

About communication

If we want to face together the question about the possibilities of intervention for anarchists in social conflictuality, present and to come, for us it becomes necessary to talk about the structural changes that have taken place in a society over the last decades. Here we will focus on the particular role that the development of telecommunication technology has had.

The text will be developed in three parts, in the first one we will try to outline a brief analysis of the role of information and the development of communication technology in relation to the structural changes of society, in the second part instead we will discuss about the influence of the development of these technologies on the social context. To conclude, there will be some disordered notes on the meaning of these changes for us anarchists, on the possibilities that we will be faced with and some other questions that for us are necessary to further deepen together.

The speed of information circulation as a necessary condition for the existence of post-industrial societies

Many analyses have been made by comrades, especially in Italy during the 80's, on the structural changes of society from an industrial form towards a form that was then defined as post-industrial. Since here it is not our intention to delve into too many details of this analysis, but to more give a general picture, we would recommend comrades that are further interested in deepening this question or who have not yet tackled it, to refer to the existing analysis, taking into account the contexts in which they were developed. It should also be taken into consideration that when we are talking about structural changes, we are not talking about absolute changes, but of trends, and therefore, we rely on the intelligence of comrades of reading the following text in this light.

The structural changes of the last decades have allowed the capitalist system to overcome the strong unrests that erupted in the 60's-70's. Unrests that came from apparently unsurmountable contradictions, and made many consider the possibility of an imminent and inevitable revolutionary rupture. Something that today we can easily ascertain not happening because the restructuring that followed was able to guarantee to capitalism the necessary flexibility to survive and thrive. The shift passed from the model of huge and rigid industrial complexes to flexible and decentralized production, from a society of massified consumption to that of individual consumption. This transformation was made possible only thanks to the

development of modern (tele)communication technologies, which allowed on one hand an incredible acceleration of the systems of information, and thus a decentralizing process of the productive system into smaller, more flexible entities, spread over the territory, rendering superfluous the accumulation and stocking of goods (and therefore the economy of scale), which was based on the concentration of enormous industrial complexes and on the use of costly and not very flexible machines, creating what we can describe as an economy of continuous flow. Not coincidentally, along with the development of the telecommunications network, instead of the production of goods in the classical sense, development came in the “immaterial” production, the production of services. The acceleration of the informatics processes is therefore at the centre of society’s restructuring processes that took place over the last decades, and is still taking place today.

The development of communication technologies and its social consequences

The changes of the productive structures within society allowed by the development of communication technologies has also enormously influenced the social sphere. This phenomenon is observable in all parts of social life, especially in those of conflictuality. If in the past we were in the presence of huge, relatively homogeneous, “class” movements, which had common conditions of exploitation and of life, or at least not very diverging (exploitation organized in huge industrial complexes and life in working class neighbourhoods), today we find ourselves in front of a much more fragmented landscape, where productive

decentralization has produced a quantitative differentiation of the conditions of exploitation (even though in essence they remain the same) and therefore a greater incapacity of understanding a common exploitation and therefore to understand ourselves as a “class”, since the exploited have increasingly less points of reference in common. The transformation of the way of thinking, of communicating and of conceiving the world, came not only from the transformations induced by the development of communication technologies, but also the technologies themselves. Instant and ubiquitous communication and the overabundance of information have allowed the establishment of a feeling of eternal present, in a world where it’s possible to know practically immediately anything that happens, both in our immediate surroundings as well as in places geographically distant. The immediacy of communication has not been without consequences on the quality of the information: to be instantaneous it has to become synthetic, short, simple, emptied of any reflection, reduced to the dimension of simple facts. The language as well has had to adapt to this new type of communication: simple, easy to understand, flattened. Now, if language and communication are the means that permit the development of thought and reflexion and therefore of desire, it should not surprise us that the amputation of language and the immediacy of communication have mutilated also our capacity to think, to reflect and to desire. Therefore we shouldn’t be surprised neither about the decline of ideologies, neither about the decline of ideas or of utopic tension, substituted more and more by the creation of opinions and by the drive of satisfying immediate needs.

Every horizon seems to fade in front of the eternity of the present.

Some disordered reflexions

Keeping in consideration the changes of the reality in which we live through a revolutionary perspective does not mean having to renounce to, or having to adapt to the times that keep running on, or to smooth out the bumps, our ideas. It is more about asking ourselves how it would be possible to transform this changing reality starting from our own ideas, to find weak points where not only is it possible but also auspicious to attack. The decline of the great workers' movements of the past should not be looked at with nostalgia, as it was already pointed out in another contribution, this decline, can confirm the validity, in this historic moment, of choosing to organize ourselves informally and through affinity. It is not about, as some claim, re-building these mastodontic communities of struggle, and neither about re-building ties that were destroyed by the development of capital, but to find ways of attacking here and now starting from our own basis, of communicating with other revolts and deepening the existing disorders, in other words to find a way of arriving to an insurrectional rupture where everything will be possible, in the good as in the bad. The impoverishment of language puts us in front of a very important problem, if our capacity of imagination, reflexion, thought and desire is reduced, how can we express that which we cannot imagine and imagine that which we cannot express? How and with which means to communicate?

[Zurich, 10-13/11/2012]

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