



The stream of self-determination and *autogestión*: Prefiguring alternative economic realities

Marcelo Vieta

abstract

This article maps out a possible genealogy of *autogestión* – workers’ self-management – through ‘the stream of self-determination’ that historically grounds and flows through it. While its practices among working people long predate the modern capitalist era, theoretical and political considerations of *autogestión* as the cornerstone of an alternative society began to be mapped out most fully with 19th-century classical social anarchists. For them, the practices of self-managed workers’ organizations and cooperatives stimulated ideas about the other society free from capitalist and state exploitation. Influencing 20th- and 21st-century theories and practices of alternative economic arrangements, notions of *autogestión* have continued to prefigure and advance, implicitly and explicitly, the self-determination of people’s own productive lives. The first section of the article posits that freedom for self-determination via *autogestión* finds its wellspring in classical social anarchist economics. Subsequent sections of the article address the continued relevance of the stream of self-determination for 20th-century theories and practices of *autogestión*, ultimately leading to a theory of a ‘new cooperativism’ for the 21st century. The stream of self-determination coursing through *autogestión* – first articulated by classical social anarchists – continues to prefigure a different socio-economic reality for the future in the present.

Introduction

There is a stream of radical economic thought that courses through theories and practices of *autogestión*, or workers’ self-management: Working people must free themselves from the oppressions inherent to hierarchical forms of power that, in capitalism, is embodied to a great extent in wage slavery and its exploitative mode of production. The pursuit of this freedom is nothing less than the struggle for

workers and communities to self-determine their own productive lives. This stream of economic thought begins with 19th-century classical social anarchism and threads through 20th- and 21st-century notions of an alternative economic reality. For social anarchists,¹ this struggle for self-determination becomes particularly pertinent when a small group – capitalists – have most of their needs and wants met via the labors of a vastly larger group – workers – that remain with many of their needs and desires unmet. A continuing faith in human beings' capacities for cooperation via the self-management of their productive lives has been at the heart of this vision for the free society for the better part of the past two centuries, influencing other libertarian socialist ideas and movements. This can be conceived of as *the stream of self-determination* coursing through the theories and practices of *autogestión*.

The stream of self-determination in *autogestión* is inspired by real historical moments of resistance by the self-activity of laboring people. It taps into an alternative historiography that recognizes that, for far longer than capitalism has existed, working people have created and sustained commonly owned and cooperatively based economic models rooted in solidarity and mutual aid, always already pushing back against ideologies and practices of hierarchical control and coercion. This 'other' history in a genealogy of *autogestión*,² paralleling the evolution of capitalism, can, for instance, be traced back to pre-capitalist and indigenous societies that were based on community production led by reciprocity, householding, and other forms of non-market redistribution (Heilbroner and Milberg, 1998; Kropotkin, 1989; Polanyi, 1957); rural people's ongoing resistances to the enclosures of common lands and traditional ways of

1 Alternatively called 'communist anarchism', 'anarchist communism', 'socialist anarchism', 'libertarian socialism', or other variants, for this article 'social anarchism' is the anarchist tradition that considers the struggle for personal freedom to be deeply entwined with social struggles against the state, capitalism and its inherent wage system, and their multiple forms of oppressions. In turn, collective action and 'mutual aid' permeate its politics (Berkman, 1929; Kropotkin, 1989). While deeply critical of the state and its institutions (as with more individualist inclined anarchisms), believing that they are 'destructive to individual liberty and social harmony' (Berkman, 1929: 4), social anarchists also critique the role played by the capitalist system, its wage-based coercive apparatuses, and the privately owned means of production that uphold modernity's hierarchies of control, inequality, and exploitation. Moreover, social anarchists contemplate, aspire towards, and struggle for 'ownership in common and joint use' of the technological, productive, and distributive components of the economy (*ibid.*: 140-150).

2 By *genealogy* I mean, as it does for Burawoy et al. (2000), a 'tracing [of] how we got to where we are' (*ibid.*:5). For the purposes of this article, a 'genealogical approach' looks for historical moments and conjunctures that trace a *possible path* for the emergence of *autogestión* without trying to find the 'authoritative' history of its 'origins' (Day, 2004: 720).

life by the encroaching capitalist system (Bookchin, 1990; De Angelis and Harvie, 2014; Thompson, 1991); the Luddites' struggles against changes in working life wrought by early industrialism (Noble, 1993); and early working-class struggles for better working and living conditions that led to the first trade union and cooperative movements (Craig, 1993; Hobsbawm, 1964; Thompson, 1991; Zamagni and Zamagni, 2010).

Community- and worker-led struggles for self-determination and experiments with *autogestión* are, of course, still very much present today. Indeed, interest in labor-managed firms and cooperatives have experienced resurgence in the past two decades due, in no small part, to ordinary people's struggles against neoliberal enclosures and crises (i.e. Atzeni, 2012; Parker et al., 2014; McNally, 2007; Ness and Azzellini, 2010; Vieta, 2010a, 2010b; 2015; Zevi et al., 2011; Zibechi, 2011). In mapping one possible genealogy of *autogestión*, this paper begins with classical social anarchist visions for the economically liberated society. In later sections of the article, I sketch out a continued unfolding of *autogestión's* stream of self-determination throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. By the last pages of the article, we will come to know today's stream of self-determination within *autogestión* as 'the new cooperativism'.

Defining two key concepts

Before setting out on this genealogical exploration, I offer orienting definitions of the article's two key concepts: *autogestión* and *prefiguration*.

The term *self-management* is arguably the inadequate but well-accepted English translation of the French and Spanish word *autogestión*, which has a Greek and Latin etymology (Farmer, 1979). The word *auto* comes from the Greek 'autós (self, same)' (*ibid.*: 59). *Gestión* comes from the Latin 'gestio (managing)', which in turn comes from 'gerere (to bear, carry, manage)' (*ibid.*). More evocatively and literally, one can conceptualize *autogestión* as 'self-gestation' – to self-create, self-control, and self-provision; in other words, to be *self-reliant* and *self-determining*. In this etymology there are deep connections, in practice and in theory, with proposals for the self-determination of working lives that resonate across social anarchist and libertarian socialist economics. Taken together, *auto-gestión* – self-management – alludes to a processual movement of self-creation, self-conception, and self-definition. It is pregnant with ethico-political relevance for the struggle for freedom from hierarchical and autocratic systems of control and exploitation, drawing on the ancient philosophical notion of *potentiality* – an evolution into something other than what one is in the now (Feenberg, 2002; Marcuse, 1964). When practiced by a collective of people living in capitalist

economic conjunctures, *autogestión* points to a future possibility of becoming something other than waged-workers relegated to spending life producing for others within the capital-labor relation. Echoing aspects of Peter Kropotkin's vision for the emancipated 'communist' society that I will touch on shortly, a worker from Argentina's contemporary worker-recuperated enterprises movement offers an insightful definition of *autogestión* from the perspective of someone living it:

Autogestión is the possibility that we – all people – have to realize ourselves professionally, economically, and, in our capacities to labour. It emerges from within ourselves and together with the people with whom we want to share this realization, but without sacrificing personal freedom, without sacrificing personal dignity, and from our own developmental potential. It is, in other words, about the possibility of the full development of the person. (De Pasquale, in Vieta, 2015)

Prefiguration, in turn, is an historical undercurrent in *autogestión's* stream of self-determination. It earmarks an ethico-political standpoint that charts aspects of a post-capitalist world by interlacing alternatives with the ethics, values, and practices that are being struggled over and desired, creating the new inside of the shell of the old (Boggs, 1977; Franks, 2006, 2010). It suggests the foreshadowing of another world within the present one, affirming that workers' self-activity and self-directed resistances to capital have an educative force for shaping a different socio-economic reality for the future in the present.³ As Benjamin Franks recently explained, prefigurative social practices 'reflect, as far as possible, the desired goals' by delineating value orientations that parallel the ends sought while, at the same time, striving not to reproduce 'economic or political hierarchies, or [generate] new, detrimental power relations' (Franks, 2010: 102).⁴

3 As I argue elsewhere, a theory of prefiguration can also be intuited in 19th- and early 20th-century socialist thought. For classical social anarchists such as Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin (and even in moments in Marx's and Gramsci's writings) worker- and community-based organizations become spaces not only of resistance to the status quo, but also for *experimenting with* and *learning how* to self-organize alternative forms of economic and social arrangements that embody the desired self-managed society (for more on this socialist intellectual history of prefiguration, see Vieta, 2015: chapter 4).

