New figures, or larval forms, of political organization and often opaque redistributions of geopolitical power, coupled with a welter of communicative, technological, and economic mutations, have given rise lately to what some regard as a “spatial turn” in the social sciences.¹ The unrelenting and often inconsistent proliferation of discourses on so-called globalization, accompanied by a host of descriptive enquiries into the changing patterns of contemporary life, display a marked obsession with all things spatial; a relentless, if often monotonous, usage of topographic metaphors and topological concepts. We are swamped by diagrams, cartographies, networks, dwellings, frontiers, and so on. The sources for this tendency are very heterogeneous, but they do appear to derive, whether sociologically, philosophically or politically, from a mounting suspicion of models of modernity that couple the lucid rationality and imposing will of a sovereign ego with a res extensa reduced to an indifferent, objective domain of coordination, calculation and control, itself directed by the temporal dimension of a project. Whether we are dealing with debates over the “global” or with the turn to Heidegger’s nostalgic ontology of habitation, spatial specificity is often enlisted to inhibit or undermine the pretensions of the kind of universal theory or politics that would smooth over the folds of particularity.²

When a commitment to such a universal account remains, spatial differentiation schematizes the general theory into a particular conjuncture.³ Whilst work of this kind maintains a commendable balance of scientific ambition and non-reductionist attention to the different logics, political and economic, at work in the spatial reality of politics, it arguably suffers from a tendency to envelop spatial differentiation within systemic logics that elide the generative role of political subjectivity, and social antagonism. This is not at all to say that such approaches need to be supplemented with a kind of phenomenology of resistance or, worse still, with an anti-universalist discourse of spatio-cultural particularity or difference. The point instead is that the “spatial turn” is often marked by what could be termed a deficit of praxis, of that exquisitely materialist concern with the effects of collective political action, subjectivity and organization on the composition of the social and the functions of command.⁴ If the vast and multifarious interrogation of the multiple spaces of contemporary social experience is not to turn into a more or less reactionary, anti-modernist nostal-
A parochial theory of cultural differences or a fatalistic logic of systemic transformation; if it is to enter into some sort of dialogue with the resurgence of interest, practical and philosophical, for notions of militancy and organization, then it is imperative to begin formulating a truly political topology, one that binds together the subjective forms of political action and the shifting configurations of space. What is required is a thinking of the antagonistic, or, at the very least, agonistic production of space, not just an account of the heterotopias of resistance or the creative destruction of space that accompanies capitalist accumulation.

As a kind of prolegomenon to such an enterprise, and for the sake of a coherent localization of this political topology itself, I would like briefly to interrogate, both theoretically and historically, a very definite political sequence which, I will argue, bears some important lessons for a political thinking of space that is to eschew the many pitfalls of the spatial turn, from romantic nostalgia to systemic fatalism, from the naturalization of the social to an exoticist condescension to cultural difference. This sequence is the one that goes by the somewhat imprecise name of Italian workerist or autonomist Marxism (operaismo), emerging in conjunction with the factory struggles of the 1960s through the journal Quaderni rossi, branching into a number of political and intellectual projects, reaching its point of organizational crisis in the late 1970s, and spreading its theoretical influence to the present day in a number of antagonistic movements (Tute bianche, Disobbedienti) and, most prominently, in the theoretical production of one of its originators, the philosopher Antonio Negri.

The choice of workerism as the object of a preliminary enquiry into political topology is motivated principally by two factors. First, the nexus of theoretical production and political militancy represented by this “tradition,” for want of a better word, is particularly rich, spanning a period of considerable social tumult and transformation and intense political conflict. What is of particular interest is the manner in which theorists of workerism, whose aims where more often than not explicitly political, tried to anticipate material transformations and spur political strategies – as well as the manner in which they were also forced to reckon with changes in the political terrain they had not entirely fathomed. Furthermore, its combination of critical fidelity to Marxism as a theory of social transformation and political practice, coupled with its emphasis on organizational experimentation, make of workerism a privileged instance for trying to glean how we may begin to think spatiality or placement in terms of the two interlinked dimensions of materialism: as a theory of praxis or subjectivation, on the one hand, and as a theory of historical change, on the other.

