
ESSAYS ON FRUGAL ABUNDANCE

DEGROWTH: MISINTERPRETATIONS AND CONTROVERSIES – PART 2 OF 4

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Degrowth will take us back to the age of candlelight

The most common objection raised by degrowth opponents is that it would send us back to candlelight, possibly to the *dark* middle ages, or even as far back as the Stone Age. In a nutshell, a degrowth society would be a rejection of modernity, and therefore it would yield something far from an age of abundance...

To journalists who argue that I want to drive society back to the Stone Age, I answer provocatively: 'No, not to the Stone Age – much further if I can, to the time when the only civilised creatures were the bonobos, whose culture consists in making love, not war...' Objectors to growth might just want to call themselves 'Neolithic conservatives'¹ as American anarchist Paul Goodman did. As a matter of fact, the Stone Age was not that bad, according to Marshall Sahlins's description of it in his controversial book *Stone Age Economics*. There were only a few needs, a few 'compulsory' activities (hunting, fishing and gathering) to cover those needs, and a lot of leisure and games. Taking the same approach, Yves Cochet points out the lifestyle of the Kapauku Papuans of New Guinea, who devote only two hours a day to subsistence farming. The same goes for the Kuikuru Indians and the Russian farmers before the October Revolution. Such institutionalised under-production must have been a surprise for the colonial governors, who must have thought that those populations regarded art, conflicts and rest as more important than the intensification of production. Yves Cochet wonders if they foresaw the insignificant gain that such intensive work would have brought them. In other words, did they already know for certain that intensive farming would have increased efficiency per acre but only at the cost of a decreasing hourly productivity? On the contrary, because of demographic growth, some societies had to start cultivating intensively, but this resulted in more complex tasks (hoeing, irrigating, planting, harvesting, selling, processing, distributing etc.) and a greater energy deficit, according to Yves Cochet.²

It is true that some objectors to growth are *romantic*, that is, they are nostalgic for the past and its traditional, even primitive, societies that they idealise. Such is the basis of Johan Zerzan's theory of *anarchoprimitivism*.³ Some catastrophists like to give their own version of the leap backwards that would return us to the Stone Age, such as Richard Duncan, who came up with the Olduvai theory (from the name of the Tanzanian prehistorical site where the Zinjanthropus and the *Homo habilis* were discovered). His theory states that humankind will go back to a way of life similar to that of the Stone Age, once fossil fuels have run out and industrialism has ended, after a reign of a hundred years (1930-2030).

This is not what we think. Let us be clear: even if it is necessary to produce and consume less than we do now in order to reduce our ecological footprint to a bearable level, this would, all other things being equal, bring France back to the level of the 1960s; we would still be far from

1 Jean-Claude Michéa, *Orwell éducateur*, Paris, Climats, 2003, p.67.

2 Yves Cochet, *Pétrole Apocalypse*, Paris, Fayard, 2005, p.167.

3 See, for example, his book *Twilight of the Machines*, Port Townsend, Feral House, 2008.

the Stone Age... But we will not allow all other things to be equal, because in the 1960s, we were already (and had been for quite some time) on the fatal path of the unlimited growth society. On the contrary, we should strive to do much better with the same amount of natural resources, or even less, thanks to different ways of sharing, more suitable production choices and progress in terms of ecological efficiency. As Ivan Illich pointed out, none of the tools designed in the past allowed for the existence of a type of society and a mode of production that were both efficient and convivial. But he adds that today, we are able to design tools that can allow man to break free from man, without making him a slave to machines.⁴

Despite all of this, isn't degrowth a step backwards in some ways? And shouldn't we openly admit it? For the 'terrorists of modernity', as François Brune says, the supreme insult is: 'Your ideas are outdated!' This is true, but he adds that, paradoxically, this fight happens to be a *battle for the future*. When an army comes to a dead-end, sooner or later it has to turn around and then *the rear guard is at the forefront!*⁵ In the end, the 'reactionaries' become the 'true' progressivists! If we really have to be progressive, we might retort that 'it is always progressive to be late on the wrong path'.⁶

There is a real 'technical' question behind the controversy, and that is: to what extent is it necessary to reduce our consumption of natural resources? The 'step backward' would indeed take us back in time, all other things being equal. Back to the 1960s, or to the pre-industrial era, or even perhaps back to the Neolithic period? Besides, there is a philosophical and political question raised by the 'step backward' objection, which is summed up well by the title of Jean-Paul Besset's book: *How can we stop being progressive...without becoming reactionary?* 'Leaving the highway of progress does not mean getting stuck in the dead-end of our past',⁷ he says. Yet there have undoubtedly been some types of 'progress' that have proved to be harmful - from the car industry to nuclear power plants - and some regrettable sacrifices - for example, the quality of water, air or food. Do we have to get used to this and accept the loss for the sake of progress?

'Let us pretend and try to see what it means to go back to the age of candlelight [...] for the agricultural sector,' Silvia Pérez-Vitoria writes. 'The expression refers to a technological step backwards. First, let us take into account the fact that most of the world's farmers are still in the "age of candlelight" - or at least, of oil lamps. In many countries of the South - or even of Eastern Europe - up to 50% or even 90% of people subsist thanks to agriculture. A vast majority of them ends up being excluded from the mainstream model, though they still have to cope with its effects: destitution, and even disappearance. This half of humankind lives "a peasant lifestyle" [...] It is they who preserve biodiversity, the soil and water; it is they who keep social

4 Ivan Illich, Tools for conviviality.

5 François Brune, 'En finir avec l'idéologie de la consommation: Pour une société de frugalité', published on the website of 'Casseurs de pub', November 2003, referred to in François Brune's *De l'idéologie aujourd'hui*, Lyon, Parangon, 2004, p.165.

6 François Brune, *De l'idéologie aujourd'hui*, Lyon, Parangon, 2004, p.165.

7 Jean-Paul Besset, *Comment ne plus être progressiste...sans devenir réactionnaire ?*, Paris, Fayard, 2005, p.236.

relationships diversified. If we were to go back to the “age of candlelight”, the vast majority of humankind would keep on living the same way but with much lower pressure on its resources and cultures. As to the others, that is, the small motorised and technological minority, they should progressively start using the rotation of crops and natural fertilisers, instead of chemicals, and animal traction or light production tools instead of systematic mechanisation. More workers would be needed in the countryside. There would be 3,600 different types of apples in French markets, instead of 12. Transport of goods would decrease for lack of means. There would be more local consumption and we would eat food of a higher quality’.⁸

The end of cheap oil may lead us to this unenviable situation, though without all those types of apple. Indeed, mass agriculture closely depends on hydrocarbons, for example for machines, fertilisers (producing one tonne of nitrogen fertiliser requires three tonnes of petrol), irrigation or transport. Let us not forget that producing one kilogram of steak, from pitchfork to dinner fork, requires six litres of petrol! Sylvia Pérez-Vitoria⁹ explains that ‘we would not go all the way back to the age of candlelight, because history has done its job; the new species in our regions will not disappear and we will not return to a feudal property system’. She concludes that ‘this would actually not be so bad’. Except that it would not bring back the wasted natural resources or the lost biodiversity. This necessarily frugal society might be very restrictive but it might also be a source of long lasting satisfaction if we know how to get ready for it and how to organise it with a clear conscience.

It is quite certain that we will not go back in time, even if we wanted to, but some trends have to be reversed and some cycles have to be approached from the opposite direction. Some ‘losses’ are quite rightly regretted and should be fixed. The volume of our ‘regret’ is proportional to the excesses of progress. We Westerners should not necessarily be ashamed of sharing the Westernised progressive dream. However, after becoming aware of the damaging effects of development, we should aspire to a better quality of life rather than to exponential growth in the GDP.

Why not call for *progress* in terms of the beauty of towns and landscapes, the purity of the ground water which provides us with fresh drinking water, the cleanliness of our rivers and the health of the oceans? Why not demand that the air we breathe and the flavour of the food we eat be enhanced? Many improvements are still needed to fight against noise, to expand green areas, to preserve wild fauna and flora and to save the natural and cultural heritage of humanity, not to mention the advances still to be made in democracy.¹⁰ Carrying out this ‘regress’ agenda (if I may be permitted this neologism) requires resorting to sophisticated technologies, some of which are still to be invented. Let us move towards progress of quality, not without limits, but

8 Silvia Pérez-Vitoria, *Les paysans sont de retour*, Paris/Arles, Actes Sud, p.192.

9 Ibid, p.193.

10 This is also what Cornelius Castoriadis wishes: ‘So we need true democracy, establishing the broadest possible procedures for thought and debate, with the participation of the citizenry as a whole. That in turn is only feasible if those citizens have true information, true training, and opportunities to exert their judgment, in practice.’ in *A Society Adrift*, op. cit., p.195.

aiming towards frugal, healthy and shared abundance! Rejecting progressive ideology might not be the best tactic but we can draw on the rhetoric that José Bové likes so much and say that it is not about taking a step backwards but a step to the side, in order to leave the path that is leading us to disaster.