4 In order to theoretically articulate the politics, desires, and strategies of today's radical social movements against globalization and neoliberalism, contemporary anarchist, post-anarchist, autonomist, and other libertarian socialist thinkers have recently theorized the prefigurative potential of radical ethico-political commitments and practices for mapping out alternatives to capitalist logics, hierarchical power relations, and institutions that systematize oppressions (see Critchley, 2007; Day, 2005; Franks, 2010; Gordon, 2007; Graeber, 2004; 2009).

Autogestión's stream of self-determination in 19th-century socialist thought

Two common sub-themes course through the stream of self-determination in a genealogy of *autogestión*:

- (1) That the struggle for *freedom from* the exploitative society is, more profoundly, the *struggle to* shape the 'self-governing society' (Horvat, 1982: 11; Marshall, 1992), where working people and communities would be, in some way, co-responsible for the economic realm, as well as for their own reproduction as human beings;
- (2) That there are experiences of workers in the present already sketching out *prefiguratively*, in degrees of opacity and clarity, aspects of the future emancipated society.

It is my contention that the stream of self-determination that has long run through practices and notions of *autogestión* recognizes that these two notions – the struggle for freedom in the self-governing society, and prefiguring the desired reality – meet in the *lived experiences* of laboring people (Vieta, 2015). They particularly resonate with the historically consistent desire and struggle of workers to self-manage their laboring lives, *paralleling* and, in the very resistances of workers, striving to *move beyond* the rise of capitalism and its underlying liberal ideologies of competition in 'free markets'.

19th-century socialist thinkers, living through the adolescent stages of capitalism, were keen on laying bare the consequences of this system's exploitative tendencies. On the other hand, their envisioning of alternatives to the rising capitalist system were also inspired by the myriad forms of workers' combinations and self-managed organizations that were emerging throughout Europe and its colonies during this period, including friendly societies, mutual associations, cooperatives, and trade unions (MacPherson, 2007; McNally, 1993).

Among 19th-century socialist thought, it was classical social anarchists that most convincingly merged the critique of the capitalist system with proposals for alternatives to it. Rather than the reform of capitalism or the seizure of power by the takeover of the state, what drove classical social anarchists was the radical re-creation of social and economic life through a deep faith in human abilities and people's instincts for self-determination linked to cooperation and mutual aid. Indeed, it was Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1972, 1989), Mikhail Bakunin (1990) and Peter Kropotkin (1995) who would level severe critiques at the emergent capitalist system and the role of the state in upholding this unjust system while, at the same time, proposing political and economic alternatives grounded in federations of producer communities and political communes that would return control of the means of production and consumption to workers and local communities (Marshall, 1992). As I will outline next, for Proudhon, Bakunin,

and Kropotkin, workers' associations such as cooperatives, as locally rooted, broadly federated, and collectively owned productive entities, were vital for outlining the creation of alternatives to the capitalist-state system and for the self-determining and self-managed society.

Self-determination, cooperation, and classical social anarchist economic thought

Classical social anarchist economic thought realized early on that the freedom for self-actualization and self-determination in a capitalist-controlled world was to be first struggled over in the economic realm. Because economic considerations have such a privileged position in the project of modernity, it is, to follow Rudolf Rocker (1997), in the radical transformations of the economic arrangements of society where the vital site of struggle for eventually winning the freedom of self-determination for the rest of life begins.

19th-century social anarchists brought together the search for freedom from the capitalist-state apparatus with the struggle for economic self-determination, perhaps being the first socialist thinkers to begin to most fully formulate – if not using the term themselves – the concept of *autogestión*. They too, as with the utopian socialists before them, envisioned economic freedom to be rooted in some form of cooperative organization, usually co-managed by the direct producers themselves (Marshall, 1992). For them, alternative economic arrangements were closely tied to a new political reality; for them cooperative societies were to be the bulwark from which a greater federation of producer cooperatives and communes would replace the capitalist nation-state (Woodcock, 2004). Moreover, these cooperatives and federations were to take on infinitely less hierarchical organizational forms by being managed by workers' and people's councils via recallable delegates. On shop floors and in the fields, workers were to control decision-making directly and democratically. In the greater community, political entities such as communes, villages, and townships were to be the sites where councils of workers, tenants, and peasants would co-manage production, distribution, and political life (Marshall, 1992).

Proudhon, for example, drew inspiration for such a social system from his own proletarian background and from the self-activity of working people, such as those in the craft trades, factory workers, and peasants. He used these experiences as his model for *mutuellisme* and its proposals for equitable systems of exchange, popular banks, private possessions over personal property, and 'collective property' of workers' associations (i.e. worker/producer cooperatives) (Proudhon, 1969: 153). Proudhon's *mutuellisme* was in ways similar to Owenite labor exchanges, where labor time, via labor notes, would be the currency in circulation, managed by 'people's banks' (Woodcock, 2004: 110). These were to

be Proudhon's keys to a more economically just society (Horvat, 1982: 118; Proudhon, 1979). While he viewed large associations such as nationalization schemes, trading blocs, state apparatuses, or other hierarchical forms of economic institutions as constraints to individual liberties and the free society, Proudhon did favor grassroots-based associations such as the producer cooperative, what later anarchist writers would call a 'syndicate', 'collective', 'producers' commune', or an 'association of producers' (Anarchist FAQ, 2009: I.3.1). These were, in essence, what we would today call worker cooperatives, which were beginning to emerge during Proudhon's most intellectually fruitful years in France (Gide, 1905; Vuotto, 2011). Proudhon would eventually conceptualize his economic system as an 'agro-industrial federation' where the political functions of the state would be reduced to making economic and industrial decisions (Proudhon, 1979: 67).

Proudhon's arguably contradictory proposals for centralization of all economic organization in the form of a reduced state entity on the one hand, and his search for individual autonomy on the other perhaps made his *mutuellisme* ultimately unworkable in practice. More specifically, unresolved tensions between individual freedom/competition and community/personal responsibility are consistently present in Proudhon's proposals. Whether or not a continued state entity, however reduced and federated, could be relegated to only making economic decisions, how centralized this system had to be, or, most crucially, whether the economic can ever be decoupled from the political, remain points of contention with Proudhon's vision for the future society. And while Proudhon's politics disdained outright revolutionary violence, preferring gradual change, Proudhon's proposals for alternative organizational arrangements beyond capital were among the first in modern socialism to both critique capitalism and the coordinating market and state mechanisms that upheld it, and offer worker-led alternatives to it (Price, 2011: chapter 1, section 2)⁵. Undoubtedly, Proudhon's ideas would be central to inspiring the struggle for workers' self-management henceforth. His visions for an alternative economics grounded in *autogestión* are strong early articulations for a society rooted in human freedom from exploitation and the re-embedding of economics back into the social sphere. There is also no doubt that a more economically just and more humane reality for working people was top of mind for Proudhon.

5 Proudhon's proposals for the treatment of women and labour unions also leave much to be desired. But I agree with Wayne Price when he writes that, despite these serious shortcomings, Proudhon was the first who 'worked out the concept of decentralized-federalist socialism' (Price, 2011: chapter 1, section 2), and is thus deserving of place in any genealogy of *autogestión* worth its salt.

Drawing inspiration from Proudhon, Bakunin viewed winning the struggle for self-determination by otherwise oppressed people – workers, peasants, and the poor and dispossessed – as key for attaining the truly free society. For him, the full development of *all* human beings and their capacities to self-organize and act cooperatively were crucial to his revolutionary visions for a better society. Indeed, economic justice, equality amongst all, and cooperative work fit hand-in-hand with his vision for freedom in the post-revolutionary society. ‘Man (*sic*) is truly free’, Bakunin would write, ‘only among equally free men’ (in Marshall, 1992: 37). For him, as with Kropotkin, liberty consisted of ‘the full development of our potential’ (*ibid.*: 39). Ultimately for Bakunin, as with Marx in a moment of agreement, while ‘cooperative societies’ were susceptible to being co-opted by the capitalist-state system, ‘[c]ooperation in all its forms’ was also for him ‘undeniably a rational and just mode of future production’ (Bakunin, 1990: 201). Foreshadowing the notion of the post-scarcity society that would be proposed a century later by Herbert Marcuse, Ivan Illich, Murray Bookchin, and others, Bakunin believed that ‘human beings’, with the imaginative and technological capacities at their disposal, ‘can... free themselves from the yoke of external nature through collective labour’ (Marshall, 1992: 291).

