



**Lorenzo Toresini**

### **The strength of „weak thinking“**

In 1972 Basaglia in Trieste brought the issue of ergotherapy, i.e. coerced labour within asylums, to the attention of his collaborators. In 1973 the first social cooperative in history was formed. A strike was called within the hospital because the Provincial authorities did not want to recognise and pay the cooperative. All, or almost all patients worked for nothing within the Psychiatric Hospital. Their workplaces ranged from the central kitchens, to the flowerbeds, to the pigsty, and there was one little old lady who washed and washed the coffee machine again and again. Basaglia's people convinced all patients-workers, who by now worked passively and out of habit, without asking for any salary, because they were NOBODY, to leave floors unwashed, flowers unkept, food not prepared for free, and the coffee machine not washed again and again. The Provincial authorities were forced to recognise the contractual power of inmates, who had by this stage formed a social enterprise, and had to sign a contract with the cooperative itself, and to introduce a new budget for internal expenses. Thus „weak thinking“ prevailed over the „strong thinking“ according to which wealth had to be produced for the owner's profit.

In fact, the thinking behind the birth of the first cooperative was the same that conceived the principle of the abolition of restraint. Eliminating ergotherapy goes hand in hand with bringing an end to the eternal war against the mentally-ill patient (K.Doerner). To stop tying up patients implied recognition, acceptance and placing value on their subjectivity. Those who restrain patients don't know what they are missing out on in terms of their expression and the message they are conveying. The utopian goal of workplace integration plays an important role in banning practices that undermine human dignity, such as restraint, custody behind locked doors, and the electrical resetting of brain hardware.