Second, the prolongation of the workerist inspiration in the much disputed work of Negri and Hardt – in the way they describe the production of a smooth space of capital regulated by a placeless imperial sovereignty as the product of the militancy and desires of the multitude – warrants renewed examination of its political and theoretical sources, both to veer away from the most simplistic criticisms of Empire and to really grasp the sources, the archaeology as it were, of a prominent contribution to the formulation of a contemporary political topology.

I would like to take my cue from a very simple question, albeit one that has gained a certain urgency in the wake of the widespread, if contradictory, attempts to fashion new forms of political militancy adequate to current dynamics of accumulation and command: how might the localization of political action, the kinds of places in which it is anchored or dimensions it traverses, affect its claims and its consequences? Or – to apply the key workerist thesis of the primacy of labour over capital, of resistance over power – how does political antagonism around the loci of production and accumulation give rise, in the processes of conflict, negotiation, and compromise, to different spatial configurations? Flashing forward, what is the effect of the dislocation of the intimate bearer of antagonism within the capitalist system, when any “proletariat” or “multitude” can no longer be found anchored and included in a specific locus, both material and symbolic, of society? Vice versa, does the differential localization of a fragmented labour-power, in the absence of a real
subjective unification, of a paradigmatic figure (the working class organized in the party) and a proper place (the factory, or the assembly) allow anything like the self-destitution that is the hallmark of any theory of the proletariat as the instance of a generic emancipation? More concretely: where does militancy take place, what, to borrow from Sylvain Lazarus, are the “places of politics,” and in what sense do they overlap with the places of the economy, the sites of capitalist exploitation and accumulation or those of spatio-temporal “fixes”; led by processes of what Harvey has recently dubbed, with reference to the occupation of Iraq, “accumulation by dispossession”? Should the conception of space be considered to be in a dialectical relationship to that of political antagonism? Indeed, one of the questions that needs to be addressed by any political topology that wishes to incorporate into itself a discourse on subjectivity is whether political organization is necessarily bound to some sort of spatial composition, whether in the sense of following the configuration of social space or of eliciting its transformation. In other words, what is the precise nature of the correlation between the objective political space of the factory and the subjective form of the party or the union, or between the “delirious” metropolis and autonomous instances of appropriation and occupation, or, more recently, between the political constitution of Empire and the movement of social forums? And, in all these cases, is economics what “sutures” politics to place, in the guise of the anchoring of a labouring subjectivity to the material locus of a given mode of production? Or is our task instead, as authors such as Lazarus and Badiou contend, to think the places of politics, the topologies of militancy and subjectivity, without a reliance on their localization within a system of economic accumulation, circulation, reproduction?

The Marxist and Leninist legacy that still influences much radical politics, for good or ill, crucially depends on the postulation of a critical point, a localization of antagonism within the social totality of capitalism, a “weakest link” in the capitalist chain or, in its workerist guise, “the material lever of the dissolution of capital planted in the decisive point of its system”: can any such point, or points, be identified today? Inasmuch as we recognize the debates that affected the revolutionary left from the 1960s onward as being accompanied by shifts in political topology, is it possible to understand the practical and theoretical disputes over issues such as organization and strategy as either the product or the instigator of spatial displacements in the sites of antagonism and militancy? Traversing the phases of development of the workerist tradition from the centrality of the factory to the non-place of contemporary capitalism in its imperial figure is perhaps not the worst place to start to gain some analytical purchase on the present tasks of a political topology. For one, it allows us to bridge the gap between current debates over the tactics and strategies of a “Global Justice Movement” converging on “World Social Forums,” and the long tradition of theoretical insights and organizational forms bequeathed by the workers’ movement and the Marxist tradition from the nineteenth century onward. Arguably poised at the tumultuous twilight of what we might see as the “classical” form of the political topology of antagonism, workerism, with its sensitivity to the crises that beset orthodox models of the relation between politics and space, and with its concern with anticipating (in order to deflect or transform) new regimes of spatialization, accumulation and command, remains a rich source for a sustained interrogation of current spatial forms and practices.