Anticipating yet another theme that was to be picked up later by Kropotkin, cooperatives were also for Bakunin important *sites of learning* for how to organize the liberated society. Here, Bakunin was also close to Proudhon’s (1989) hopes for cooperatives as ‘the open school, both theoretical and practical, where the workman (*sic*) learns the science of the production and distribution of wealth, where he studies... by his own experience solely, the laws of... industrial organization’ (*ibid.*: 78)⁶. In this regard, both Proudhon and Bakunin prefigured the early and mid 20th-century anarcho-syndicalist (e.g. Rocker), guild socialist (e.g. G.D.H. Cole), and council communist (e.g. Pannekoek and Mattick) ideas of ‘canalizing’ social change through ‘industrial action’ (Woodcock, 2004: 118), and even (while more reformist in political ambitions) the early cooperative movement’s fifth Rochdale principle of ‘Education, training, and information’ (ICA, 2013). Proudhon and Bakunin also foreshadowed our current understanding of workplaces – particularly worker coops – as sites for the fostering of worker solidarity that also witness rich and collaborative forms of workers’ informal learning (Smith and Dobson, 2010; Garrick, 1998; Livingstone and Scholtz, 2007; Larrabure et al., 2011; Sawchuk, 2008; Vieta, 2014).

6 Perhaps surprisingly, Antonio Gramsci’s (2000) considerations of workers’ associations and even V.I. Lenin’s later writings on cooperatives (see, for example, Lenin, 1923), had similar hopes for the educational possibilities of cooperatives and workers’ associations for the working class.

Kropotkin, in turn, viewed cooperatives, ‘village community institutions’, and communes such as the Russian *artel* and the *mir* (Kropotkin, 1989: 238, 271-3), the Swiss cantons, professional guilds and early workers’ combinations, labor unions (262), friendly societies and social clubs (274), and other forms of ‘federated’ human associations (238) and economic and social collaborations as continuations of the evolutionary nature of human beings’ inherent need to cooperate. For him, ‘mutual aid’, rather than competition and the capitalist distortions of the divisions of labor, were essential human practices that could be traced back throughout human history and pre-history. For Kropotkin, human beings naturally draw to and always already privilege cooperation rather than competition. If, for Marx, human beings were at core *homo fabers*, for Kropotkin, they were at core *homo mutuus*. The possibilities for cooperation usually gave way, when people were left to self-organize their own affairs, to the ‘essentially mutual aid character’ (in Buber, 1996: 43). This character catalyzed for him all cooperative endeavors. In Kropotkin’s view, the Rochdale cooperative pioneers and the worker-managed factories of the Paris Commune of 1871 were prime examples of the self-help nature of people that compelled them to come together into cooperative relations. Indeed, the mutual aid characteristic of human beings prefigured for Kropotkin the truly free modern society – ‘communism’ (*ibid.*: 43). ‘The fullest development of individuality’, Kropotkin would write when conceptualizing his vision of a decentralized and federated communism,

[will] combine with the highest development of *voluntary association* in all its aspects, in all possible degrees and for all conceivable purposes: an ever changing association bearing in itself the elements of its own duration and taking on the forms which at any moment best correspond to the manifold endeavours of all... creat[ing] regional and autonomous life in the smallest of its units – the street, the house-block, the district, the parish. (in Buber, 1996: 43, emphasis added)

Certainly, then, for classical social anarchists such as Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin, some form of cooperative arrangement of the means of production and economic activity, via workers’ syndicates broadly defined, was vital for attaining real human freedom in the alternative society. They were the first to begin to articulate the theoretical and practical implications of an *autogestión* motivated by and deeply infused with workers’ self-determination. For classical social anarchists, cooperation and cooperative activity could be the way forward to the ‘communist’ society, a new social order rooted fundamentally in less-dominative forms of organizing work and production.

***Autogestión* and workers' power into the first half of the 20th century: Towards aggressive encroachment**

By the last half of the 19th century, the notions and practices of *autogestión*, first articulated by the classical social anarchists, would merge with movements of worker cooperatives, organized labor, and democratized workplaces, growing in importance for envisioning the post-capitalist society. This was witnessed in, for example, the First International's endorsement of producer cooperatives (Horvat, 1982; Marx, 1978). The possibilities exemplified in the short-lived worker takeover of factories and shops during the Paris Commune of 1871 also did much to inspire revolutionary socialist and anarchist visions of the post-capitalist society of cooperatives, equally impressing Bakunin, Kropotkin, and Marx. In the US and Canada during the last quarter of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century, the nascent union movement would merge with worker cooperative experiments and other workers' collectives with the Knights of Labor and the IWW (Curl, 2009). Emerging out of revolutionary-syndicalism, anarcho-syndicalism would eventually become the predominant position of early 20th-century French, Spanish, Argentine and other labor movements that viewed the general strike and workers' takeover of factories as the first steps to the transformation of society. The more reformist British shop stewards movement of the early 20th century⁷ would also center social transformation on the self-managed shop floor, embodying 'the resentment of the craft unions against certain encroachments of power by capitalists' (Bayat, 1991: 17). For all of these early movements and proposals for workers' control, organizing workers into associations of laborers at the point of production was seen as central in raising working-class consciousness and as the key point of struggle, the first step towards transforming society (*ibid.*: 15).

For a brief time in the immediate years following World War I, a broad European movement of bottom-up shop floor organizations such as factory committees and workers' councils proliferated in countries such as Italy, Russia, Hungary, Poland, Germany, and Bulgaria. At first, they tended to emerge as direct reactions by workers and their representatives to the deplorable post-war socio-economic conditions. These workers' actions and the new organizations they brought forth in countries such as Italy, Hungary, and Germany, would subsequently expand into broader political movements, sometimes in cooperation with parties of the Left. The 1917 Russian Revolution's roots – if short-lived – in directly democratic workers' committees, for instance, is often underplayed in official histories of the rise of the Soviet Union (Brinton, 1970;

7 Conceptualized politically as 'guild socialism' in Britain in the 1910s, primarily via the writings of G.D.H. Cole (1980).

Horvat, 1982). Factory seizures and the creation of workers' councils also followed general strikes in Germany in January-February 1918, for instance, while the seizure of industry by workers in Northern Italy during the *biennio rosso* (1919-1920) witnessed a general strike of upwards of 200,000 workers, many of them also occupying and collectively running their factories (Forgasc, 2000; Gramsci, 2000). And workers' and people's committees – heavily influenced by social anarchist thought – self-managed the entire economy in large swaths of revolutionary Spain between 1936-1939 (Dolgoff, 1974). Indeed, bureaucratic trade unions and leftist political parties' general failure to respond to or support these movements created political and leadership vacuums and situations of dual power that, although also encouraged by the Bolshevik left at the time, would nevertheless see in places like Italy the working class acting independent of hierarchical organizations or state institutions for a time (Bayat, 1991).

These related historical examples of worker-led and workplace-centered collective actions, promoted by anarcho-syndicalists, communist anarchists, and council communists alike, have come to be known as the 'aggressive encroachment approach' to workers' control (Bayat, 1991: 33). Aggressive encroachment theorists such as the council communists Anton Pannekoek (2003) and Paul Mattick (1967), and the anarcho-syndicalist Rudolf Rocker (2004), explicitly argued for workers' control as a bottom-up political movement that could ground 'the revolutionary self-organization of the working class' (Bayat, 1991: 38). In contrast to the centralist, vanguardist, and *etatist* proposals of the Bolsheviks and their overrunning of the workers', peasants', and soldiers' soviets by early 1918 (Horvat, 1982), councilists and anarcho-syndicalists believed that through workers' councils the working class itself could prepare and self-direct the eventual transformation of society.

Notions of *autogestión* in the second half of the 20th century

Already by the 1920s, theories of workers' control and self-management were taking a back-seat to *etatist* socialist and communist economic and political ideologies and practices. This situation was especially augmented after the defeat of the Left in Spain in the late 1930s and the Left's preoccupation with World War II, Stalinism, and their immediate aftermaths throughout the 1940s and into the early 1950s (Horvat, 1982). Broader usage of the term *autogestión*, together with growing interest in new theories of workers' control, would emerge amongst libertarian socialist thinkers by the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s (e.g. James, 1992; Marcuse, 1969).