Degrowth and the Enlightenment

Behind this debate lies an important philosophical question, one concerning the very nature of the Enlightenment and its goal: contrary to right-wing objectors to growth, our project is fully imbued with the Enlightenment's spirit, that of the emancipation of humankind and of the achievement of an *autonomous society*. But this agenda was terribly ambiguous. One of the recommended means was the will to rationally master Nature with economics and technology. Even though it aimed at freeing humankind from our subordination to transcendence, tradition and revelation (the custodians of the *Ancien Régime*), it made modern society the most heteronomous society in human history, subject to the dictatorship of capital markets, to the *Invisible Hand* of the economy, and to the laws of *technoscience*. The artificialisation of the world has been consistently encouraged for more than two centuries, to such an extent that it now compromises human identity. The outcome of the autonomy agenda through the technoscientific leap forwards is transhumanism or the desertion of the planet by the human species and its migration out into the cosmos. By overstepping the biological barriers that constitute a limit for us, we would be emancipated –and this seems to be feasible today – from the barriers linked to our genetic and cosmic conditioning. This prospect echoes the pessimistic vision of human nature, the anthropology of the wolf-man that has characterised modernity since Hobbes and the birth of political economy, with the spectre of a war of all against all: since man is imperfect because of his animalistic nature, it is preferable to make him leave it. This rejection of human condition in favour of a real technical redemption is an abdication and a submission to the dictates of the performance of artefacts. The Leviathan represents a technocratic state or the very heavy or invisible hand of the World Company, with a thirst for power that betrays the promises of empowerment made during the age of Enlightenment.¹¹ This is caricatured by the rejection of the democratic debate on scientific and technical research.

Degrowth, on the other hand, represents an attempt to take a fresh look at the modern political empowerment agenda by tackling the difficulties inherent in its realisation. As accurately predicted by Alexis de Tocqueville, modern societies are dominated by the aspiration for equal opportunities, but it is worth mentioning that this egalitarianism results in paradoxes, because these societies are plagued by 'sad passions'¹² (envy, greed, lust for wealth and power). Therefore, we do not mean to reject our Kantian 'unsocial sociability', but rather to embrace and

¹¹ In addition to my book *L'invention de l'économie* (Albin Michel, 2005), read Luigino Bruni's well-crafted analyses in *L'Ethos del mercato. Un'introduzione ai fondamenti antropologici e relazionali dell'economia*, Milano-Torino, Bruno Mondadori, 2010.

¹² Expression coined by the Belgian philosopher Gilles Deleuze in his works on Spinoza.

overcome it. To this end, Illich argued in favour of conviviality, while Castoriadis proposed the establishment of radical democracy.

Conviviality, a term borrowed by Illich from the great 18th-century French gastronome Brillat-Savarin, specifically aims to strengthen social ties that were weakened by the 'economic horror'. Conviviality echoes the *agape* in Christian theology and restores the spirit of giving as a component of social exchanges alongside the 'survival of the fittest' concept. Thus, it re-establishes the Aristotelian *philia* (friendship) necessary for the *polis* – that is to say, any human society – to exist. It is, as it were, its equivalent transposed into an individualistic society. This overlaps with French sociologist Marcel Mauss's intuition. In a 1924 article entitled 'A sociological assessment of Bolshevism', he ignored 'the risk of seeming old-fashioned and a purveyor of commonplaces', and advocated going back to 'the old Greek and Latin concepts of *caritas*, for which the modern "charity" is such a poor translation... the necessary "friendship", the "community" that constitute the delicate essence of the City'.¹³

It is also necessary to avert the mimetic rivalry and destructive envy that threaten any democratic society. 'By leading men out of the natural order, which is ruled by needs, desire pushes them into expecting others to give them the same excessive value they feel themselves', Jean Jacques Rousseau wrote in his *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men*.¹⁴ Indeed, in modern societies, justice is both necessary and improbable. It is necessary to avert a war of all against all, which would result from the disappearance of traditional connections amongst men and their community. And it is improbable because justice implies the destruction of the common world by the illusion of unlimited freedom. This is why the spirit of giving and grace (the *agape*) is necessary to make degrowth societies convivial. Even when it effectively settles conflicts between people, a justice that is purely formal holds social atoms in a desert of loneliness without remedying the material and moral misery ensuing from class conflicts. If free citizens want to create an autonomous society in which well-being is widespread, they must feel sympathy and benevolence, even for the complete stranger who is related to them only because he or she also belongs to humankind.

Moreover, radical democracy as defined by Castoriadis aims to address the same problem: how to enable equals to coexist peacefully? Indeed, the genuinely democratic city establishes an experiment of human transcendence through which the paradox of egalitarian hierarchy would be overcome. As the Belgian philosopher Robert Legros says in his discussion with Castoriadis, 'to acknowledge the limit of human powers that is not self-imposed certainly corresponds to admitting a heteronomy at the heart of autonomy. To interpret such a limit as a rule inscribed in man's humanity, and not as a religious rule, represents an attempt to grasp the meaning of a

13 Translation by Ben Brewster. Quoted in Stjepan G. Mestrovic, *The Balkanization of the West: The Confluence of Postmodernism and Postcommunism*, London, Routledge, 1994, p.70.

14 Exegesis by François Flahault, in 'Que faire, que penser de Marx aujourd'hui?', *Revue du Mauss*, n° 34, second semester 2009, p.52.

specifically democratic heteronomy'.¹⁵ Perhaps Claude Lévi-Strauss had this difficulty in mind when he talked about the tragic failure of the caste system in India: 'It is tragic for manhood that this great experiment failed; I mean that the various castes did not succeed in reaching a state in which they could remain equal because they were different – equal in the sense that there would have been no common measure between them – and that a harmful element of homogeneity led to the creation of a hierarchy. Men can coexist on condition that they recognise each other as being all equally, though differently, human, but they can also coexist by denying each other a comparable degree of humanity, and thus establishing a system of subordination'. And yet, according to de Tocqueville and Louis Dumont, this is not possible if men are identical and equal.¹⁶ If it is accepted and associated with a distributive justice model, the inter-individual or inter-collective asymmetry of *Homo hierarchicus* is philosophically acceptable, and practically necessary to introduce *Homo aequalis* smoothly.

Although degrowth and the plan to build an autonomous society intend to realise the empowering dream of Enlightenment and modernity, this does not mean that we will free ourselves from our integration in nature or our deep roots in history; on the contrary, we shall recognise our natural and historical heritage.

Degrowth means a return to a patriarchal and communitarian order

Some critics, especially those with left-wing views, claim that degrowth promotes a localism which would regress to a bygone patriarchal, chauvinist and communitarian organisation.¹⁷ According to French tradition, the suspicion of communitarianism is an accusation of the worst kind. In this controversy, François Éwald does not beat around the bush when he says, 'We know that there is no other empowerment agenda than that of "political economy" that has been carrying the West since the 18th century'.¹⁸ By Jove! Would degrowth be unknowingly bringing a socially retrograde agenda?

This objection comprises the three main components that are linked together to a greater or lesser degree: the issues of localism, community and patriarchy.

15 Robert Legros, 'Castoriadis et la question de l'autonomie', in Cornelius Castoriadis. Réinventer l'autonomie, op.cit, p.150.

16 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*. Translation by John and Doreen Weightman, Penguin, 1973. p.149. Ivan Illich's most controversial and misunderstood book, *Gender*, dealt with this complex issue.

17 Jean-Paul Pollet, from the Belgian magazine *Imagine*, thus summarizes the objection: 'My question is about the reservations expressed by some left-wingers about degrowth theories, which they think would not as much be based on a well-understood austerity as on a deep simplification of the social order and a return to the old, patriarchal order, in which individual fulfilment would give way to the public interest.'

18 *Les Échos*, 12 September 2002, p.53.

1) Degrowth and localism

When it comes to localism, one must become aware that in any event we must introduce some kind of *reterritorialisation*. The question is: how do we go about doing so? Consumerism makes us exceed the environmental footprint, and thus over-consume bio-productive space. Globally, as of 2009, we have exceeded the biosphere's capacity to renew itself by over 50% (30% as of 2002), with Africans consuming less than 10% of the individual average and US citizens consuming nine or ten times more than the average. The objective is not so much to reduce final consumption, but, rather, to establish a new form of consumption and production. In 1960, a French person's consumption stood at 1.8 hectares, amounting to one planet.¹⁹ Today, it stands at about 5.8 hectares of bio-productive space; if everyone on Earth lived like us, we would need three planets. Does this mean that we consume three times as much meat, vegetables, gas and power today as we did fifty years ago?

Allow me, just this once, to give a personal example. In 1960, I was already a grown man and I consumed about as much as I do today. However, the food I ate was not made in the same way. Yoghurts were made with milk from a nearby farm and sometimes they were even homemade; the glass pots were recyclable and unlike today, yoghurts did not travel 9,000 kilometres from production to consumption.²⁰ There are countless examples of this kind: the suit whose every part has travelled 60,000 km and the frozen lamb from New Zealand covering 18,835 km in a refrigerated cargo plane before landing in Britain. Thirty different countries are involved in the making of a bike designed in France for the sporting goods chain store Decathlon. Perfume bottles from Interparfums travel from France to Shanghai and back, thus covering 20,000 km to have Chinese workers label them at half the cost. Hermès scarves go all the way to Madagascar merely for their famous rolled hem.²¹ Even more comical illustrations of these absurdities are legion. The United States, where wood resources are plentiful, import their matches from Japan, while the latter has to get its wood supplies from looting companies operating in the Indonesian forests; meanwhile, Japan imports its chopsticks from the US. 'In 1998, Britain imported 61,400 tonnes of poultry meat from the Netherlands in the same year that it exported 33,100 tonnes of poultry meat to the Netherlands', says Caroline Lucas.²² In 1996, the UK imported 434,000 tonnes of apples, nearly half of which came from outside Europe, while nothing has been done to save the 60% of UK apple orchards that have been lost since 1960.

19 For more details about the environmental footprint, read the first chapter of my book *Le Pari de la décroissance*, op. cit.