Throughout the discontinuous and contested history of workerism there is arguably a constant tension, perspicuously emphasized by Steve Wright, between, on the one hand, the explanation of the tendencies guiding the transformation of capitalism and its state form, and, on the other, the militant assumption and contestation of these changes in political action. The question turns out to be exquisitely spatial, and relates to whether the extension of what Tronti influentially called the “social factory” (fabbrica-società) – the consequence of the “real subsumption”11 of all labour and all social relation to the requirements of capitalist accumulation – still demands the identification of the factory and the
wage as the key sites of struggle; or whether, on the contrary, the increasing diffusion and decentralization of production and antagonism, marked by the explosive growth of the service sector and diminution of manufacturing and manned heavy industry, leads to acknowledging the necessity for different forms of struggle, different figures of organization and subjectivity – perhaps ones that evade the dialectical articulation that had been afforded by the centrality of the factory.

In the specific case of workerism, the analysis of the problem of the place of politics was filtered throughout by its signal conceptual contribution to the intellectual arsenal of Marxism: the notion of class composition. Like most of the concepts gleaned by Tronti, Negri and others from Marx (such as “social worker,” “general intellect,” “tendency,” “real subsumption”), class composition was formulated on the basis of the urgent necessity to anticipate the transformations and command strategies of capital, on the one hand, and contribute to the consolidation of an organized proletarian subject, on the other.

Negri defines class composition as

the combination of political and material characteristics – both historical and physical – which makes up: (a) on the one hand, the historically given structure of labour-power, in all its manifestations, as produced by a given level of productive forces and relations; and (b) on the other hand, the working class as a determinate level of solidification of needs and desires, as a dynamic subject, an antagonistic force, tending towards its own independent identity in historical-political terms. All concepts that define the working class must be framed in terms of the historical transformability of the composition of class. This is to be understood in the general sense of its ever wider and more refined productive capacity, the ever greater abstraction and socialisation of its nature, and the ever greater intensity and weight of the political challenge it presents to capital. In other words, the re-making of the working class!

As I shall argue, the question that persistently preoccupied the various theories of workerism – how to combine the structural vicissitudes of labour-power with the organized politicization of the needs and desires of the working class – was always spatially articulated or indexed, and inevitably so, one might add, such that the crisis of the large factory as the privileged place of politics was of momentous importance to both the theory and the practice of workerism. What is more, with the diffusion of production and the dissemination of labour-power occurring in the 1970s – diagnosed by workerists as a political response on the part of the state to the manifestations of workers’ autonomy – one might even argue that the Leninist focus on the critical point, the lever of revolution, lost its own index, left to float, diaphanous, over a highly differentiated, dishomogeneous social terrain, or forced into life via the violent confrontation with the state, a confrontation which, having lost or abandoned the centrality of the factory, was beyond the dialectics of recuperation.

Negri’s remaking of the working class here manifests all of its problematicity, since the subjective recomposition of the class was, especially as the decade of the 1970s wore on, an explicit response to the effects of capitalist restructuring, effects among which the tendential disappearance of a place of labour was first and foremost. In light of the internal debates and destiny of workerism, we could even hazard the hypothesis that in the articulation of the two dimensions of class composition highlighted by Negri – “technical” and “political” composition – the question of the spatial composition of class becomes of paramount importance, dictating both the political strategies of workerism and its theoretical valence. In this regard, its experience of the collapse of the factory as the site of the dialectical articulation of the structural and militant dimension of class, and their overall placement with a social totality, rendered it sensitive to the potentially disjunctive character of social spaces, divided between production and politics with no a priori fit being provided.

It might be useful at this point to spare a couple of words about the question of method. Most, if not all, the authors working in the orbit of workerism share two broad theoretical commitments. The first is to the aforementioned notion of “class composition,” the gist of which
is that any militant Marxism must concern itself not just with the objective analysis of the relation of labour to the means of production and the functions of command of capital but also with the dynamics of internal differentiation of the working class and their influence on its capacities for organization and antagonism. The second, which relies on this preoccupation with the antagonistic motor of the process of capitalist accumulation, is an interpretation of the transformations in the political configuration of capitalism and its means of domination from the angle of its most advanced, and in a certain sense “revolutionary,” sectors: a method of tendency, as Negri referred to it, in which the movement toward an ever more intense socialization of capital and “real subsumption” of society by capital is taken as the analytical key through which to grasp, anticipate and intervene in concrete political conjunctures. The theory is thus itself shot through with a kind of insurgent subjectivity, with an overt partisan hostility to detached contemplation (which it deems anchored in the denial of division) and scientific disinterest (whose systemic ties it finds easy to reveal, namely in the class composition of the figure of the expert or technician), thereby foregrounding its specific temporal regime: a partisan theory that fuels a recomposition of class and a political strategy and organization by anticipating the future moves of capitalist command, through an analysis of the tendencies at work in the organization and localization of production.