While, historically, as I've been laying out so far, practices of *autogestión* long predate its conceptualization, the term was first used broadly in France by Marxist and anarchist theorists in the 1950s to denote both the potential of the Yugoslav model for an alternative to the capitalist and state-socialist systems of production, and to name historical events that saw workers take on both the control and co-ownership of economic and political life, such as during the Paris Commune of 1871 and the anarchist-influenced commune and cooperative movements in Catalonia and other parts of Spain during the civil war in 1936 (Arvon, 1980; Rosanvallon, 1979). It was then applied to describe the first months of the social and economic reorganization of Algeria's post-colonial economy in 1962 (Bayat, 1991). Thereafter, the term was adopted by protagonists and theorists of the emergent 1968 social movements to circumscribe their main demands and desires for a post-capitalist society (Gorz, 1973; Hunnius et al., 1973). And, as I will argue in the last pages of this article, the term has returned with similarly radical connotations in recent years with the newest social movements struggling for alternative economic and social transformation.

But the socio-political dimensions and possibilities of *autogestión* remain in tension and have been long-debated when conceptualizing what exactly the term entails for workers and society. First, to what degree do workers actually *control* the labor process when self-managing it? This is an issue of *management*. Second, do workers themselves *own*, collectively, the means of production, or do they 'share' ownership with private investors or the state? This is an issue of *property relations*. Both issues also force us to further ask: to what degree do workers freely decide production issues, what and how they work, how much they work, how they set up the labor process, if and when they can dissolve the firm, and so on? When *autogestión* is a question of how much *participation* workers have in *managing* the firm while the means of production continues to be owned by private investors or the state, the term's conceptualization tends to ideologically fall within liberal democratic or state socialist camps. Here, in other words, the degree to which workers can self-manage their work extends only to issues concerning the degree of participation they have been allowed or afforded by the owners of the means of production. Moreover, within liberal democratic perspectives, workers' control and self-management are usually always considered and constituted within a broader capitalist market system; the abolishment of this system is, for liberal democratic advocates of self-management, rarely top of mind. When, on the other hand, *autogestión* is also considered as an issue of the *collective* or *social ownership* of the means of production, private property relations are directly addressed while the direct management of the means of production by workers themselves is assumed (Vieta, 2015).

Some radical theorists, such as Mario Tronti (1973; 2010) and the French collective *Négation* (1975), specifically criticized *autogestión* for its continued reformist tendencies, falling far short, they argued, in its actual revolutionary potential of abolishing the capitalist system of production. For them, workers' self-management as an 'other' of capitalism borders on an impossibility because all labor within capitalism, as that 'special' commodity that valorizes more than it costs for the purchaser of labor-power, to paraphrase Marx, 'equals exploitation' (Tronti, 2010). Moreover, all labor within the capitalist mantle 'embodies the class relation' predicated by the labor process under capital (Tronti, 1979: 9, in Thoburn, 2003: 110). In addition, workers' self-management of the production of commodities that will ultimately be sold on open markets is still the 'management' of labor and leads to workers' 'self-exploitation' as 'collective capitalists'⁸. For these critics, as articulated recently by some Italian autonomists, the real freedom towards self-determination rests with the 'refusal of work', including 'exodus' from the compulsion to work and the puritan notion that any 'dignity' might reside in work (Weeks, 2005; 2011). The specifics of the alternative economic arrangements that would undergird a system rooted in the refusal of work, however, remain vague in contemporary autonomist thought⁹.

A more radical notion of *autogestión*, as it has been conceptualized in recent decades, takes these tensions into account and strives to move beyond them towards radical ends (Arvon, 1980; Miranda Lorenzo, 2011; Peixoto de Albuquerque, 2004; Rosanvallon, 1979). In its application by those that explicitly define their projects as one of *autogestión*, or in its conceptualizations by Left scholars that have theorized it, the term has been applied in a much more radical way than mere *workers' participation* in co-managing an otherwise capitalist firm.

8 On these themes, see also McNally (1993).

9 It deserves to be pointed out here, if in passing, that libertarian socialists (such as autonomist Marxists) and social anarchists decidedly agree on what a liberational self-management is *not*. The adoption of workplace participation schemes by *laissez faire* human resource management (HRM) programs, for instance, underscore the criticisms leveled at self-management by some on the radical libertarian Left. With roots in the Human Relations School of the 1930s, proponents of HRM openly advocate for workers' participation, especially as responses to employees' resistances to scientific management (Grint, 2005). HRM proponents recognize the efficaciousness of aspects of self-management for appeasing unions' demands for 'healthier', more 'participative', and more 'open' workplaces, for example. Far short of reducing exploitation in the workplace, of course, these reactionary self-management or workers' participation schemes have generally succeeded in investing workers more and more into the broader capitalist system and the workplaces that employ them and, thus, paradoxically, have served to extract more relative surplus-value from them while lessening the costly application and need of direct supervision (Bratton et al., 2003).

In its radical practices and notions, *autogestión* has paralleled the desires of workers to more fully self-determine their working lives beyond the mantle of hierarchical control, private gain, and private property. Indeed, in recent decades, the concept of *autogestión* has been recast within the radical stream of self-determination by more recent libertarian socialist and social anarchist theorists.

The French anarchist sociologist Henri Arvon (1980), for example, whose book was translated into Spanish in 1980 as *La autogestión* and had influence in introducing the term to Latin American countries such as Argentina (Wyczykier, 2009), posits that the desire for *autogestión* long predates the 1960s social movements. For him, the term parallels the ways that pre- and non-capitalist communities have self-managed their own productive and social affairs. For Arvon, however, the conscious demand for *autogestión* from workers, underscoring its roots in the stream of self-determination, only arises with the formal subsumption of labor within capitalist paradigms. As more self-determined and locally rooted ways of economic life like the commons and craft-based production began to disappear in Europe with the advent of capitalism, more and more workers began to demand greater participation in economic and productive life and, indeed, increasingly, as witnessed in the rise of worker cooperatives, autonomy from capital and alternatives to waged work. Here we find, according to Arvon, the first modern struggles for and experiments with *autogestión*, initially theorized most concretely, as I reviewed in the first section of this article, by classical social anarchists. Arvon's conceptualization of *autogestión* could also be conceived of using E.P. Thompson's notion of the moral economy undergirding the drive of marginalized people to self-determine their own economic and social lives and retain traditional and communal ways of provisioning for life's needs (Thompson, 1991). As Argentine sociologist Gabriela Wyczykier puts it, commenting on Arvon's historical analysis, the struggle for *autogestión* 'reflects a permanent hope for the human being' for self-determining socio-economic life (Wyczykier, 2009: 30). Most fundamentally, then, extending out from Arvon's assessment, the desire for *autogestión* is the historical human drive and demand to be free from exploitation (Bayat, 1991) and to collectively determine the direction of the socio-economic spheres of life (Horvat, 1982), all integral demands in the stream of self-determination.

Together with Arvon, another French theorist who had a role to play in further conceptualizing *autogestión* was Pierre Rosanvallon (1979). For Rosanvallon, *autogestión* is saturated in praxis and is an umbrella concept that moves the socio-economic transformation of society at large from state-capitalist centralization to more horizontal and directly democratic practices. For Rosanvallon, these practices at the local level, in tune with classical social anarchist notions of the prefigurative force of workers' self-directed organizations and theories of

aggressive encroachment, could then radiate out onto all socio-economic institutions. While for him the practice is not limited to workplace or industrial democracy, certainly workplaces would need to be democratized too for the emancipated society. In line with Arvon, before it became a doctrine of the New Left of the 1960s, Rosanvallon claimed, *autogestión* had already long been a socio-political practice (*ibid.*: 12). It was embodied in institutions such as cooperatives and in historical workers' movements such as the 1871 Paris Commune; the early soviets of the 1905 Russian Revolution; the Catalanian, Levantian, and Andalusian communes of 1936; and in the demands infusing the May '68 events. In the practices of the movements of '68, he argued, in contrast to the centralist and *etatist* positions of the French Communist Party and the French CGT union central at the time, the demands for *autogestión* promised a 'socialism of liberty'. *Autogestión* has thus been, from its beginnings for Rosanvallon, a prefigurative concept infused with 'promises and hopes for a different political and economic reality' (*ibid.*). For Rosanvallon, however, the demands for *autogestión* post 1968, in practice, turned out to be a disappointment. By the time Rosanvallon was reflecting on *autogestión* in the aftermath of the movements of '68, the concept encapsulated for him 'what could have been' and, implicitly, what can still be, rather than what *autogestión* had actually become (*ibid.*: 20). Nevertheless, the concept continued, for him, to be instilled with prefigurative promise for social change, which would be infused with people's direct participation in the socio-economic and political dimensions of society.