20 According to Stéphanie Böge's thesis, published in 1993 by the Wuppertal Institut (read *Silence*, n° 167, July 1993). The detailed calculation is given by Ingmar Granstedt, *Peut-on sortir de la folle concurrence ?*, coll. 'La Ligne d'horizon', 2006.

21 Laurence Benhamou, *Le Grand Bazar mondial*, Paris, Bourin, 2005, p.3.

22 Caroline Lucas, *Stopping the Great Food Swap. Relocalising Europe's Food Supply*, report published by the Greens/European Free Alliance, European Parliament, March 2001.

The mind boggles at the results of the calculation in terms of food miles, which encompasses distances from farm to fork. 'A head of lettuce from Salinas Valley, California, reaches the markets of Washington, D.C., after a 5,000 km journey during the course of which 36 times more energy is consumed in the form of petrol than it contains calories. By the time the lettuce reaches London, 127 times as much energy will have been expended to get it there than it contains', says Yves Cochet.²³ And it gets worse: the volume of these 'perishables' that sail and fly the world increases by 4% every year! The ketchup found in Swedish homes has gone through a 52-step odyssey, from transformation to transportation! The travels of Danish prawns are grotesque but, alas, far from exceptional²⁴: they go to Morocco to be peeled, then return to Denmark, before being shipped off for sale. More incongruous still, Scottish langoustines are expatriated to Thailand to be hand peeled in a Findus factory, and then returned to Scotland to be cooked, before being sold in Marks & Spencer stores. Here is a particularly significant example: Brazilian farmers traditionally eat red beans, but livestock are fed on cattle cakes made from soy that is grown on swidden land in the Amazon rainforest. This depletes the Earth's green lung and the meat is then transported over 10,000 km, which contributes to climate disruption. Finally, the carcass is used to produce meat and bone meal (which makes our cows 'mad'), and this infected meat is still poisoning us. In short, we, the consumers, lose on all counts while agribusiness firms reap benefits. Therefore, the increase of our environmental footprint was probably caused more by globalisation than by our consumption levels, excessive though these may be.

Even if this is the only reason, we must go back to a system that leaves a sustainable environmental footprint for the planet. We have been deterritorialising our production system, although in order to reduce our environmental footprint we must relocate first and foremost. The zero-mile objective of the Italian consumer organisation, which consists of consuming local products, is a necessary means to achieve this goal.²⁵ We will need to dismantle the retail sector and to introduce a form of de-commodification that will enable us to rediscover simple, natural pleasures that do not squander the planet's resources. Activities such as growing your own garden, shopping at the local market, baking your own bread, making yogurts and cooking your own food can bring a lot of personal satisfaction and pleasure for enthusiasts, without putting the environment at risk.

In fact, this relocation of economic activities implies a vast reterritorialisation of life as a whole. On the political front, Richard Heinberg says: 'without fossil fuels, it is doubtful that a sufficient energy basis could ever be assembled to build and maintain a government with a global scale of organisation, communication, and security'.²⁶ It is not impossible in centralised, hierarchical societies, as shown with past empires, but we can hardly imagine how a representative

23 Yves Cochet, *Pétrole apocalypse*, op. cit., p.69.

24 Philippe Mühlstein, 'Les ravages du mouvement perpétuel', *Le Monde diplomatique*, January 2005.

25 Codacons (Coordinamento delle Associazioni per la Difesa dell'Ambiente e dei Diritti degli Utenti e dei Consumatori), www.codacons.it

26 Richard Heinberg, *The Party's Over: Oil, War and the Fate of Industrial Societies*, *New Society*, 2005, p.197.

democracy (not to mention a direct democracy) composed of 9 billion individuals riding horses or bikes could ever work. This problem could be solved by using a pyramidal architecture of small, local, open democracies based on bioregions, that is, natural regions where livestock, plants, animals, water and people form a relatively coherent group ruled by the principle of subsidiarity.²⁷ This is about reinventing a new culture of localism; starting from scratch.

2) Degrowth and communitarianism.²⁸

Although there are ‘as many “small worlds” as there are communities’, we can no longer dream of the continental or planetary “common world” that Hannah Arendt aspired to fifty years ago’,²⁹ says Yves Cochet. This prospect of the end of the single world is not expressed very well and may prompt critics to accuse us of being ‘communitarians’ (ultimate insult which needs updating). It is true that Edward Goldsmith, founder of *The Ecologist* magazine, as well as right-wing or *New Right* degrowth activists, certainly have arguments in favour of a nostalgia for an idealised past and a return to a closed community. However, most objectors to growth do not share these views. True, the suspicion is all the stronger because we reassert the value of localism, while demands for autonomy based on a regional identity have always been suspected of withdrawal, seclusion and intolerance, especially in France (due to the Catholic and Jacobin traditions).

Our understanding of eco- and bioregions does not factor in the concepts of race and blood but focuses instead on where people happen or choose to live. As established in the previous section, degrowth takes a fresh look at the agenda of human empowerment set during the age of Enlightenment. Questioning exacerbated individualism and acknowledging the legacy of the past are necessary steps towards a degrowth society; but it does not imply a return to feudal and hierarchical organisations. ‘Indeed, the affirmation of individual autonomy has always been going hand in hand with a rise of collective heteronomy’,³⁰ says Marcel Gauchet. Quite the opposite, horizontal relationships must be favoured over the vertical ones that rule the current economic and political society. For Karl Polanyi, though, the empowerment achieved through commodification and contractual freedom ‘meant that the noncontractual organisations of kinship, neighbourhood, profession, and creed were to be liquidated since they claimed the allegiance of the individual and thus restrained his freedom. To represent this principle as one of noninterference, as economic liberals were wont to do, was merely the expression of an

27 This is what proposed the American eco-anarchist Murray Bookchin (1921-2006).

28 According to Emmanuelle Martin, from the Alliance journal (*Pour une Europe des consciences*, n° 7, January 2006), ‘When you speak of degrowth, you are bound to hear people tell you that it is impossible to backpedal and that, besides, nobody would wish to live like their grandparents. Is it what degrowth is all about?’

29 Yves Cochet, *Pétrole apocalypse*, op. cit., p.203.

30 Marcel Gauchet, *La Démocratie contre elle-même*, Paris, Gallimard, 2002, p.18.

ingrained prejudice in favour of a definite kind of interference, namely, such as would destroy noncontractual relations between individuals and prevent their spontaneous re-formation'.³¹

We cannot turn back the clock – some things have changed forever and not always for the worse: for instance, we are individuals, not just part of a community. But we need to be clear-headed. We think that contrasting the person with the individual (following the perspective opened up by Emmanuel Mounier), that is to say, contrasting a genuine individualism with a caricature of it incorporated in mass conformity, could be the way to overcome the Manichean opposition between individualism and communitarianism. The goal of re-establishing links between economic and social concerns might be achieved by re-introducing horizontal solidarities and reciprocities, but not by returning to one-way hierarchies. Individuality is not something we are born with, it is something we have the potential to acquire. Adult beings construct themselves by critically choosing what groups they belong to or are affiliated with.³² If the sublation (*Aufhebung*) of the oppositions of individual versus community and of market versus totalitarianism is not possible, we would have no choice but to wait passively for the advent of an environmental apocalypse which would put an end to this story.)

3) Is degrowth chauvinist?

Erich Fromm, Wilhelm Reich and many others have shown that capitalism, the economy and the illusion of infinite growth are *patricentric*, phallogocratic and, all in all, chauvinist. According to Jean Gadrey, 'GDP and growth are not gender-neutral'.³³ Growth is indeed connected to a thirst for power, while competition is a form of war. It is no coincidence that the national accounts underestimate housekeeping activities. Gadrey also observes that 'the fact that GDP takes into account part of the (domestic) chores that are performed mostly by men, but not at all those which are massively carried out by women, is nothing but a disguised discrimination.'³⁴ 'The man who grows potatoes in *his* garden contributes to GDP, but not the woman who cooks them in *her* kitchen!' Anselme Jappe remarks that 'the economic production is associated with male "traits": being harsh (to oneself and to others), resolute, rational, calculating, and compensated for their work; on the other hand, non-market activities are associated with female "traits": being sweet, understanding, emotional, generous and unrewarded for their work'.³⁵ According to Roswitha Scholz³⁶, the feminist Critical theorist, 'what value cannot grasp and thus dissociates is

31 Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1944, p.163.

32 As best evidenced by François Flahault. Read in particular: *Adam et Ève. La condition humaine*, Paris, Mille et une nuits, 2007, and *Le Crépuscule de Prométhée. Contribution à une histoire de la démesure humaine*, Paris, Mille et une nuits, 2008.

33 Jean Gadrey, *Adieu à la croissance*, op. cit., p.28.

34 *Ibid.*, p.30.

35 Anselme Jappe, 'Le "côté obscur" de la valeur et le don', op. cit., p.110.

36 Quoted in Anselme Jappe, 'Le "côté obscur" de la valeur et le don', op. cit., p.111.

precisely in contradiction with the claim that value is a global measure concept; it is what is not stated in the theory of value itself, and thus cannot be the target of the arguments used to criticise value. As the activities of reproduction that women perform are the opposite of abstract work, it is not possible to subsume them under the concept of “abstract work”, as has often been done by the feminist movement, which has largely embraced the positive category of work at the basis of the Marxist theories underpinning the labour movement’. On this topic, Roswitha Scholz also says: ‘The activities dissociated by value encompass activities such as affection, assistance, care of the sick and the weak, as well as eroticism, sexuality and *love*. They also include feelings, emotions and behaviours, which go against the rationality of *business economics* prevailing in the field of abstract work, and are in contradiction with the category of work, although they do feature some kind of utilitarian rationality and some protestant principles’.

