to be true is that which serves our life, which is effective at making us owners of our lives and reducing the uncertainty produced by the future and the surroundings.

This doesn't mean that Dewey prefers applied knowledge—engineering, for example—to abstract. Not at all. Nor does he demand a direct motivation between the effort to gain knowledge and the concrete problems of every moment. Knowledge also creates "truth" for us in fields of mathematics for those problems we haven't yet encountered in the physical world, in art, or in intellectual games like Go or chess. But that doesn't mean that art or mathematics are "disinterested" knowledge. In reality, if we love and dedicate time to that knowledge, it's because we make it part (or we hope to make it part) of our effort to take the reins of our lives—individually and collectively. That can take many forms in the story, from its use as a metaphor, to the acceptance that it will be useful in the future, to the search for its psychological or emotional effects. In the end, knowledge is the core of the story that we make of experience, and passion for knowledge is nothing more than the practical form of passion for life.

In his proposal, there is an underlying concept of social truth that doesn't need to be unique,

and, in fact, normally is not unique. Different communities have different truths about the way they organize themselves socially, because they have different experiences and contexts, different forms of knowledge, and different stories that connect them.

In this way, Dewey gave **legitimacy to community differences** and to the differences between communities. He rejected something that had been conventional wisdom since the imposition of the monotheistic religions: "if what we say is true, then what the rest say cannot be." His arguments were useful in slowing the trend, which had been growing stronger throughout almost the whole 20th century, of the forced homogenization of society by the State. During the whole 20th century, a good part of community experiences were harassed, if not actually persecuted, by all manner of movements and governments, from czars to Stalinism, from fascism to British rule, and even national liberation movements.

But, on the other hand, at the same time that Dewey proposed an ethic of knowledge to communitarianism, he also offered it an alternative to the dichotomy between isolation, on the one hand, and the aspiration to political power to impose an economic model on society, on the other: **participatory democracy**.

Although today's collective imagination puts the rise of totalitarianisms in the 1930s, the real tipping point happened before the crash and the Great Depression of '29. In 1921, the Kronstadt rebellion in Russia was followed by the prohibition of non-Bolshevik revolutionary opposition—and even part of the Bolshevik opposition—and in 1922, Mussolini marches on Rome.

The expansion of radio transforms family life, and even the layout of the house: the living room, or "sitting room," goes from being a place of conversation, reading, and music by the members of the family to having their furniture oriented towards the new device that "speaks" endlessly. For the first time, on a national scale, people listen to the voices of political leaders. In parallel, popular leisure is revolutionized by the cinema, which is first introduced as part of live vaudeville shows, and then replaces them. Centralized mass communication is imposed, and with it, new figures and social behaviors are born that seem to confirm that democracy's days are numbered. It is the age of "mass politics."

Totalitarian ideologies seem to be the owners of the future: they have leaders that break with the bourgeois aesthetics of liberal dignitaries, and wear laborers' shirts or uniforms (a symbol of the emerging power of the organized mass/class/people/homeland), leaders who developed a new oratory style "for radio" and exaggerated gestures like the stars of silent movies, which allow for iconic identification. But they also have an alternative to political participation as it was understood in the liberal system: demonstrations and

mass choreography that arouse a sense of fraternity and emotion over the exercise of the vote among the new, university-educated middle class and the new generation of workers entering the factories of the new Taylorist era. The generation gap is obvious. The idea of "youth" is born as a political category and as a myth of power. The real community, which still survived as the main point of reference for individual identity in small cities and towns, is definitively overcome by the imagined community of the nation and the class.

This is the global context of one of John Dewey's more polemical works: *The Public and its Problems*. The book emerges as part of the philosopher's answer to a book by the journalist Walter Lippmann. Both Lippman and Dewey agree that the emergence of the new newspaper chains, radio, and cinema were transforming the basis of democratic institutions, attracting the masses to a culture of adherence that replaced deliberation with propaganda, another political innovation of the times.