***Autogestión* and the stream of self-determination today: A 'new cooperativism' for the 21st century?**

Theorizing Autogestión today

More contemporary conceptualizations of *autogestión*, while not discarding the call for more widespread societal transformation advocated by Arvon and Rosanvallon post '68, tend to focus on the implications for transforming the economic realm and, more specifically, its productive entities as first steps to possible longer-term and broader social change. Basque social economy theorists Antxon Mendizábal and Anjel Errasti (2008), for instance, argue that *autogestión* is a dynamic concept rooted in libertarian and anarchist strands of workers' self-activity, further suggesting its conceptual roots in the classical social anarchist stream of self-determination. Mendizábal and Errasti position *autogestión* on two planes, taking into account practices of 'cooperative production' at the level of the enterprise and 'social and participative democracy' at the 'territorial level' (*ibid.*: 1). Historical experiences of *autogestión* within the economic realm have been about 'processes which look for the transformation of relations of production'

and ‘a process that articulates the different workers’ collectives to be coordinated and realized within productive structures of cooperation and solidarity’ (*ibid.*: 3). For them, in sum, *autogestión* entails four key characteristics:

- (I) the organizational nature of productive entities as social(ized) property;
- (II) the collective and directly democratic participation in the coordination of this productive activity by workers and, ideally, by all people affected by this activity in what they term ‘common solidarity’;
- (III) respect for the differences and autonomy of each productive entity and the people that work therein; and
- (IV) the social(ized) organization of such a system by some sort of federated political organ that, via a recallable delegate model, democratically configures the way production is to unfold socially.

As with Anton and Rosanvallon, Mendizábal and Errasti’s model of *autogestión* has its theoretical roots in the forms of cooperative and collective production practiced in parts of revolutionary Spain in 1936 (Broué & Témine, 1962; Rama, 1962), as well as resonating with anarcho-syndicalist and council communist proposals. With Mendizábal and Errasti, we also begin to see how the concept has actually been taken up in Latin America throughout the 1990s and early 2000s.

Contemporary Latin American theorists of *autogestión* suggest that the term most immediately invokes the democratization of the economic realm at the micro-level of the productive enterprise, such as workers’ coops and collectives, worker-recuperated enterprises¹⁰, rural producer collectives, family-based microenterprises, and neighbourhood collectives (Cattani, 2004). From out of these micro-economic experiments, often loosely federated territorially in some way, the state can then be lobbied to support them, and then, it is hoped, transformed into an entity responsive to the needs of worker-led firms and local community development. Such has been the approach taken up in Brazil in the past decades, for example, with the relationship between the state (via the National Secretary of the Solidarity Economy), many of the country’s unions, and rural and urban cooperative movements that emerged after the early, anti-neoliberal experiments with *autogestión* in the 1980s and 1990s, such as the landless peasant and worker movements (Singer and Souza, 2000; Gaiger and Dos Anjos, 2011). Eventually, this bottom-up approach, it is thought, could see the further proliferation of a people-centred solidarity or popular economy rooted

¹⁰ Formerly investor-owned or private firms taken over and self-managed by former employees (see Vieta, 2010a).

in economic justice and participative democracy (Coraggio, 1999; 2004; Pastore, 2010; Sarria Icaza and Tiribia, 2004).

One of Latin America's most influential theorists of *autogestión*, the Brazilian sociologist Paulo Peixoto de Albuquerque (2004), for instance, suggests this more 'gradual encroachment' approach to social transformation in his four-pronged definition of the term. For him, *autogestión* has:

- (I) a *social character*, where people within all social strata are engaged in the development of a new societal order grounded in self-determination and participation;
- (II) an *economic character*, where the social implications of production are taken into account and where work would be privileged over capital, as in the case of worker cooperatives;
- (III) a *political character*, where, as with Porto Alegre's participatory budgeting practices, all people affected would have a say in decision-making and collectively constructing some sort of popular power; and
- (IV) a *technical character*, which points to the (re)design and (re)deployment of non-exploitative and re-rationalized divisions of labour and production processes. (Peixoto de Albuquerque, 2004: 31-38)

Whereas Arvon and Rosanvallon refuse to specifically center on the economic realm and the firm when conceptualizing *autogestión*, preferring to remain at the level of sociological theorization and have the emancipated, self-managed society worked out by those living it immanently, Peixoto de Albuquerque and other contemporary Latin American theorists of *autogestión*, such as José Luís Coraggio (1999; 2004), Paul Singer (2004), and Luiz Inácio Gaiger (2003), have reversed the theorization, working from within the myriad bottom-up experiments of the social and solidarity economies across the region that have been responding to and moving beyond neoliberal enclosures in recent years.

In sum, the contemporary conceptualizations of *autogestión* that I have been sketching out in this section take into account implicitly three broad characteristics: (1) the *effectiveness* and *viability* of associated forms of social production for provisioning for life's needs and producing social wealth; (2) economic justice in some form of *democratic organization* of productive entities; and (3) the *social ownership* of the means of production.

In myriad examples today, the seeds of another world are being prefigured and are emerging, grounded in these three broad characteristics and gradually blooming into new worker- and community-driven experiments in *autogestión*.

From Italy's *centri sociale* (social centres)¹¹, to the degrowth movement, to Latin America's indigenous movement of self-managed villages under the auspices of the notion of *el buen vivir*, to India's Dalit women's agricultural cooperatives organized via village-based council's called Sanghams (Mookerjea, 2010), or to Argentina's worker-recuperated enterprises movement, *autogestión* is becoming, once again, a persuasive solution for the self-determined life for groups of formally and informally employed people around the world. Other promising modes of *autogestión* emerging around the world today include: Quebec's *cooperative solidaire* (solidarity cooperatives), Brazil's landless peasants' and workers' movements, guerilla gardening initiatives, the DIY movement, barter groups, community cash systems, neighbourhood assemblies, community dining halls and free health clinics, alternative media projects, collective farms and intentional communities, and housing coops...to name only a few¹².

This global community-focused movement in *autogestión* from below is both a reaction to the worst effects of neoliberal enclosures and prefigurative experiments beyond them. In these spaces, what is prime is not the pursuit of profit and self-interest, but the democratic control of the labor process, the sharing of surpluses, inter-cooperative networks of solidarity, and the deepening of concern for the needs and desires of people and surrounding communities beyond just the daily business concerns of the firm within values and practices of mutual aid. In short, they are alternative islands of solidarity economies within a sea of crisis-riddled capitalism that begin, from within and from below, to slowly corrode and highlight the deficiencies of the status quo socio-economic order. *Autogestión* today is most promising for the search for socio-economic self-determination when it both contests and begins to move beyond the logics of neoliberal markets and stimulates its own proliferation at the local level.

The 'new cooperativism'

Elsewhere, I have called today's resurgence in myriad forms of community-based projects of *autogestión* that prefiguratively point to paths beyond capitalist exploitation and circuits of production and exchange, 'the new cooperativism' (Vieta, 2010b).

The new cooperativism finds its historical roots in the social anarchist-influenced stream of self-determination and its suggestive potential for another world. The

11 Community-recuperated spaces emerging from once-private or abandoned and now occupied and 'commonized' buildings and factories.

12 For a wide range of examples of experiments in self-determination and *autogestión* today, see Buglione and Schlüter (2010), Cattani (2004), Parker et al. (2014), Gibson-Graham (2003; 2006), Miller and Albert, (2009), and Vieta (2010b).

new cooperativism today is a bottom-up, grassroots-driven movement of *autogestión* distinguished by five features:

- (I) It emerges as direct responses by working people or grassroots groups to the crisis of the neoliberal model;
- (II) Its protagonists do not necessarily have tight links to older cooperative, labor, or social movements, beginning their collective projects from out of immediate social, cultural, or economic needs rather than from pre-existing ideological sentiments;
- (III) Its politics tend to emerge at the level of the everyday and tend to take on, when compared to capitalocentric frameworks, more equitable ways of redistributing social wealth and more ethical ways of engaging with the other and the earth;
- (IV) It tends to involve strong practices of horizontalized labor processes and decision-making structures, often including collective ownership of social, cultural, or economic production; culturally- and gender-sensitive divisions of labor; and more egalitarian schemes of surplus allocation, certainly when compared to capitalist production, and even when compared to older or more traditional cooperative experiences; and
- (V) It has stronger connections with surrounding communities than capitalocentric economic models; many of them embrace clear social objectives and local initiatives of community development. (Vieta, 2015)

Both as direct responses to neoliberal enclosures and perpetual crises, *and* as real alternatives beyond, the new cooperativism puts into sharp relief how people's desires for self-determination and freedom in economic life can begin to be expressed and proliferate outside of the yoke of capitalist discourses.

