

VIRNO: 1977 represents a break with the previous tradition. It is the most radical rupture which - to a point - we are still living. What happened? That a movement of struggle, which was anything but marginal, exploded. It has been said many times that it was the peons of the *bidonvilles* of the peripheral neighbourhoods who revolted against the economic crisis. Not at all. As we were interpreting and living 1977, it became clear to us that this was a social subject that was anything but marginal: that, on the contrary, was rich with learning, rich with knowledge, rich with productive capacity; a subject that was probably central in terms of productivity, or that would become central, that was borne out of the [capitalist] restructuring processes. It was the new productive subject that emerged from the [capitalist] restructuring processes. It was a rich subject that knew many things; that knew how to become self-entrepreneurial. A powerful subject, a subject that was anything but marginal. To make the example of the University of Rome, they often were the precarious intellectual workers, they were the workers who even if they were working attended classes at university to accumulate sociality, information, knowledge. What happened? We thought - just to make a key example - that it wasn't true that the restructuring of production, and therefore unemployment as well as the work mobility that it produces, was in itself a bad thing: it could be that this mobility, this precarious work, contained a strong element of workers' self-determination, of working-time flexibility, of choice with respect to life's times: given the richness that time represents. And this was a real scandal with respect to the themes of those days: with respect to the dogmas of the movement and the trade unions, who said that the main issue was the defence of the job no matter what and resistance to [capitalist] restructuring. We said: in restructuring, in mobility, there can be a different relation with self-determined work, in which the times of the working day are articulated around one's needs and exigencies. All of this to mention a fundamental theme of our reflections around this new attitude towards work: according to which in our view work was no longer seen as some kind of settled destiny which dictates that one starts working at twenty and stays in the same place until it is time to retire. The factory was no longer a life sentence: it was an episode in one's biography. [coughing in the courtroom] It was a circumscribed episode with respect to which the response was to escape, to try to move to more fulfilling jobs, to richer productive activities. We interpreted nomadism from job to job, precarious work, mobility as a potentially rich element about which we had to start pondering. This is the first great theme.

And for the movement of those days that was a scandal. It was an element of rupture and discontinuity. We said: yes, informal work comes with poverty and exploitation. But we also said: informal work isn't necessarily that archaeological thing in which one works without machines, at very low technological levels. Maybe modern informal work begins to be the work of widespread electronics. Maybe informal work is an extraordinary opportunity to disentangle ourselves from the factory regime. And this is another great element that perhaps today sounds either obscure, or not very significant, or even banal, because many of these elements have subsequently been taken up even by popular newspapers. In those days it was a complete scandal within the movement. These were themes that were absolutely path breaking and scandalous themes. The other great theme was the discourse about the State: if in the first half of the 1970s the new social developments were linked to the classical Communist theme of the seizing power - as I was saying before - what we questioned, with respect to what was concretely happening within the movement of 1977, was the very concept of seizing power, of political revolution. I don't know if I am managing to give you an idea of the scandal - with respect to a particular kind of environment, a particular kind of world, which was a world that was experiencing turmoil and struggles - represented by saying seizing power is a poor, miserable thing, let's abandon it. The idea of political revolution itself, the substitution of one kind of State management with another, of institutions with institutions, is a miserable idea that has no relation with the new social movements: critique of the concept of political revolution, critique of the concept of seizing power. We said: at best, with respect to power, for these new social movements there will be the problem of defending themselves from power, of growing by experimenting new forms of life and by keeping power at arm's length. In the debate of those days these were contradictory elements with respect to the commonplaces that circulated in the movement of 1977. But they were elements that were linked to the new experience that we were making.