The accelerated modernization undergone by Italy in the post-war period, with its massive internal migrations (from the agricultural South to the industrial North) and rapid urbanization had a profound impact on the theoretical tendencies and political tactics of the dissident left of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and Italian Socialist Party (PSI) and in particular of extra-parliamentary groups that formed in the wake of the strikes and mobilization of the so-called “hot autumn” of 1969. The 1950s and 1960s witnessed a thorough rearrangement of the relation between class composition and the political cartography of production, consumption and circulation, such that the Italian cities that Sartre had singled out in Search for a Method for their evasion of a classist topography, of the kind instead visible in Paris, were now far more “striated” by the cycle of production. As Balestrini and Moroni note, this was a period in which the streets “became the assembly chains of the work force.” In this regard, the importance of migration and overwhelming transformation of Northern industrial cities under the guidance of capitalist planning cannot be underestimated – especially for the manner in which it spurred the theoretical and political work of Italian Marxists. This is not just in terms of dislocation and the uprooting, if not obliteration, of spatially entrenched existential patterns, the cultural dispossession and destruction that has notoriously accompanied capitalism ever since its inception. It also entails a deeply ambivalent phenomenon: on the one hand, the radical disruption of the political memory sedimented in certain experiences of social space (say, the experience of the artisan or professional worker as compared to that of the displaced and “disqualified” mass worker), on the other, the emancipation from political inhibitions and irrational allegiances that comes with the evacuation of cultural and territorial ties.

Danilo Montaldi, a path-breaking and unorthodox socialist thinker, one of the forebears of workerism, made the following observations about the new visage of the industrial metropolis:

In Milan, “time” and “space” have different meanings than those of the humanism whose passing is lamented in our universities. Neither time nor space must remain “empty.” […] The owner of a condominium had placed in six apartments, of three rooms each, eighteen families: one family per room, with shared amenities. […] From the digs and galleries of the metro rise up all the dialects of Italy […]. It is especially in common dives and commuter trains that one can still hear talk of politics in terms of wages and work hours. The silence that elsewhere dominates the mass constitutes, for the sake of the continuity of the City’s rhythms, an even stronger armature than the
newly restored buildings. [...] The City, expanding the frontiers of the public until the farthest moral peripheries, multiplies within the reaches of its horizons, the attacks on habits and traditions.17

The effects of this massive dislocation of the social geography of Italy – aesthetically encapsulated by the passage from the neo-realist city of the immediate post-war period (The Bicycle Thief) to the alienated urban landscapes of Antonioni (La Notte) – arguably lay the perilous foundations for a later phase that saw the unfurling of Lotta Continua’s 1970 congress slogan Prendiamoci la città (Let’s Take the City) and the theorization by Potere Operaio of the appropriation of autonomous spaces, or basi rosse (red bases).18 not to mention an extension of social conflict outside of the factory gates and into the metropolitan arena.

The drastic transformation testified by Balestrini and Montaldi, with all its subjective and cultural effects, was openly promoted by what Negri would refer to as the “planner-state” and focused on the factory as both physical and symbolic space. The theorists working in Quaderni rossi thus turned to enquiries into the changed experience of class composition, to a kind of militant sociology concerned, for instance, with the particular subjectivity of the new workers from the South, but also to a renewal of Marxist theory on the basis of this Italian phenomenon.19 It is thus that the theoretical thrust of workerism, whilst elicited by such phenomena of modernization and dislocation, came to be fashioned, first of all, in a radical reflection on the antagonism between labour and capital as localized in the factory – conceived as the critical point of articulation of the capitalist system of exploitation and the subjective, organizational resources of the working class.