A new cooperativist sentiment rooted in the kind of radical *autogestión* I have been mapping out so far is also implicitly (and at times explicitly) present in contemporary anarchist and post-anarchist writings, especially when drawing on today's prefigurative alternative experiments. While their debt to classical social anarchist economic thought and the stream of self-determination that I have been mapping out in this article resonates strongly in their writings, contemporary anarchist and post-anarchist thinkers often gloss over, assume, or under-theorize the self-management experiments they mobilize as illustrative of alternatives to the neoliberal capitalist-state system. Nevertheless, an *autogestión* that is deeply invested in the kind of new cooperative experiments I am thinking of here is similar to, for instance, Andrej Grubacic and David Graeber's 'new radical dreams and visions' of 21st century social movements rooted in 'decentralization, voluntary association, mutual aid, the network model' (2004: par. 2), or Richard Day's (2005) conceptualization of the 'newest social movements' that both resist neoliberal globalization and that also outline new,

non-hegemonic socio-economic realities beyond the politics of demand, or Uri Gordon's (2007) insightful analysis of the anti-authoritarian politics that ground the social movements, affinity groups, and alter-globalization movements of the 21st century.

In the remaining paragraphs, I'd like to begin to articulate theoretically the prefigurative practices that make today's *autogestión* so compelling for a growing number of social groups from around the world and that is encapsulated in the new cooperativism. To do so, I draw from recent autonomist Marxist thinking around self-management.

As I have argued elsewhere, new cooperative experiments in *autogestión* imminently transform *organizations, communities, and subjectivities* (Vieta, 2014). New cooperative organizations are driven by the possibilities of another kind of life, which eventually becomes clear to their protagonists praxically *from within their moments of struggle*; for them, their *politicization emerges out of their actions*, motivated often by the conjunctures of crises they find themselves in¹³. For the protagonists of the new cooperativism, their *hope grows from their responses to their difficulties* rather than from an enlightened vanguard; from below and within their moments of struggle, not from above or outside of them. Cándido González, labor activist and former member of Argentina's worker-recuperated firm Artes Gráficas Chilavert, eloquently articulates the immanent change in his own subjectivity that emerged from his own struggles in the trajectory of occupying, taking over the former capitalist workplace that employed him and his *compañeros*, and transforming it into a worker cooperative:

Early on in the fight to reclaim our work we started fighting for our salaries, for getting out of our severe debt-loads that the boss had left us.... But now I know, looking back on our struggle three years on. Now I can see where the change in me started, because it begins during your struggles. First, you fight for not being left out on the street with nothing. And then, suddenly, you see that you've formed a cooperative and you start getting involved in the struggle of others. You don't realize at the time but within your own self there's a change that's taking place, you don't see it directly at the time. You realize it afterwards, when time has transpired...doing things that you would never imagine yourself doing. (González, 2005)

Autogestión in the new cooperativism, to be sure, is not a ready-made solution for liberation from capitalist exploitation. Indeed, it remains always at tension within the existing capitalist economic status-quo and its supportive state apparatus. It lives uncomfortably within a 'dual reality' (Diamantopolous, 2012; Vieta, 2015) between market mechanisms that coordinate economic activity (and on a

13 For similar arguments emerging out of the struggles of 1968, see Marcuse (1969).

planetary scale) on the one hand, and the self-determination and radical democracy at the point of production and consumption it prefigures, on the other. As Marx (1992) also cautioned concerning cooperatives, paralleling Bakunin's warnings: 'Excellent in principle... and useful in practice', on the one hand, coops nevertheless, if limited to a 'narrow circle' of private work disembodied from greater struggles against capital, 'will never be able to arrest the growth... of monopoly, to free the masses' (*ibid.*: 80).

But we must also remember that the prefigurative potential of *autogestión* in the new cooperativism does not rest on its possibility for overthrowing the system *tout court*. Nor, at the same time, can a reformist model hope for the eventual proliferation of the cooperative economy at the expense of capitalism. The most radical moments of *autogestión*, I contend, happen in spite of the system, as pockets of possibility within planetary capital, increasingly offering a more compelling model for people to secure their economic and social needs and desires.

Autogestión in the new cooperativism is part of a focused trajectory of socio-economic practices that foster the continued expansion of solidarity economies and experiments, collaborative production, locally based spaces of mutual aid, extended networks of solidarity, and non-marketized socio-economic relations. Contemporary notions of 'the common', for instance, map out what this trajectory looks like in new cooperative practices today. For autonomist Marxists Greig de Peuter and Nick Dyer-Witford, the prefigurative force of the new cooperativism rests with its possibilities for 'the circulation of the common', in contrast to 'the circulation of capital' (de Peuter and Dyer-Witford, 2010: 45). For them, the interplay of three major areas of the commons are crucial for an alternative circulation: the 'eco-social commons', such as fisheries and nature reserves, protected watersheds, and commonly controlled forestry practices; the 'networked commons', such as 'non-rivalrous' digital goods, online resource pooling, and copyleft practices; and, most relevant for this article, the 'democratized organization of productive and reproductive work' in what they call the 'labour commons' most readily visible in worker coops and other labor-managed firms (*ibid.*). De Peuter and Dyer-Witford illustrate how a new circulation of the common could unfold by reconfiguring Marx's circulation of capital formula:

C represents not a Commodity but Commons, and the transformation is not into Money but Association [A]. The basic formula is therefore: $A - C - A'$. This can then be elaborated into $A - C \dots P \dots C' - A' \dots$ (*ibid.*).

In fact, as a 'labour commons' (*ibid.*: 37-39), a worker cooperative's redistribution of economic surpluses and its worker-members' self-control of their labor

processes are *the* distinguishing characteristic of these labor-managed firms as *socialized* productive entities. In a worker coop it is, after all, labor – the direct producers – that *hires* capital, not the other way around as in capitalist businesses, permitting worker-members to potentially control the labor process and redistribute surpluses democratically (Craig, 1993: 94). And so long as worker cooperatives do not hire waged-workers that are not members, and so long as they redistribute earnings equitably amongst all members, surplus-labor too begins to be eliminated in these spaces (Vieta, 2015). In sum, for de Peuter and Dyer-Witthof, a labor commons transforms the workplace into ‘an *organizational commons*, the labour performed... [into] a *commoning practice*, and the surplus generated, [into] a *commonwealth*’ (de Peuter and Dyer-Witthof, 2010: 45, emphasis in original). These are all central features of the new cooperativism.

Rather than predetermined blueprints for alternative economic spaces, the model of the labor commons is instead inclusive of how experiments of *autogestión* in the new cooperativism can proliferate, within ‘new economic imaginaries’ that incite the creation of spaces of alternatives out of already established ones into something akin to what Gibson-Graham call the ‘generative commons’ (in de Peuter and Dyer Witthof, 2010: 46; see also Vieta, 2010b). An open-ended, generative vision of this alternative economic possibility reminds us of the open-ended, under-determined processual ‘becoming’ of *autogestión* introducing this article. Here, *autogestión* would not be a new ‘hegemonic imaginary’, as Stephen Shukaitis reminds us, but rather a generative process of ‘developing such spaces with the intent of *creating resources and possibilities to expand and deepen other struggles* as well’ (Shukaitis, 2010: 72, emphasis mine). Similarly, Ethan Miller (Miller and Albert, 2009) has called for the continual building of a ‘wider economic movement’, ‘an alternative [solidarity-based] ecosystem’ that ‘must generate interventions at every point in the economic cycle’ (*ibid.*: 13).

In sketching out how people are collectively provisioning for their needs and producing and distributing goods and services otherwise in short supply – that is in meeting their socio-economic needs – the new cooperativism’s practices of *autogestión* is, in the spirit of de Peuter and Dyer-Witthof’s, Shukaitis’, and Miller’s reminders, beginning to (re)imagine a world where bottom-up and community-based practices of *autogestión* and self-determination can flourish. And it begins to map, prefiguratively, another, self-determined socio-economic world in the process.

Concluding thoughts, continued prefigurations

The stream of self-determination infusing *autogestión* is part of the historical and conceptual DNA of today's social and solidarity economies, self-managed workers' organizations, and the new cooperativism. These contemporary experiments in self-management prefigure a self-determining society. They do this in their privileging of workers' full capacities to conceptualize and carry out production in association, in more equitable organizations of the division of labor, in their practices of mutual aid and their overall concern for the wellbeing of all members of the cooperative organization and surrounding communities, in their less-commodified labor practices as associates that co-own and co-managed production, and in the forms of non-market economies they begin to make possible through federated associations of productive entities that promote community economic development outside the firm.