But while Lippman believes that the defense of democracy is in being immersed in the methods of agitprop and using the tools to defend what they are being used to oppose, Dewey rejects this, and in his argument, creates a new concept: participatory democracy.

Participatory democracy is not based on the "atomic," individualist idea of liberalism. It's not about making decisions by majorities in a sort of free market of ideas and interests, which the legislature represents. But nor does Dewey accept the idea of society as a collective subject, as a single, imaginary community endowed with a destiny (like the nationalists think) and awaiting leaders to carry it out (like Fascists, socialists, and communists think).

Dewey understands society as a "lumpy" aggregate of individuals that evolves through interaction. For him, **the goal of both the "lumps" (real communities) and of the democratic organization of the whole, can only be to assure the conditions of self-realization of individuals**.

The goodness of democracy and of the democratic system resides precisely in that it allows a kind of communication, of interaction between people, that makes it possible to identify the interests of each one within an ethical framework that is not individualist, not zero-sum, but collaborative, such that it sustains everyone within their real communities. Democracy, for Dewey, is based on each of us representing ourselves and acting socially, projecting the "**community spirit**" Adler talked about.

Dewey believes that the key for that "outward" projection of communal logic lies in the **means of communication**. Essentially, radio, cinema, and other centralized media reduce

audiences to a passive attitude, spoonfeeding them what different elites think as they clash over control of the State or markets. These media are looking for emotional responses, and basically, irresponsible adherences.

A project of true defense of democracy, on the contrary, must seek deliberation and a daily commitment by everyone, proposing options, confronting different points of view, and practicing distributed communication ("free and complete intercommunication"). It must call on both citizens and their representatives to be responsible and accountable. For Dewey, the right to participate in public affairs means the **individual responsibility to learn**. It is that effort and pleasure in permanent learning that makes us citizens and projects communal logic beyond its original limits to permeate all of society.

But in the Taylorist era, whose birth Dewey has witnessed, knowledge is more and more specialized. Paradoxically, in the most ideological decade of the century, the narrative of "technical" management is being imposed, hiding the political nature of every collective decision in a wide-open social space. Faced with that, Dewey defines citizens as **multispecialists**, who take responsibility for learning and self-empowering throughout their lives. That's why, for him, **democracy is not a system of electing elites, but an essential part of the individual ethos that must be fed starting in school; democracy is the path of personal and collective development beyond the limits of the real community**.

Dewey would have enjoyed the rise of **the blogosphere**. Surely, today, he would be fighting to create **deliberative spaces on distributed architectures** that are not dependent on big corporate servers. His dream, his vision for democracy, was not of a given set of public policies, but of projecting values and lessons from the community experience to a wider social space.

That was how Dewey ended up being the pedagogical precursor of later partisan educational reformers of "child-centered teaching" that split into different alternative pedagogical schools that continue to emerge even today, but which are far from obtaining the results of the father of progressive pedagogy.

Dewey's pedagogical method can be summarized as follows:

- The objective of education is to turn children, whatever their origins and personal circumstances, into trained, responsible, free citizens, capable of building their own happiness and making a positive contribution to society.
- Children don't arrive at the school as "blank slates." Each one will react differently to inputs of any kind that they receive in class.

- That's why the key is in the personalization of teaching, which must adapt continuously to each child, based on their response.
- A child is not taught, a child learns, and only when they see a practical utility to what they learn.
- A child learns by doing, and the visibility of the result is what gives meaning to their learning process.

But the most interesting thing is the "Adlerian" part of Dewey, which affirmed that, even as children, we feel realized when we feel that we contribute to the well-being of the community by using our personal skills and talents. That's why **the main function of education is to help children find those skills and virtues that make them different, and because of exactly that, valuable to the community**.