However, many traditional cultures, and especially the Mediterranean culture, have been as phallographic as growth societies are. Yet, in response to economic imperialism, which is fundamentally male chauvinist, the degrowth society will either be women-oriented or even feminist, or it will not exist. The values mentioned previously, which are more specifically carried by the feminine dimension of human beings, must gain or regain the upper hand.³⁷ J. C. Tronto³⁸ thus argues that, in order to meet this target, we must ‘reconcile one’s own needs with other people’s needs, find a balance between competition and cooperation’. This reaction to the deceitful, exclusive domination of ‘selfishness’ in modern society is totally in accordance with the ethical overhaul demanded by the degrowth theory.

Reconciling the necessity of gender equality and the undeniable difference between genders implies that a solution should be found to the same insoluble problem raised by democracy. Besides, degrowth cannot provide an answer to every question. Each degrowth society will have to deal with these issues, which include gender relations or relations between generations for instance, not to mention eternal and ultimate questions about the meaning of life, love, pain, illnesses, natural disabilities, death etc.

Thus, this radical change ‘back to’ feminine values will only be possible with the new prospect of actually building a thrifty society of frugal abundance. It is imperative that a new concept of reason (more sensible than rational), giving a new interpretation of tradition and going beyond it, and freeing itself of instrumental rationality, should be devised and spread. This *metanoia* (regret/regress) implies a deep revamping of *tradition*. If ‘the past can help us pave the way towards the future’, as Zapatistas³⁹ claim, then we should also add, as they do: ‘In fact, we the indigenous people, do not belong to yesterday, we belong to tomorrow’. And it is interesting to

37 This concern for others does not differ greatly from the analyses American feminists made of the ‘care’ concept in their gender studies, which are now very popular and have also been taken up by social-liberal reformism to make up for insufficient though necessary government policies.

38 Quoted in Alice le Goff, ‘Care, empathie et justice’, *Revue du Mauss*, no. 33, first half of 2009, p.360.

39 In a declaration dated March 12th, 2001, quoted in Jérôme Baschet, *op. cit.*, p.191.

link this to the comment made by Esther⁴⁰, the Neozapatista Comandante, addressing Mexico's Parliament, on March 20th, 2001: 'We women know which customs are good and which are bad'. Though we could argue whether this adamant claim is true, it does show that this issue is no longer taboo, and this is what actually matters.

I will conclude for the time being with Jean-Paul Besset's words⁴¹: 'When dealing with tradition', he writes, 'the same method must apply as when dealing with progress: evaluation, selection, sorting out and elimination. We see it as a way of getting rid of what leads to confinement – the suave invitation to nostalgic withdrawal and to resentment, the exquisitely wistful perception of the peaceful order of fields and factories, churches and cottages –, of getting rid of what freezes the present into the delusion of an idealised past, whether it be symbolised by religion, race, the nation, class or clan. We should not encourage people to hate progress – as all the reactionary movements have done through history – but to criticise it uncompromisingly'.

Degrowth means unemployment

For the advocates of growth, or in fact for ordinary people in modern societies, full employment is inextricably linked with growth. Since the end of the so-called 'Trente Glorieuses', the three decades of massive economic growth following the Second World War, unemployment has become a nightmare for industrialised economies once again. Sluggish growth (that is, 2 or 3% GDP growth per year) is indeed not sufficient to reduce it. Degrowth, which is often understood as 'negative growth', even though it is ecologically desirable, is thus considered to be a terrible prospect from a social standpoint, since a stronger growth, or even a two-digit growth would be necessary to get the economy back to full employment.

This misunderstanding is largely due to the fact that it is difficult to distance oneself from the mind-set of a growth society. We saw that a growth society without growth is the worst possible situation and has nothing in common with the degrowth agenda. For 'objectors to growth', to kick-start the economy by stimulating consumer demand and growth is ruled out on principle. A significant and compulsory working hour reduction is therefore one of the prerequisites to find a way out of a work-based growth society, but also to guarantee everyone a satisfying job, in a context in which the consumption of natural resources needs to be reduced by two-thirds (at least for France). In order to be efficient, the working hour reduction should be massively implemented. Though it has undeniably resulted in job creations, the failure of the 35-hour-week scheme in France shows how this measure, however sensible it is, is hardly compatible with the prevailing capitalist system. On the one hand, in the context of competitive globalisation and the European market economy, it was a risky move to go it alone; on the other hand, without the prospect of actually getting out of productivism, the measure lost significant symbolic value.

40 In a declaration dated March 28th, 2001, quoted in Jérôme Baschet, *op. cit.*, p.223.

41 Jean-Paul Besset, *Comment ne plus être progressiste...*, *op. cit.*, pp.326-327.

Challenging the central role of work in our society means undermining the concept of the growth economy, which is all the more reason to make it a central component of our agenda.

There is strong evidence, however, that it would be no problem at all for a degrowth society to generate self-employment or even waged employment for everyone. Giving up productivism and the exploitation of workers in countries of the South would require more labour to meet the same level of final consumption (which could be the result of a sharp reduction in intermediate consumption), and even a reduced consumption of material goods. Relocating industrial production and making our society more eco-friendly would create many jobs. A report by WWF showed that a 30% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2020 should lead to the creation of 680,000 jobs in France. Moreover, there is no doubt that the renovation of both public and private buildings aimed at improving their thermal insulation will represent a huge construction programme which will create jobs. If the French government implemented the European Renewable Energy directive and if 20% of its electricity was produced from renewable sources such as solar or wind power, 240,000 jobs would be created.⁴²

In the farming industry, in particular, jobs could be created without growth in production if we gave up the artificial labour productivity resulting from the use of technologies that damage the environment, and if we abandoned industrial farming. In fact, according to a survey by the *Fédération nationale des agriculteurs bio* (the French organic farming association) 90,000 jobs could be created in France if the share of organic farming was raised from a mere 2% currently to 9% of the overall agricultural production (like in Austria). Reaching 15% of organic farming would mean an additional 120,000 to 150,000 jobs. Considering this, if 100% of the agricultural production was organic – which should be our goal – more than 1 million jobs could be created. And yet, that would, incidentally, not bring us back to the situation that prevailed in the 19th century, when more than 40% of the workforce worked in the farming sector. With appropriate technical progress, we could reach 10 to 20%, which is quite reasonable compared with the current level of 3 to 5%.⁴³

The end of cheap oil should also lead to the creation of many jobs. Fossil energy has always been the enemy of employment, since it has encouraged mechanisation and thus made capital-labour substitution easier. Tractors have replaced draft animals and brought about a reduction in labour force in the farming sector. Assembly lines, automation and robotics have in turn driven workers away from factories. The development of self-sufficiency, of small workshops equipped with small machines, which could be sophisticated but would not use a lot of energy, would allow us to cover all our basic needs thanks to the large-scale implementation of a craft industry of a new kind. Ingmar Gransted takes Ivan Illich's thinking about autonomy and the convivial tool further, suggesting that vernacular workshops should be created; those would be equipped with miniaturised and efficient machinery, breaking with the gigantic scale of industrial manufacturing and the promethean conception of techno-science, which have doomed us to

42 www.wwf.fr

43 In the United States, there are 'so few full-time farmers that the census forms for the year 2000 included no such category in their list of occupations', in Richard Heinberg, *Pétrole, la fête est finie*, op. cit., p.250.

heteronomy. For textile manufacturing, for instance, he writes: 'spinning, drawing and texturing operations could be combined within a single small machine the size of a wardrobe, which could be set up in vernacular workshops and made accessible to local residents. [...] A similar concept could be devised for paper recycling; in this respect, simple machines, which are small enough to be transported on request and rented on a weekly basis, are already available. These machines would be installed in local communities and in towns, together with guillotines, staplers and gluing machines, so that users could make their own notepads and notebooks. A photocopier or any other small reproduction equipment could also be added to the whole'.⁴⁴

The results of this *deindustrialisation*, which would be achieved thanks to technically complex but convivial tools, would prove that it is possible to produce things in other ways – by recycling, repairing and transforming – and that, although everything could not be produced in a self-sufficient way, a huge number of things could be. 'This growing capacity for local self-organisation will enable each local community or region to control its economic and social future and to invent its own original organisation system, while remaining open to the world',⁴⁵ Granstedt says.

We thus have four elements: 1) a reduction in the overall theoretical productivity as measured by economists, which will be an undeniable fact if we give up the thermo-industrial model, reject polluting technologies and the excessive use of fossil energies, and give up energy-consuming equipment; 2) the relocation of activities and the end of the exploitation of countries of the South; 3) the creation of environment-related jobs in every industry; 4) a new way of living and the elimination of unnecessary *needs* (significant 'streamlining' in advertising, tourism, transport, the automotive industry, agribusiness, biotechnology etc.). The first three facts would imply an increase in the amount of work; the last one would imply the contrary.⁴⁶ In any case, though, a degrowth society should provide productive waged employment and self-employment for everyone, instead of turning non-market activities into waged employment, more or less artificially, and increasing the number of parasitic or servile jobs. Unfortunately, the latter is the very strategy which policymakers in countries of the North have chosen to address the crisis of productivism and keep growth – or what is left of it – going.