Genealogically rooted in the stream of self-determination and classical social anarchist thought, new cooperative practices of *autogestión* have been emerging, prefiguratively, from out of the shell of neoliberal capitalist processes of production to start becoming something else. Not as a new totality – a new and detailed socio-economic model, ready-made to replace the old one – but, rather, as a set of future-oriented possibilities, experiments, or preliminary sketches that suggest alternative economic, productive, cultural, and social practices in the present *and* for tomorrow.

As the historical experiences self-managed workers' organizations teach us, the struggle for the society free from exploitation calls for human beings to collectively take back control of our very *productive capacities* and *economic imaginings* (Gibson-Graham, 2006) – that is, to win the freedom to self-actualize and provision for our needs and wants *in common*. It is true that *autogestión* could equally accommodate capitalist coordination and control. But it has also always been suggestive of, if not infused with, the stream of self-determination. As Kropotkin so clearly put it more than a century ago, the struggle for self-determination is the struggle for

a new form of society...[that] must take the place of the old one: a society of equals, who will not be compelled to sell their hands and brains to those who choose to employ them in a haphazard way, but who will be able to apply their knowledge and capacities to production, in an organism so constructed as to combine all the efforts for procuring the greatest sum possible of well-being for all. (Kropotkin and Brandes, 2009: 398)

references

- Anarchist FAQ (2009) 'What could the economic structure of anarchy look like?' [<http://www.infoshop.org/AnarchistFAQSection13>].
- Arvon, H. (1980) *La autogestión*. Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica/Edición Nuevo País.
- Atzeni, M. (2012) *Alternative work organization*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bakunin, M. (1990) *Statism and anarchy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bayat, A. (1991) *Work, politics, and power: An international perspective on workers' control and self-management*. New York, NY: Monthly Press Review.
- Berkman, A. (1929) *What is communist anarchism?* [http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/bright/berkman/communistanarchy.pdf].
- Boggs Jr., C. (1977) 'Revolutionary process, political strategy, and the dilemma of power', *Theory & Society*, 4(3): 359-93.
- Bookchin, M. (1990) *Remaking society*. Montreal: Black Rose Books.
- Bratton, J., J.H. Mills, T. Pynch and P. Sawchuk (2004) *Workplace learning: A critical introduction*. Aurora, ON: Garamond Press.
- Brinton, M. (1970) *The Bolsheviks and workers' control, 1917-1921: The state and counter-revolution*. Montreal: Black Rose Books.
- Broué, P. and E. Termine (1962) *La revolución y la guerra de España*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica.
- Buglione, S. and R. Schlüter (2010) 'Solidarity-based and co-operative economy and ethical business: Trends, innovations, and experiences in Europe', Rosa Luxembourg Foundation (Brussels). Background Paper.
- Buber, M. (1996) *Paths in utopia*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- Cattani, A.D. (ed.) (2004) *La otra economía*. Buenos Aires: Altamira.
- Cole, G.D.H. (1980) *Guild socialism restated*. Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers.
- Coraggio, J.L. (1999) *De la economía de los sectores populares a la economía del trabajo*. Quito: ILDIS.
- Coraggio, J.L. (2004) 'Una alternativa socioeconómica necesaria: La economía social', in C. Danani (ed.) *Política social y economía social. Debates fundamentales*. Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento and Editorial Altamira.
- Craig, J.G. (1993) *The nature of co-operation*. Montreal: Black Rose Books.
- Critchley, S. (2007) *Infinitely demanding: Ethics of commitment, politics of resistance*. London: Verso.
- Curl, J. (2009) *For all the people: Uncovering the hidden history of cooperation, cooperative movements, and communalism in America*. Oakland, CA: PM Press.
- Day, R.J.F. (2005) *Gramsci is dead: Anarchist currents in the newest social movements*. London/Toronto: Pluto Press/Between the Lines.
- De Angelis, M. and D. Harvie (2014) 'The commons', in Parker, M., G. Cheney, V. Fournier and Chris Land (eds.) *The Routledge companion to alternative organization*. London: Routledge.
- De Pasquale, J. (2009) Personal interview [recorded and transcribed by Marcelo Vieta].
- de Peuter, G. and N. Dyer-Witheford (2010) 'Commons and cooperatives', *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture and Action*, 4(1): 30-56.

- Diamantopolous, M. (2012) 'Breaking out of co-operation's "iron cage": From movement degeneration to building a developmental movement', *Annals of Public and Co-operative Economics*, 83(2): 197-212.
- Dolgoff, S. (1974). *The anarchist collectives: Workers' self-management in the Spanish revolution 1936-1939*. Montreal: Black Rose Books.
- Farmer, P. (1979) 'Enjoying language: An adventure with words'. *The English Journal*, 68(5): 58-61.
- Feenberg, A. (2002). *Transforming technology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Franks, B. (2006) *Rebel alliances: The means and ends of contemporary British anarchisms*. Oakland, CA: AK Press.
- Franks, B. (2010). 'Vanguardism and paternalism', in J. Nun and S. Wahl (eds.) *New Perspectives on Anarchism*. Plymouth: Lexington Books.
- Forgasc, D. (ed.) (2000) *The Antonio Gramsci reader*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Gaiger, L.I. (2003) 'A economia solidária diante do modo de produção capitalista', *Caderno CRH*, 16(39). [<http://www.cadernocrh.ufba.br/viewarticle.php?id=171>].
- Gaiger, L.I. and E. Dos Anjos (2011) 'Economía solidaria en Brasil: La actualidad de las cooperativas para la emancipación histórica de los trabajadores', in C. Piñeiro Harnecker (ed.) *Cooperativas y socialismo: Una mirada desde Cuba*. La Habana: Editores Caminos.
- Garrick, J. (1998) *Informal learning in the workplace: Unmasking human resource development*. London: Routledge.
- Gibson-Graham, J.K. (2003) 'Enabling ethical economies: Cooperativism and class', *Critical Sociology*, 29(2): 123-161.
- Gibson-Graham, J.K. (2006) *A postcapitalist politics*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Gide, C. (1905) *Les œuvres de Charles Gide, Vol. 4: Coopération et économie sociale 1886-1904*. Paris: Patrice Devillers.
- Graeber, D. (2004) *Fragments of an anarchist anthropology*. Chicago, IL: Prickly Paradigm Press.
- Graeber, D. (2009) *Direct action: An ethnography*. Oakland, CA: AK Press.
- Gramsci, A. (2000) 'Factory councils and socialist democracy', in D. Forgasc (ed.) *The Antonio Gramsci reader*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Gray, J. (1831) *Social system: A treatise on the principle of exchange*. London: Rees, Orme, Brown & Green.
- Grint, K. (2005) *The sociology of work: Introduction*. Malden, MA: Polity Press.
- González, C. (2005) Personal interview [recorded and transcribed by Marcelo Vieta].
- Gordon, U. (2007) *Anarchy alive! Anti-authoritarian politics from practice to theory*. London: Pluto Press.
- Gorz, A. (1973) 'Workers' control: More than just that'. In G.D.G. Hunnius and J. Case (eds.) *Workers' control: A reader on labor and social change*. New York, NY: Vintage.
- Grubic, A. and D. Graeber (2004) 'Anarchism, or the revolutionary movement of the twenty-first century'. [<http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/andrej-grubic-david-graeber-anarchism-or-the-revolutionary-movement-of-the-twenty-first-centu>].
- Heilbroner, R.L. and W.S. Milberg (1998) *The making of economic society*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