Treating students as homogeneous, according to Dewey, causes the child to atrophy socially by wasting their "natural desire to give, to create, which is to say, to serve." The social spirit is replaced by strongly individualist motivations and standards, like fear, emulation, rivalry, and judgments of superiority and inferiority, which cause the weakest to gradually lose their feeling of capacity and accept a position of continuous and lasting inferiority, while the stronger reach glory, not because of their merits, but because they're stronger. For Dewey, education for democracy required that the school become a cooperative community and

> an institution that is, provisionally, a place of life for the child, in which he is a member of society, has an awareness of his belonging, and to which he contributes.

The reason that the excellent results obtained in life by Dewey have not been maintained uniformly in the successive proposals of later "alternative pedagogy" is that his pedagogical method is not a method as such. Its personalized nature makes it impossible to turn it into a "procedure," a closed box to deliver to a school that wants to buy the "Dewey Method."

So, we can assert that "procedure" killed Dewey's pedagogy, because it's really an ethic, and an ethic can't be reduced to a procedure. This "way of teaching," (avoiding the word "method") depends exclusively on the teacher. That's why Dewey's manuals were so directed at teachers, and put so little emphasis on the child. That's why alternative schools, however good their intentions may be, are dependent on the sharp eye of the selector of teachers, or luck, to get good results, and that's why it's inviable to try to change anything

in public schools as long as teacher training (where primary-school teachers come from) is so undemanding.

Another difference, perhaps even more important, between Dewey's theory and his heirs today, is what each understands by "child-centered teaching." For Dewey, the focus on the child meant, to use a mechanical metaphor, looking more at how the nuts and bolts are forged than at the whole machine, to help it work better. Or, to put it another way, each child is a future adult with a social function, which will be to create more wealth and well-being for all, the more he or she contributes of him or herself. This contribution will be optimal, and each one will give the best of him/herself, if they feel good doing so (if they find meaning in it), and inversely, if a person feels at ease with him/herself and with their contribution to society, they will be happier and more productive: their contribution will be optimal.

When we talk about contribution, obviously we're not only referring to the production of wealth. Social contribution is physical and spiritual and results in an individual responsibility for all the settings of life: intellectual, emotional, productive, etc. All this clashes directly with the understanding of "child-centered teaching" as the placement of the child at the center of community life (whether of the family or the school), making all decisions and strategies depend on him/her.

Education based on experience, the orientation and the adaption to the personal experiences of children can never imply that they take control of the educational process. Modifying the curriculum based on their responses and contributions doesn't mean that limits and hierarchies have to disappear. Taking into account the diversity of children to bring out the best in them never means that we should forget what they are: children, emotionally and intellectually immature and inexperienced, and we should never put them at the same level as an adult. As in any social organization, they have to earn the right to be considered full members. The best way to truncate this process and never let them become responsible and happy adults is get ahead of ourselves and give them treatment that they have not yet earned for themselves.

This focus on individual responsibility is no coincidence. Dewey, like Adler, would have wanted to train children as "communards." Both authors, without having ever discussed forms or experiences of community organization, see the world through it. That's why surely both, and especially Dewey, have been so influential on the current evolution of egalitarian communitarianism. The three big ideas of Dewey's legacy, which many continue to describe as "naive" or utopian from the perspective of the national "community"

and the State, seem the most pragmatic thing in the world when we do it in the existing communal world.

- The idea that social truths are never definitive or universal, since they are developed through the **community experience** in a broad sense.
- The concept of **participatory democracy** as a practical way of taking the logic of the egalitarian community—and therefore the centrality of the development and realization of each person—to a broader space.
- **Child-centered pedagogy** as a way of reproducing the values of responsibility in belonging that make that type of egalitarianism possible.

Dewey, in a communitarian reading, thus becomes a guide for the relations of each community with their surroundings, and even a way to transcend the borders of the real community without falling into the trap of "higher causes" or dissolving into outside political structures. Participatory democracy becomes, more than a program or a methodology, a way for the community and the communards to exist and to contribute in the open space of the city.

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