A smooth, more or less long transition towards a society in which work will no longer have this imaginary central meaning should be planned. To ease the shift from the old to the new social order and to give people enough time to adapt, we could indeed consider using productivity gains – as long as this concept remains relevant – to reduce working hours and create jobs,

44 Ingmar Granstedt, *Du chômage à l'autonomie conviviale*, Lyon, À plus d'un titre, coll. 'La ligne d'horizon', second edition 2007 (first edition 1982) pp.52-56.

45 Ibid., p70. Towards the end of his life, André Gorz developed ideas similar to Granstedt's. See his article in *Entropia*, no. 2, first half of 2007.

46 From a similar perspective, Jean Gadrey tried to assess consequences for each industry (see *Adieu à la croissance*, op. cit., p.109 and following pages).

without either cutting wages (at least the lowest wages) or reducing the production of final goods, though a change in what would actually be produced might occur. Generally speaking, productivity gains should no longer be used to sustain the growth of final goods production. In the 1980s, André Gorz had devised scenarios of this kind, which were partly taken up in the political agenda of Germany's social democrats (SPD). But the project was short-lived due to the fall of the Berlin wall and the lack of real determination, among most SPD members, to break with previous models. It is important to note that, although the shift from one model to another can be a painless process, there should be no compromise as far as our goals are concerned. Changing our way of living will enable us to cope with unemployment, but focusing on the issue of unemployment for its own sake, without considering its nature, may prevent us from ever changing our society and lead us to the final clash.

Degrowth is not compatible with democracy

Critics often consider that degrowth goes hand in hand with the demise of democracy; some of them even think that degrowth is some kind of eco-terrorism.⁴⁷ For most of them, degrowth can only exist in a dictatorial – if not totalitarian – regime. Thus, according to Alain-Gérard Slama⁴⁸, 'the degrowth-oriented measures that Green parties plan to implement in order to change consumption patterns and habits imply the existence of a practically totalitarian state'. The fiercest opponents of degrowth actually describe objectors to growth as green Khmer.

On the contrary, the degrowth agenda is meant to be fundamentally democratic, unlike *post-democracy*, this fake caricature of a democracy manipulated by the media and lobbies, that we know today.⁴⁹ Lobbying in post-democracy makes it nearly impossible to have an environmental policy other than one that is compatible with eco-business and does not challenge the cult of growth.⁵⁰ On the contrary, the autonomy that we call for means that we should stop submitting to the dictatorship of financial markets or to the *invisible hand* of economy, and regain control over our destiny. We live on a planet with limited resources; how will we share what nature's generosity still has to offer? Let us do a thorough review of the ins and outs of the problem and discuss them with respect for everyone's views and beliefs. Is it not what democracy as we see it in Western countries is all about?⁵¹

47 For example, Jean-Paul Fitoussi and Éloi Laurent, *La Nouvelle Écologie politique*, Paris, Le Seuil, 2008.

48 On France Culture (a French radio station), on August 23rd, 2008 ; quoted in Denis Bayon et al, *La Décroissance*, op. cit., p.206.

49 Colin Crouch, *Post-Democracy*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2004.

50 This is what Hervé Kempf condemned as oligarchy in his book *L'oligarchie ça suffit, vive la démocratie*, Paris, Le Seuil, 2011.

51 In African and Indian-American traditions, there are other, just as honourable ways to express collective will, for example through palaver or communality; but let us keep this book about our agenda in countries of the North. Regarding palaver, see the first chapter of my book, *La Déraison de la raison économique* (Paris, Albin

The transition to a voluntarily and convivially frugal existence will admittedly not be a painless process. Who is prepared to 'give up' their cars, dish-washers, holiday homes or trips around the world? Who will demand that the use of scarce resources be shared according to necessary restriction rather than purchasing power? Arguments and demonstrations are not sufficient to change mentalities and behaviours. There will be backlashes. With or without degrowth, the history of humanity remains an extremely vibrant and violent tragedy. Giving up the cult of growth will not solve every problem with a wave of a magic wand. However, Western societies are the only ones in History which have released all the things that other societies have, more or less successfully, tried to keep in check, namely sad passions: ambition, greed, envy and selfishness. More precisely, it was widely believed in modern societies that private vices, channelled by the economy through interest, were becoming public virtues and working for the common good, without the agents knowing it. They could therefore be unleashed without risks. Thus, here is what students in top business schools (but not only there) learn: 'Go on lads! Put your interest, the interest of your company and the interest of your boss first! Be real sharks, take as much as you can!' The outcome is far from meeting the expectations of laissez-faire advocates, even though free competition is regulated by rules enacted by the European Commission.

In Ancient Greece, the hero who surrendered to his hubris was punished by fate. Hubris must be controlled and tamed as much as possible. This is where 'society' comes in, to help individuals repress their desire for omnipotence, and we thus understand why Margaret Thatcher decided that society should be abolished.⁵² And therein lies the tragedy of our situation: at precisely the time when heads of state are virtually unanimous in declaring that they want to save the planet, they are all implementing measures to boost economic growth. 'The environmental crisis,' observes a former French minister for the environment, 'arouses a vague sense of apprehension, which is accorded little conscious reflection and is both politically marginal and electorally insignificant'.⁵³ Yves Cochet adds: 'Nowhere in the world have there ever been any huge protest marches against the increase in greenhouse gas emissions, the loss of biodiversity, or the build-up of manufactured chemicals in the environment'.⁵⁴ Meanwhile, Hubert Védrine, former French minister for foreign affairs, reminds us that 'most populations fiercely refuse to see their lifestyle called into question, for they consider it to be a right, something to which they are entitled, in the context of progress envisaged as a one-way movement'.⁵⁵ Luckily, this is no longer entirely true

Michel, 2001); about communalism, see Georges Lapierre's article 'La communalité comme théorie et comme pratique', *Entropia*, no. 9, Fall 2010.

⁵² We have all heard about her famous statement: 'And, you know, there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families, and no government can do anything except through people, and people look to themselves first.' (*Woman's Own Magazine*, October 31st, 1987). In a similar vein, after receiving the 2010 Goncourt prize for literature, Michel Houellebecq said: 'We don't have any duty to our country; [...] France is nothing more than a hotel'. He might well have said a brothel.

⁵³ Yves Cochet and Agnès Sinaï, *Sauver la terre*, Paris, Fayard, 2003, p.31.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.42.

⁵⁵ Hubert Védrine, 'Surmonter l'insurmontable', *Le Débat*, no. 133, January-February 2005, p.173.

and the failure of the Copenhagen climate change agreement gave rise to large-scale protests. But there is still a long way to go and the triumphalist announcement of the un hoped-for and illusory Cancún agreement in December 2010 may well have lulled people back into passivity.

Faced with such deep-rooted consumerism, many doubt whether our so-called democratic societies – which should, in fact, be described as oligarchic – are capable of implementing the necessary measures. They believe that restrictions could be successfully enforced only by some sort of authoritarian ecocracy.⁵⁶ Hans Jonas propounded the hypothesis that a ‘benevolent dictatorship’ is necessary if we are to face up to the ecological challenge. ‘We cannot simply brush the question aside,’ he wrote. ‘Major conflicts in the past have imposed constraints, limits on our freedom, and war economies. Humanity has resorted to tyrannies of public safety. It has often benefited from doing so. And surely the issue at stake calls for us to accept such methods in order to bring about change?’⁵⁷ Dominique Bourg adopts a similar stance in favour of an expertocracy.⁵⁸ Although this technology specialist has converted from sustainable development to degrowth, he quite rightly does not trust the electoral system of today’s post-democracies, which systematically infantilise citizens and which he mistakes for real democracy. It is true, as George Trow writes, that ‘in the absence of adults, people [come] to put their trust in experts’.⁵⁹ Yet, even supposing that experts are less susceptible to manipulation than the average citizen, is it really possible to abandon productivism without restoring democracy?

Furthermore, it is important to distinguish between the *technical* need for a strong but democratically-chosen authority to oversee the transition and the necessary rationing, and an anti-democratic coup led by those wishing to preserve their privileges in a world of scarcity, which would lead directly to eco-fascism. While Jonas rejects eco-totalitarianism as ineffective and against his principles, certain minds in the highest realms of the Empire are giving it ever more serious consideration as a means of rescuing the system rather than humanity.⁶⁰ Supposedly, if the masses in developed countries were to see their standard of living threatened, they would be willing to abandon themselves to a demagogue promising to protect it in exchange for their freedom, even at the price of greater global injustice and of course, ultimately,

56 Hubert Védrine expresses views along these lines in the article quoted above, as he bases his hopes partly on the “enlightened technocratic despotism” of the European Commission’. Such a hope could drive more than one to despair!

57 Quoted in Jean-Paul Besset, *Comment ne plus être progressistes...*, op. cit., p.330. See also Michel Tarrrier (*Dictature verte*, Presse du Midi, 2010), who depicts a benevolent ecocracy following an ecological coup d’État.

58 ‘For all environmental questions, scientific knowledge should be at the heart of the decision-making system.’ See his interview in *Le Monde*, 31 October-1 November 2010. See also Dominique Bourg and Kerry Whiteside, *Vers une démocratie écologique*, Paris, Le Seuil, 2010.

59 George Trow, *Within the Context of No Context* (Boston, Little Brown and Company, 1981)

60 It is discussed in all seriousness by the Bilderberg group, the semi-secret society of the world’s elite which presides over the fate of the Empire, that is to say, world society.

the elimination of a portion of humanity.⁶¹ And in any case, only a totalitarian power would be capable of imposing the drastic reductions in consumption needed to ensure the survival of the elite. Richard Fleischer's film *Soylent Green* (1973), based on the science-fiction novel by Harry Harrison, depicts this scenario: in a world wrecked by pollution of all kinds, only the powerful have access to the limited remaining supplies of natural products, whilst the masses, controlled by a merciless police force, are reduced to eating foul artificial food made from recycled corpses...