- Hobsbawm, E. (1964) *Labouring men: Studies in the history of labour*. London: Basic Books.
- Horvat, B. (1982) *The political economy of socialism: A marxist social theory*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.
- Hunnius, G.D.G., G. David and J. Case (eds.) (1973) *Workers' control: A reader on labor and social change*. New York, NY: Vintage.
- ICA. (2013) 'Co-operative identity, values & principles'. Geneva: International Co-operative Alliance [<http://ica.coop/en/what-co-op/co-operative-identity-values-principles>].
- James, C.L.R. (1992) 'The class struggle', in A. Grimshaw (ed.) *The C.L.R. James reader*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- Kropotkin, P. (1989) *Mutual aid: A factor of evolution*. Montreal: Black Rose Books.
- Kropotkin, P. and G. Brandes. (2009) *Memoirs of a revolutionist*. New York, NY: Cosimo.
- Kropotkin, P. (1995) *'The conquest of bread' and other writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lenin, V.I. 1923. 'On cooperation' [<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1923/jan/06.htm>].
- Larrabure, M., M. Vieta and D. Schugurensky (2011) 'The "new cooperativism" in Latin America: Worker-recuperated enterprises and socialist production units'. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 43(2): 181-196.
- Livingstone, D.W. and A. Scholtz (2007) 'Contradictions of labour processes and workers' use of skills in advanced capitalist economies', in V. Shalla and W. Clement (eds.) *Work in tumultuous times: Critical perspectives*. Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- MacPherson, I. (2007) *One path to co-operative studies: A selection of papers and presentations*. Victoria: New Rochdale Press.
- Marcuse, H. (1964) *One-dimensional man: Studies in the ideology of advanced industrial society*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Marcuse, H. (1966) *Eros and civilization: A philosophical inquiry into Freud*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Marcuse, H. (1969) *Essay on liberation*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Marshall, P. (1992) *Demanding the impossible: A history of anarchism*. London: HarperCollins.
- Marx, K. (1978) 'Inaugural address of the Working Men's International Association', in R. Tucker (ed.) *The Marx-Engels reader*. Melksham: Norton Press.
- Marx, K. (1992) *The First International and afterwards: Political writings, Vol. 3*. London: Penguin.
- Mattick, P. (1967) 'Workers' control' [<http://www.marxists.org/archive/mattick-paul/1967/workers-control.htm>].
- McNally, D. (1993) *Against the market: Political economy, market socialism and the Marxist critique*. London: Verso.
- McNally, D. (2007) *Another world is possible: Globalization and anti-capitalism*. Winnipeg: Abeiter Ring Publishing.
- Mendizábal, A. and A. Errasti (2008) *Premisas teóricas de la autogestión*, paper presented at the EcoCri 2008: XI Jornadas de Economía Crítica conference, Bilbao, Basque Country.

- Miller, E. and M. Albert (2009) 'Post-capitalist alternatives: New perspectives on economic democracy'. Socialist Renewal Publishing Project. (GEO) Collective [http://www.readingfromtheleft.com/PDF/SRPP/PostCapAlternatives.pdf].
- Miranda Lorenzo, H. (2011) 'Cooperativismo y autogestión en las visiones de Marx, Engels y Lenin', in C. Piñero Harnecker (ed.) *Cooperativas y socialismo: Una mirada desde Cuba*. La Habana: Editores Caminos.
- Mookerjee, S. (2010) 'The Sangham strategy: Lessons for a cooperative mode of production', *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture and Action*, 4(1): 110-132.
- Négation. (1975) *Lip and the self-managed counter-revolution*. Detroit, MI: Black and Red.
- Ness, I. and D. Azzellini (2011) *Ours to master and to own: Workers' control from the commune to the present*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket.
- Noble, D. (1993) *Progress without people: In Defence of Luddism*. Chicago, IL: Charles H. Kerr.
- Pannekoek, A. (2003) *Workers' councils*. Oakland, CA: AK Press.
- Parker, M., G. Cheney, V. Fournier, and C. Land (eds.) (2014) *The Routledge companion to alternative organization*. London: Routledge.
- Pastore, R.E. (2010) 'Un panorama del resurgimiento de la economía social y solidaria en la Argentina' [http://www.socioeco.org/bdf_fiche-document-834_en.html].
- Peixoto de Albuquerque, P. (2004) 'Autogestión', in A.D. Cattani (ed.) *La otra economía*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Altamira.
- Polanyi, K. (1957) *The great transformation: The political and economic origins of our time*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Price, W. (2011) 'Marx's economics for anarchists' [http://www.anarkismo.net/article/20585].
- Proudhon, P.-J. (1969) 'What is property? An inquiry into the principle of right and of government'. London: William Reeves Bellamy.
- Proudhon, P.-J. (1972) *System of economic contradictions: Or, the philosophy of poverty*. New York, NY: Arno Press.
- Proudhon, P.-J. (1979) *The principle of federation*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Proudhon, P.-J. (1989) *General idea of the revolution in the nineteenth century*. London: Freedom Press.
- Rama, C.M. (1962) *Revolución social en el siglo veinte*. Montevideo: Nuestro Tiempo.
- Rocker, R. (1997) *Nationalism and culture*. Montreal: Black Rose Books.
- Rocker, R. (2004) *Anarcho-syndicalism in theory and practice*. Oakland, CA: AK Press.
- Rosanvallon, P. (1979). *La autogestión*. Madrid: Editorial Fundamentos.
- Sarria Icaza, A.M. and L. Tiribia (2004) 'Economía popular', in A. D. Cattani (ed.) *La otra economía*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Altamira.
- Sawchuk, P. (2008) 'Theories and methods for research on informal learning and work: Towards cross-fertilization', *Studies in Continuing Education*, 29(3): 34-48.
- Shukaitis, S. (2010) 'Sisyphus and the labour of imagination: Autonomy, cultural production, and the antinomies of worker self-management', *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture and Action*, 4(1): 57-82.
- Singer, P. (2004) 'Economía solidaria', in A.D. Cattani (ed.) *La otra economía*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Altamira
- Singer, P. and A.R. Souza (eds.) (2000) *A economia solidária no Brasil: A autogestão como resposta ao desemprego*. São Paulo: Contexto.

- Smith, D. and S. Dobson (2010) 'Storing and transmitting skills: The expropriation of working-class control', in D.W. Livingstone, Smith and W. Smith (eds.) *Manufacturing meltdown: Reshaping steel work*. Winnipeg: Fernwood.
- Thoburn, N. (2003) *Deleuze, Marx and politics*. London: Routledge.
- Thompson, E.P. (1991) *Customs in common*. New York, NY: New Press.
- Tronti, M. (1973). 'Social capital', *Telos*, 17: 98-121.
- Tronti, M. (2010) 'Struggle against labor'. *Operaismo in English* [<http://operaismoenglish.wordpress.com/2010/09/29/struggle-against-labor/>].
- Vieta, M. (2010a) 'The social innovations of *autogestión* in Argentina's worker-recuperated enterprises: Cooperatively organizing productive life in hard times'. *Labor Studies Journal*, 35(3): 295-321.
- Vieta, M. (2010b) 'The new cooperativism', *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture and Action*, 4(1): 1-11.
- Vieta, M. (2014) 'Learning in struggle: Argentina's new worker cooperatives as transformative learning organizations', *Relations Industrielles/Industrial Relations*, 69(1): 186-218).
- Vieta, M. (2015 forthcoming) *There's no stopping the workers: Crisis, autogestión, and Argentina's worker-recuperated enterprises*. Leiden/Chicago: Brill/Haymarket Books.
- Vuotto, M. (2011) 'El cooperativismo de trabajo en la Argentina: Contribuciones para el diálogo social'. Geneva: International Labour Organization (ILO) [http://www.ilo.org/americas/publicaciones/WCMS_179395/lang-es/index.htm].
- Weeks, K. (2005) 'The refusal of work as demand and desire', in Murphy, T.S. and A.-K. Mustapha (eds.) *The philosophy of Antonio Negri*. London: Pluto Press.
- Weeks, K. (2011) *The problem with work: Feminism, Marxism, anti-work politics, and post-work imaginaries*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Woodcock, G. (2004) *Anarchism: A history of libertarian ideas and movements*. Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press.
- Wyczykier, G. (2009) *De la dependencia a la autogestión laboral: Sobre la reconstrucción de experiencias colectivas de trabajo en la Argentina contemporánea*. Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento-Promoteo Libros.
- Zamagni, S. and V. Zamagni (2010) *Cooperative enterprise: Facing the challenge of globalization*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Zevi, A., A. Zanotti, F. Soulage and A. Zelaia (2011) *Beyond the crisis: Cooperatives, work, finance: Generating wealth for the long term*. Brussels: CECOPA Publications.
- Zibechi, R. (2011) 'The revolutions of ordinary people'. JWTC: Johannesburg Workshop in Theory and Criticism [http://www.jwtc.org.za/volume_4/raul_zibechi/revolutions_of_ordinary.htm].

the author

Marcelo Vieta is Assistant Professor in the Program in Adult Education and Community Development and the Program in Workplace Learning and Social Change at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. He is also an associated researcher with the European Research Institute on Cooperative and Social Enterprises (EURICSE) in Trento, Italy. He researches, teaches, and publishes on the historical

conditions, the political economic contexts, and the lived experiences of alternative economic arrangements, especially in Argentina, Italy, and Canada.