

In Irena Lagator Pejović: *Società a responsabilità limitata (S.r.l.) / Limited Responsibility Society (L.L.C.)* Edited/Curated by Ilaria Mariotti. Published by: VILLA PACCHIANI, SANTA CROCE

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## People and their power in the unlimited responsibility society

The following reflections spring from a well-defined occasion, the exhibition of the work of Irena Lagator Pejović at the Centro di Attività Espressive in Villa Pacchiani in Santa Croce sull'Arno. The Montenegrin artist presents a series of installations that centre on the concepts of the limited responsibility society, as opposed to an unlimited responsibility society. I agree with artist when, in one of her writings, she invests the term 'unlimited' with a degree of openness and generosity that the word 'limited', in and of itself, does not possess.

I believe that nowadays it is more necessary than ever to talk about generosity. In times of recession, it is compulsory to talk about the economy, while it is generous to talk about the immaterial, including the subject of the languages of art. Such generosity has a cost - the immaterial has a cost. At times such costs are intangible, at times they are very tangible indeed. Thus, it seems that the economy is simply inescapable. And so, let us try and think, as human beings, what type of society we intend to opt for, seeing that there is no way to avoid references to the economy and that, at the same time, we do not want to forfeit the languages of art.

If we, as people, make up society, and if, as such, everything that happens in society concerns us, what sense does it make for us, as human beings, to accept only 'limited responsibility'? If everything that happens in society concerns us, would it not be more appropriate to think of ourselves and others as partners in an unlimited society? And if we welcome this prospect, how are we to evaluate the stakes that each of us puts into this society? What are these stakes? And, above all, who are our partners, what kind of people are they? When our reasoning is formulated in terms of economics, we cannot but make utilitarian calculations.

I will try to put forward a hypothesis about who these people might be, taking cues from Carl Rogers' book, *Personal Power*: "Persons who trust their own power, do not feel a need to have 'power over,' and are willing to foster and facilitate the latent strength in the other person".

Power is another subject that accompanies us all our life; we are born and have the power to inspire nurturance through our fragility, while that same fragility exposes us to the power of those who would nurture us. Thus, it is neither useful nor sensible to go against nature, which places us in a world where power exists for a reason. But is there only one kind of power, or could there be different types?

Carl Rogers' 'modest proposal' is to use personal power, not by exerting it over other living beings, but to develop one's own innate human potential.

If we adhere to a conception of human nature by which people simply cannot be trusted, but must be guided, instructed, rewarded, punished and controlled by those who are wiser or in higher positions, we must necessarily exert a form of power that is over others. But if, instead, we subscribe to Rogers' "gradually formed and tested hypothesis, that the individual has within himself vast resources for self-understanding, for altering his self-concept, his attitudes and his self-directed behavior..." and accept his postulate that "there is a natural tendency toward complete development in man...the term that has most often been used for this is the actualizing tendency, and it is present in all living organisms ...", and if we moreover believe that this is at the very core of the mystery of what makes organisms 'tick', we find an important basis for our political thought: power is within the organism itself. Under normal conditions, it tends towards its own growth and independence from external control. If we believe all this, then we can perhaps direct our efforts toward a form of power that is personal, towards achieving awareness of what our power is with regard to ourselves and the ability to strive for full realization of the Self.

What sort of politics would come of such a hypothesis? Rogers's thought stems from his practice of clinical psychology, and therefore his language makes reference to his profession, that of a therapist. However, in his writings he refers to 'Clients', which is in itself an assertion of non-power. In a profession where the exercise of power presents an inherent risk of abuse, Rogers chooses not to call people who turn to him 'patients', because being a patient involves putting yourself into the hands of another, renouncing your power and investing another human with more power. Rogers instead uses the word 'client', a term that, curiously, in our language (as in most) is strongly associated with the economy, but which for Rogers means affording to others freedom of choice, freedom to decide and determine what direction they wish to take. Rogers extended his theory to fields other than psychotherapy, to teaching, to group management, to enterprises and international conflict. Thus, what he says must be construed in the broad, that is, Unlimited, sense.

Rogers states that the

*Person-Centered approach is based on consciously renouncing (...) all control over the Client and the power to make decisions for him. It consists of favoring the client's taking possession of himself and the strategies by which this can come about, its consists of restoring his ability to take decisions and responsibility for their consequences.*

He later adds:

*Thus, from a political point of view, if we are looking for a foundation of trust on which to base our actions, our purpose should be to identify and possibly to increase the number of individuals who are coming closer to being whole persons - who are moving toward a knowledge of, and harmony with, their most intimate experience, and who sense, with an equal lack of defensiveness, all the data from the persons and objects in their external environment. Such persons would form a growing stream of practical wisdom, and their indications would be wiser than the commandments of the gods or the directives of governments. They could make up the vital tide of a constructive future"*

Here Rogers returns to the point of our interest today: who could the partners in a Unlimited responsibility society be? From the foregoing, we can postulate that they are people who believe in their own personal power and, precisely for this reason, are wise, and their wisdom includes the ability to take responsibility for their choices, which is the other side of personal power. Firmly believing in one's own personal power implies believing in the personal power of all living beings as well. This is because it is a type of power that does not seek power over others. To believe in personal power involves granting oneself the chance of self-realisation, to the best of one's potential.

To conclude, then, what kind of society could we expect if all living beings recognized in themselves and others the freedom of self-determination and the duty to take responsibility for their own decisions? Would there be any field left for the individual to feel not responsible, extras rather than stars? Probably not.

And what role can art have in this process? Can we assume that art, in that it has limited space within society, albeit manifested in numerous and variegated forms, may be the 'non-place' that allows us to experience the fruitfulness of unlimited responsibility? It is with this hope and this wish that I conclude my contribution.

Note: All quotations have been drawn from Carl R. Rogers, *On Personal Power*, Delacorte Press, New York, 1977.

Editor's note: Mariangela Bucci was called upon to contribute to this project by virtue of her multiple roles of City Councillor, Client-Centred psychotherapist and teacher at the IACP (Italian Institute of the Person-Centred Approach).