This prospect, which stands diametrically opposed to the degrowth agenda, cannot be ruled out if indeed, as George Bush Sr. once said, the American standard of living is not open to negotiation. But the best way to find out whether the people of the United States (or France, or Ecuador) are willing to accept the changes that are necessary is surely to ask them.

In France, however, whether it is a question of nuclear power, genetically modified organisms (GMOs) or nanotechnology, the referendums demanded by citizen organisations are refused without fail by the ruling power and the debates that are staged are systematically rigged. Decisions are made before the people have even been pseudo-consulted. Of course, it is perfectly possible that under the manipulative influence of the media, advertising and propaganda, and intoxicated by over-consumption, the people would refuse to embark on the path towards a society of frugal abundance. This would even be quite normal in a *post-democracy*. Yet it is not what the opinion polls seem to indicate.

A survey conducted by Ipsos in August 2004 for National Geographic France, without a preliminary awareness campaign, shows that 58% of French people believe each individual should take action in his or her daily life; 75% are willing to stop leaving their electrical devices on stand-by; 62% to drive at 120 km/h on the motorway; 47% to stop using air-conditioning; 44% to use only public transport; 45% to buy an electric or hybrid non-polluting car; 43% to install solar heating at home.⁶² Many other surveys carried out in different countries show similar results. Curiously enough, as far as principles are concerned, there is no real opposition to the notion of building a degrowth society. Of course, there is a long way from intentions to acts, and the pace at which the situation is deteriorating will not necessarily work to the advantage of the democratic option. Castoriadis described the inversion of mentalities that could occur, however: '...people today don't believe in the possibility of a self-governed society, so the outcome is that such a society is impossible today. They don't believe in it because they don't want to believe in it, and they don't want to believe in it because they don't believe in it. But if they ever start wanting it, they'll believe in it and they'll be capable'.⁶³ The proposal to build a society of frugal abundance relies on the significant presupposition that the conditions required for doing so are possible. The very act of making such a proposal contributes nonetheless

61 See William Stanton, *The Rapid Growth of Human Population 1750-2000, Histories, Consequences, Issues, Nation by Nation*, Brentwood, Multi-Science Publishing, 2003.

62 Quoted by Hubert Védrine, *Surmonter l'insurmontable*, op. cit., p.175.

63 Cornelius Castoriadis, *A Society Adrift. Interviews and Debates, 1974-1997*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2010, p.211.

towards the change of attitude that is needed and sets the wheels in motion. We are faced with the none-too-small task of refounding democracy.

As Castoriadis used to say, whatever happens, we cannot prevent a democracy from committing suicide. If the vast majority of citizens choose to ignore all warnings, the objectors to growth will not attempt to bring them happiness against their will. The degrowth gamble simply consists in believing that the appealing prospect of a convivial utopia, combined with an awareness of the threats that weigh on our future and the need for a change of system, is likely to promote a 'decolonisation of the imagination' and, in the long term, inspire enough 'virtuous' behaviour for a sensible solution to be achieved: ecological democracy. This was also the conclusion drawn by Castoriadis who said: 'And if there is no new movement, no revival of the democratic agenda, "ecology" could very well be integrated in a neo-fascist ideology. In the case of a global environmental disaster, for instance, one can well imagine authoritarian regimes imposing harsh restrictions on a terrified, apathetic population. The insertion of an ecological component in a radical democratic political agenda is indispensable. And it is all the more imperative since any such agenda implies challenging the values and orientations of today's society, which is inseparable from the criticism of today's underlying "imaginary of development".'⁶⁴ On the other hand, Ivan Illich declares that 'the alternative to managerial fascism is a political process by which the population decides how much of any scarce resource is the most any member of society can claim; a process in which they agree to keep limits relatively stable over a long time, and by which they set a premium on the constant search for new ways to have a growing percentage of the population join in doing ever more with ever less'. He adds, 'such procedures may sound idealistic at present [1973! The same year that *Soylent Green* was released]. This is not proof that they cannot become effective as the present crisis deepens'.⁶⁵

Can degrowth be incorporated into a capitalist system?

A recurring question in practically every public debate is whether degrowth is compatible with capitalism. Some critics, and more specifically the anarchist and Attac movements, accuse objectors to growth of coming to terms with capitalist exploitation because they denounce globalisation and growth without labelling them attributes of a capitalist and radically *laissez-faire* system.

'According to Jean-Marie Harribey,' Paul Ariès notes, 'there are several flaws in the degrowth agenda: pursuing unrestricted degrowth without abandoning capitalism, failing to see that capitalism is not the only possible economic system, and giving up on the idea of full employment'.⁶⁶ Some objectors to growth, such as Maurizio Pallante in Italy, seem to consider

⁶⁴ Cornelius Castoriadis, *A Society Adrift*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2010, p.201.

⁶⁵ Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, Glasgow, Fontana, 1975, p.116.

⁶⁶ Paul Ariès, *Décroissance ou barbarie*, Villeurbanne, Golias, 2005, p.87.

that degrowth (mainly that of GDP⁶⁷) is compatible with the capitalist market economy, but this is not our view, nor that of the majority of degrowth advocates. For Maurizio Pallante, founder of the *decrescita felice* (happy degrowth) movement, degrowth is a positive concept that can be defined as a reduction in GDP, which in practical terms means a decrease in the consumption and production of goods and market services. And yet, degrowth is 'happy' because meanwhile, goods and non-market services, which procure real satisfaction, are on the increase. Such a concept tends to confine degrowth's break with tradition to the sole aim of self-production, thus linking it to the 'simple living' ideology.

In actual fact, we are being criticised for throwing the 'rotten' baby of economic development and growth out with the dirty bathwater of capitalism and liberalism. In other words, we refuse to preserve the idea of an *alternative* economy, *alternative* growth, and *alternative* development (which can be described as Keynesian, public, socialist, human, green, sustainable etc.)

And it is true that for a certain section of the extreme left, capitalism is held responsible for all evils and shortcomings and is therefore defined as the fortress we have to bring down. But giving the enemy the face of capitalism is in fact problematic – economic players such as transnational firms do hold power, but are by nature incapable of directly exerting it. On the one hand, the 'Big Brother' of big business is anonymous, yet its subjects are willing to put constraints on themselves more than ever, and commercial advertising succeeds in manipulating them far more insidiously than political propaganda. Given these conditions, how can we take on the techno-economic mega-machine at a political level?

Objectors to growth have no clear stance on this topic because it is a question of challenging not only capitalism, but also the growth society as a whole. This is where Marxism falls short. As the Greek economist and philosopher Takis Fotopoulos stated, 'even if the growth economy is born out of market dynamics, it remains important not to confuse the two concepts. We can have a growth economy that is not a market economy, as is the case with "real socialism"'⁶⁸ Therefore, to challenge the growth society we must challenge capitalism, but the converse is not necessarily true. Jean-Paul Besset observes that 'capitalism and socialism both over-emphasise productivity. If the latter had triumphed rather than the former, we would probably still have had the same outcome. Do both systems not share the same operational vision of nature, an expendable resource waiting to be exploited to meet demand? Both intend to meet the demands of social well-being by an indefinite increase in productive power. Marxism argues for the development of productive forces to be freed from private property and put at the disposal of the working classes. Capitalism aims to suppress the barriers that restrict dynamic market mechanisms to ensure it is functional'.⁶⁹

67 See Maurizio Pallante, *La decrescita felice. La quantità della vita non dipende dal PIL*, Rome, Editori Riuniti, 2005.

68 Takis Fotopoulos, *Towards an inclusive democracy*, Continuum, 1998.

69 Jean-Paul Besset, *Comment ne plus être progressiste...sans devenir réactionnaire*, Paris, Fayard, 2005, p.169.

Like Pascal's infinite universe, the growth society is both nowhere and everywhere – including in our heads – and it rarely looks the same.

Free-market capitalism and productivist socialism are two approaches of one single programme for a growth society based on the development of productive forces to spur on human advancement. Ariès ironically states, 'socialist oil is not any *greener* than capitalist oil, and socialist nuclear power would not be more manageable. Moving away from capitalism is therefore necessary but insufficient. We need to dismantle the consumer society and to stop focusing on productivity. In short, we must destroy the industrial society. The human and environmental effects of "real socialism" are at least as bad as those of capitalism, and even of extreme capitalism'.⁷⁰

Given that growth and development respectively mean the growth of accumulation of capital and the development of capitalism, and therefore the exploitation of the workforce and the endless destruction of nature, degrowth can only mean reducing accumulation, capitalism, exploitation and predation. In order to reverse this destructive process, we need to not only slow down accumulation, but also challenge the logic of capitalism.

Without integrating environmental constraints, the Marxist criticism of modernity leads to terrible ambiguity. While Marxism criticises and condemns the capitalist economy, it considers that the growth of the forces unleashed in the process is 'productive' although they bring about at least as much destruction. If we look at growth in terms of the production, work and consumption, it can be given credit for (almost) all the good in the world, whereas in terms of an accumulation of capital, growth is blamed as the root of all evil; the proletarianisation of workers, their exploitation and impoverishment, not to mention imperialism, wars and crises, including of course environmental crises. As a result, a change in the relations of production, which is what the revolution we need and want means, will therefore be reduced to a more or less radical change of status for those who have a right to a share in the fruits of growth. We can quibble about its content, but the principle remains unchallenged.⁷¹ We obviously cannot expect the non-Marxist left to address this problem, as it came to an understanding with the system long ago.

70 Paul Ariès, *Décroissance ou barbarie*, Villeurbanne, Golias, 2005, p.27.

71 It is regrettable, and perhaps tragic, that the relationship between Sergueï Podolinsky (a Ukrainian aristocrat and scientist exiled in France) and Karl Marx came to an abrupt end. Podolinsky (1850-1891) was a precursor of ecological economics looking to reconcile the socialist view with the second law of thermodynamics, and he strived to synthesise Marx, Darwin and Carnot. Because he was overwhelmed and not well acquainted with scientific questions, Marx asked his dear friend Engels to review Podolinsky's proposal. This was probably a mistake. Steeped in a positivist and mechanistic conception of science, Engels did not foresee the significance of Podolinsky's work and concluded it was of no interest. Vernadsky's attempt in a similar vein had an even more tragic fate after the October revolution. Stalin wiped out Russian ecology in Siberian labour camps. In most cases, subsequent attempts at creating an 'eco-marxism' were subtly trying to rehabilitate and explain the past and were neither convincing nor effective. See James O'Connor, *Natural Causes: Essays in Ecological Marxism*, New York, Guilford Press, 1997.

By definition, degrowth is opposed to capitalism. As Murray Bookchin wrote, 'Capitalism can no more be "persuaded" to limit growth than a human being can be "persuaded" to stop breathing'.⁷² Degrowth not only condemns the contradictions and the social and ecological limits of capitalism, but also, more importantly, challenges its 'spirit', in the sense of the word as it was used by Max Weber, who considered 'the spirit of capitalism' to be a precondition for its realisation.⁷³ The axiom 'No social justice without growth', which wreaked so much havoc within the traditional socialist movement, should be replaced with another, taken from the nascent Native American rights movement: 'No social justice without ecological justice'.⁷⁴

A drastic reduction in activities that harm the environment and thus in the production of exchange values in the form of material, physical items would not necessarily involve limiting the production of intangible products, particularly non-commercial ones. Intangible products could remain commercial, at least in part. Mauro Bonaiuti imagines a possible gradual reform of the system through the creation of 'relational goods', in order not to frighten off more sensitive souls.⁷⁵ Patrick Viveret points in the same direction, with his suggestion that we ought to 'reconsider wealth' and calculate it differently. As for Jean Gadrey, he asks 'Can we pull through with reformed capitalism?' He concentrates on a painstaking examination of the material conditions of eco-compatible capitalism, and openly concludes that it is impossible to draw any conclusions. He does air some serious doubts. However, in doing so he fails to consider the heart of the problem. While it may be possible to conceive of an eco-compatible economy that is as enduring as a capitalism of the intangible, this perspective is, as we shall see, quite limited. Furthermore, this point of view is unrealistic when it comes to the ideological foundations of the market society, which is to say excess and unlimited (pseudo-) domination. Generalised capitalism cannot *not* destroy the planet in the same way as it destroys society and all that is collective.

However, the degrowth revolution and its various forms have raised questions on the abolition of capitalism and its consequences (the role of money, the market, wage labour and profit). If the market and profit can no longer be at the basis of the system, they may still linger as incentives. 'So capitalism shall remain,' say our critics.⁷⁶ Let us be absolutely clear: we shall not fall into the realist/essentialist/substantialist trap!

What do we mean by the word 'capitalism'? Capitalism as a system, as a 'mode of production' (in Althusser's words), is a creation of the mind. It is useful as a way of understanding a complex

72 Douglas Martin, 'Murray Bookchin, Writer, Activist and Ecology Theorist, Dies', The New York Times, 7 August 2006.

73 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Talcott Parsons, 1930.

74 Miguel Benasayag, 'Contre-pouvoir et décroissance', *Entropia*, no. 9, 27 September 2010, p.11.

75 Mauro Bonaiuti, 'A la conquête des biens relationnels', *Silence*, no. 280, February 2002. Michel Bernard, Vincent Cheynet and Bruno Clementin, *Objectif décroissance*, Lyon, Parangon, 2003.

76 Michel Bernard, 'Sortir des pièges de l'effet rebond', *Silence*, no. 322, April 2005. Also, several anarchist schools of thought (for example, www.lariposte.net).

reality, but dangerous if the concept is fetishised. Today, companies, governments and citizens all buy into the capitalist logic because it is the logic of the dominant actors in modern society, and has therefore spread into the minds of many. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the social economy are no exception. That is why the degrowth society cannot come about if we do not reject capitalism first. It is easy to talk about 'rejecting capitalism', but the historical process behind this phrase is anything but simple... Getting rid of capitalists, banning private ownership of production, and abolishing wage relations and money would plunge society into chaos and only be possible at the price of mass terrorism. None of this would be enough to abolish the capitalist *worldview* – far from it!

Would we still be able to speak of money, 'markets', profit and wages in a post developed society?⁷⁷ Are these 'institutions' (assimilated a bit too hastily to capitalism by some) not obstacles to the creation of a convivial society? Many human societies have markets, particularly in Africa, as well as currencies and, of course, commercial, financial and even industrial profit (the latter should perhaps be called 'industrious', since we are referring to artisans). They also have contract work (previously known under Roman law as *locatio operae*), which we call wage labour. But these 'economic' relations are dominant neither in the production nor in the circulation of 'goods and services'. Above all, they are not sufficiently interconnected to constitute a 'system'. These are neither market societies nor all-market societies, nor wage labour societies, nor industrial societies. They are definitely not capitalist societies, even if we can find *capital* and *capitalists* in them. The worldview of these societies has so little to do with economics that they experience their own *economy* unwittingly.⁷⁸ Castoriadis says, 'It's quite obvious: you can't have a complex society without, for instance, impersonal means of exchange. Money has that function and is very important in that respect. It's another thing to deprive money of one of its functions in capitalist and pre-capitalist economies: that of an instrument for the personal accumulation of wealth and for the acquisition of means of production. As a unit of value and as a means of exchange, money is a great invention, one of humanity's great creations'.⁷⁹

I think it is important to distinguish the Market from the markets to avoid mixing them up. The latter never obey a pure rule of perfect competition, and it is just as well that they do not. Client relations are never completely impersonal. They always include a little bit of the spirit of giving that should also be rediscovered by the degrowth society.⁸⁰

Therefore, abandoning development, the economy and growth does not mean that we must renounce all of the social institutions annexed by the economy. Rather, we must place them in a

77 Serge Latouche, *Le défi de l'éthique dans une économie mondialisée*, Paris, Fayard, 2003.

78 '...the extinction of capitalism without doing away with autonomy and the logic of capital, which remain valid, though in a limited way.' André Gorz, *Capitalism Socialism Ecology*, New York, Verso, 1994.

79 Cornelius Castoriadis, *A Society Adrift. Interviews and Debates, 1974-1997*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2010, p.161.

80 *Ibid.*, p.169.

different kind of logic.⁸¹ It is not a question of abolishing all institutions that have been colonised by economics, but of restoring their sociability. Exchanges of products and services (including labour) would no longer be pure exchanges between things, objects of monetary calculation. They would revert to being exchanges between people, with all the hazards that involves. Again, getting out of the economy is exactly like an *Aufhebung* in the Hegelian sense of ‘abolition’, ‘sublation’. However, getting out of the economy also involves renouncing the idea of economic science as an independent and formalised discipline.

Degrowth can therefore be considered a kind of ‘ecosocialism’, especially if, by ‘socialism’, we agree with André Gorz in considering it ‘the positive response to the disintegration of social bonds ensuing from the commodity and competitive relations characteristic of capitalism’.⁸²

On the transition

The transition between the capitalist system and the degrowth society will certainly be problematic as regards reconverting the production system. However, degrowth is also a gamble on human ingenuity, which will have to provide solutions when the time comes. For example, we can imagine turning car factories into factories that produce electric cogeneration machines. All you need to make a microgenerator is, after all, a car motor connected to an alternator placed inside a metal box. The skills, technology and even the equipment needed are practically identical. Distributive cogeneration raises energy efficiency from 40% to 94% and reduces both fossil fuel consumption and CO₂ emissions.⁸³ Humanity’s technical and scientific archives already contain a nearly inexhaustible supply of ingenious solutions to the myriad problems we shall encounter. We just need to choose wisely. The reconversion of productive activities would also include the redefinition of labour and, at the very least, limiting onerous work until it can be abolished.

Escaping from the growth society impasse means finding ways to create the world of voluntary restraint and frugal abundance that we believe is possible. In order to do so, we must, however, get out of the rut of ‘critical’ thinking, that is, the pre-packaged thinking which forms the basis of every leftist stance. Inventing new approaches to politics means rethinking politics as a whole and finding a route out of the dead-end of politicking. One of the reasons (if not the main reason) for the failure of socialism is the hegemonic desire for a single discourse and a single model. That is not to say that there have not been several (from Leninism and Stalinism to Maoism,

81 We share Castoriadis’ point of view on this as well: ‘On the other hand, there is the absurd Marxist idea that the market as such—commodities as such— “personifies” alienation. That’s absurd because interpersonal relations in an extended society can’t be ‘personal’ the way they are in a family. They are always, and always will be, socially mediated. In any even slightly developed economy that mediation is called the market (exchange, in other words).’ *A Society Adrift*, op. cit., p.155.

82 André Gorz, *Capitalism Socialism Ecology*, London, Verso, 1994, p.30.

83 Maurizio Pallante, *Un futuro senza luxe?*, Rome, Editori Riuniti, 2004.

Trotskyism and social democracy), but none of these schools of thought or models was capable of encapsulating the many truths and diverse, concrete solutions. In his famous 1881 letter to Vera Zasulich, Marx admittedly raised the possibility of moving directly from the traditional Russian peasant community, the *mir*, to socialism, thus bypassing capitalism entirely. This alternative was discussed again in Africa after independence and was mentioned in relation to Mexico's indigenous peoples and Zapatista movement.⁸⁴ However, we know that Engels was very sceptical about it a decade after Marx's death, and twenty years after that, Lenin attacked (both in theory and in practice) the 'remains' that Stalin was to eliminate without pity. The various 'real Marxisms' of emerging countries were just as hard on pre-capitalist community structures. 'Socialist' modernisation erased the past with more violence and energy than even capitalist modernisation. This paved the way for the ultra-liberal globalisation which followed in the wake of socialism's failed experiments. Early socialism, quickly dismissed as being romantic and utopian, was characterised by its remarkable diversity of agents and projects, which has been wiped out by the one-track thinking of historical, dialectical and scientific materialism. Henceforth, plurality was tolerated only for tactical reasons; a mere temporary concession until diverging voices could rally around the only real socialism... Enabling dissonant voices is what degrowth is all about.

Is degrowth a left or right-wing political agenda?

It is obvious to most objectors to growth that degrowth is a left-wing political agenda, even though certain right-wingers advocate for their own version of degrowth. Not only is it a left-wing political agenda, but it is the only one that can give the Left meaning again. Nevertheless, this message is often strongly rebuffed.

Degrowth is part of the left-wing agenda because firstly, it is based on criticism of liberalism, secondly, it renews ties with socialism's original philosophy by condemning industrialisation, and thirdly, it questions capitalism according to the strictest Marxist orthodoxy.

1) Degrowth is above all a radical critique of liberalism as the underlying system of values of the consumer society. It is a solid utopia, a political project that can be divided into eight Rs: re-evaluate, reconceptualise, restructure, relocate, redistribute, reduce, re-use and recycle, two of which – re-evaluate and redistribute – give new meaning to this critique. Re-evaluating means rethinking the values we believe in and around which we structure our lives, and changing the ones that lead to disaster. Altruism should trump selfishness, and so should cooperation when opposed to fierce competition; social life over unlimited consumption; local over global; autonomy over heteronomy; reason over rationality; human bonds over materialism, and so on. What matters most is to question the Promethean approach of modernity inherited from Descartes (according to whom human beings are the masters and owners of nature) and from Bacon (for whom nature has to be subjugated). The whole paradigm simply needs to be changed.

⁸⁴ For Africa, please refer to: Guy Belloncle, *La question paysanne en Afrique*, Paris, Karthala, 1982. For Mexico: Jérôme Baschet, *La rébellion zapatiste*, Paris, Flammarion, 2005.

Redistribution of wealth and access to natural heritage is necessary in order to fill the gap between developed and developing countries, as well as within each society. The fair distribution of wealth is the sensible solution to social issues. The capitalistic production system, based on unequal access to the means of production and resulting in an ever-growing gap between rich and poor, needs to be eradicated and give way to the Left's core ethical value of sharing.

2) The ideas of independent thinkers such as Élisée Reclus and Paul Lafargue are at the basis of socialism, and are the pillars of the degrowth ideology. Ivan Illich and Jacques Ellul inspired objectors to growth, who are renewing ties with the critique of industrialisation as expressed by the precursors of socialism. To get a good idea of the origins of political ecology as it has been developed by André Gorz or Bernard Charbonneau⁸⁵, we should read the works of thinkers such as British artist and revolutionary William Morris, and others whose ideas ranged from anarchism to socialism. We should also study and reconsider the Luddites' claims. Demanding quality products, refusing ugliness, seeing life in a poetic and aesthetic dimension are prerequisites in order to give Communism meaning again.

3) Criticising capitalism is inherent to degrowth, since this movement is completely opposed to the consumer and development society. Paradoxically, degrowth can be considered more Marxist than Marxism, it being the goal that Marxism (and maybe even Marx himself) never managed to achieve. Indeed, growth is only a label put on what Marx analysed as the unlimited accumulation of capital, which is the source of all the dead ends and injustice of capitalism. Marx summed it all up (or almost all) in one short passage, often quoted, commented on and eventually rejected by the guardians of the temple⁸⁶: 'Accumulate, accumulate! That is Moses and the Prophets!' The very essence of capitalism lies in the accumulation of capital, which is made possible by the extortion of the surplus value produced by workers. Accumulation is achieved through making profit, and has no other goal than resulting in an even bigger profit. According to Marx, even 'individual capitalists' are subject to this logic. Indeed, if they fail to accumulate, they will be eliminated by competitors who have more funds than they do. Saying that growth or capital accumulation is the essence and purpose of capitalism would be as relevant as saying that it is based on the search for profit. Ends and means are in this case interchangeable. The aim of accumulating capital is to make profit, and vice-versa. Using the word *good* to qualify growth, development or accumulation of capital – entertaining the myth of a 'growth whose goal is to better fulfil social needs'⁸⁷ –, in other words, saying that there is such a thing as a *good* capitalism (green or sustainable) means that a *good* exploitation is possible. The current crisis is inextricably entwined with social and ecological issues. To find a way out, we need to put an end to our continual accumulation of capital, and to stop considering that the

85 See William Morris's lecture 'How we live and how we might live', 1884, transcribed and published in Political Writings of William Morris, by A. L. Morten, 1973.

86 See 'Décroissance: le poids des mots, le choc des idées', written by Alain Beitone and Marion Navarro, available and discussed on the MAUSS website (www.revuedumauss.com).

87 Phrase used by Alain Beitone and Marion Navarro, *Ibid.*, p.6.

logic of profit should be the basis for all decisions. For this reason, the Left should adopt the degrowth theory lest they deny their own values.⁸⁸

Right-wing antiproductivism

Criticism of modernity does exist among right-wingers; the Right also include elements of anti-utilitarianism and anti-capitalism.⁸⁹ Therefore it is not surprising that anti-Labourism and antiproductivism on the Right use the same arguments as we do. We must concede that the Right went further in its criticism of modernity than the Left, despite, on the one hand, a long tradition of criticism from the anarchist wing of Marxism – later updated by the Frankfurt School, councilism and situationism – and, on the other hand, the publication of *The Right to be Lazy*, an essential book written by Marx's son-in-law Paul Lafargue, which remains today one of the strongest blows stricken against Labour and productivism. Criticism of modernity took a big step forward with Hannah Arendt and Cornelius Castoriadis, after they studied the theories of counterrevolutionary thinkers such as Edmund Burke, Louis de Bonald and Joseph de Maistre. However, these ideas remained politically marginal. Maoism, Trotskyism and any other kind of ultra-leftism are just as productivist as orthodox communism. Nevertheless, right-wing and left-wing antiproductivism are not to be confused. The same goes for anti-capitalism and anti-utilitarianism. The way we envision the degrowth society is neither as a permanent return to the past nor as a compromise made with capitalism, but as a journey beyond modernity (hopefully with every step in the right place).

All the quibbling around the word degrowth, used by some as a way to create an aversion to it, often hides resistance (in the psychological sense of the word) to the degrowth concept in both the Right and the Left. 'Degrowth' is reproached for its lack of appeal and its ambiguity (as if it was not the case of words such as progress, growth, development and the most ambiguous... sustainable development). On top of this, degrowth is a negative word, and that is unacceptable in a society where being 'positive' is crucial (as if those who aspire to change the world had to abide by the rules of its perverted ideology). To put it simply, degrowth is not sexy. These arguments are not wrong. I would even say that it is a terrible word to summarise a project of ecologic democracy and frugal abundance, but it is still no worse than any other. Nevertheless, degrowth as a catchphrase is a rather good choice, inasmuch as it is not completely negative. And since the economy has overflowed its banks just like a river, it would in fact be desirable to contain it within reasonable limits. After all, the decline in the water level after a devastating flood is a good thing.

One reason for resisting the word degrowth, according to the political scientist Marie-Dominique Perrot, is that this word, which is supposed not to remind us of a set of notions already anchored

88 André Gorz, *Paths to Paradise*, Pluto Press, 1985.

89 Alain de Benoist is the French representative of this movement, though he denies it. Alain de Benoist, *Demain la décroissance ! Penser l'écologie jusqu'au bout*, Paris, Édite, 2007.

in our minds, is actually doing so by almost sneakily taking on all the magic of the term 'growth'. All the while, it is also openly and radically trying to distance itself from it with the prefix 'de-'. Degrowth is affected and infected by the word 'growth', which devours it from within.⁹⁰

Fortunately, she offers a solution to the problem: we just need to turn the magic of growth into a poetic vision of degrowth. Degrowth offers a way out of the dream world of endless production, leading to a poetic era, free of any sentimental, aesthetic or moral imperative but full of imagination and creativity.⁹¹

If we look at the term itself, degrowth is just a catchy word, but when it comes to the material domain, it is a synonym for decrease. And in order to decrease, we need to 'de-believe' and shape the poetic world put forth by Marie-Dominique Perrot.

90 Marie-Dominique Perrot, 'La Décroissance, un mot en laisse', *Entropia*, n°9, Autumn 2010, p.211.

91 *Ibid.*, p.213-214.