In its inaugural formulation, as set forth in Tronti’s seminal Operai e capitale, the factory is a strategically and “genetically” totalizing particularity within the system of production, the privileged site of a partisan comprehension of the whole from the part upon which the whole depends. In Tronti’s early work this objective and subjective centrality of the factory is characteristically dissimulated by the fetishistic logic of capital, it appears as a mere moment, at the very point where capitalism is moving toward real subsumption and the factory is de facto the material and spatial schema of all social existence. As he writes:

The more capitalist production penetrates in depth and invades in extension the totality of social relations, the more society appears as a totality with respect to production and production as a particularity with respect to society. When the particular is generalised, is universalised, it appears as represented in the general, the universal. In the capitalist social relation of production, the generalisation of production is expressed as the hypostasis of society. When specifically capitalist production has woven the entire net of social relations, it itself now appears as a generic social relation.20

The political use of the factory as a site for political mobilization, organization and conflict thus depends on an organized subjective reversal which takes cognizance of the extension of the factory as a political and economic reality onto the whole social terrain. Focusing the antagonistic efforts of the working class on using the factory as a lever for attacking capital means both recognizing the tendency of the political logic of production to produce a social factory and anticipating or counter-actualizing this tendency by turning the factory into the destructive part at the centre of the social whole:

The more capitalist development advances, that is, the more it penetrates and extends the production of relative surplus value, the more the production–distribution–exchange–consumption cycle tightens, the more, that is, the relation between capitalist production and bourgeois society, factory and society, society and State becomes organic.21

What must be avoided at all costs is accepting the appearance, arising from the boundless extension of capitalist relations, that society is no longer moved and riven by the antagonistic structure of production. Beneath the organic semblance that makes of the factory a mere
moment, the militant task is, in the same gesture, to exacerbate the “anorganic” antagonism of the working class and to affirm the factory as the matrix of this society, not just a mere moment. As Luciano Ferrari Bravo perspicuously notes, the seeming pacification brought about by the dissolution of the factory itself as a site of antagonism, when viewed from the angle of the theory of the social factory, reveals itself as built on an armature of command, a structure of power which extends domination further and further into the social fabric rather than dissipating it in a set of local negotiations:

Social factory, capitalist social plan: within the first historical realisation of this movement is born the optical that sees the “extinction” of the exponential agglomerate of social violence. One is not able immediately to see that the social diffusion domination, the apparent “appeasement” of “politics” and “economics” necessarily harbours within itself the concentration of factory despotism on the whole of society.22

Needless to say, the question of revealing the factory as a “critical” locus, a matricial particularity, is an eminently practical one, since it involves the organized affirmation of labour as the exploited power which is cloaked by the seeming rationality of the social organization of production.

This political reaffirmation of the centrality of the factory, however, cannot be simply deduced from the thesis of the social factory. In his judicious assessment of the various impasses, at once political and theoretical, of workerism, Steve Wright directs our attention to the strategic ambivalence arising from this thesis. If we do not entirely endorse the dialectical matrix of Tronti’s argument, which identifies the factory, qua site of the immediate process of production, as the privileged site for forcing antagonism into the apparent social peace planned by the state, then it becomes difficult to adjudicate theoretically whether the notion of the social factory is to be read as a call to remain with the factory and the political forms it has traditionally given rise to, anchored as they are to particular forms of struggle (strike, sabotage, demonstration, negotiation) and centred on the (Leninist or social-democratic) party, or, alternatively, whether the task is that of inventing new modes of political behaviour capable of assuming the qualitative jump generated by the spreading of social factory — such that the anti-capitalist “lever” might lie elsewhere (or nowhere in particular...).23 On one level, we could argue, in favour of Tronti, that the creeping generalization of the factory, of “industrial production,” to cover the whole of “social production” (or rather, to make the social itself a matter of production in the capitalist sense), does not per se obviate the privileged localization of the factory — inasmuch as the latter is the one site where the reality behind the seeming pacification of the social factory can appear for what it is, and that the class struggle can be made explicit, organized and expanded. There is here also the realization, on Tronti’s part, that this is a moment to be seized, a kairos for political action which, once the conjuncture has been well and truly worked over by capitalist socialization, may never return. On another level, it is difficult to shake off the impression, corroborated by Wright, of a tension between Tronti’s brilliant updating of Marx to the Italian situation and the more rigid localization of his extremely antagonistic dialectics in the factory. The latter suggests that his political topology might depend, if not on a teleology — of the kind that elsewhere heralded the onset of a dedifferentiated world market — at least on a determinate law-like tendency, without which nothing would guarantee the role of this place, the factory. In Tronti’s seminal work this law is, of course, not the objective law of transition between modes of production, but the far more subjective “laws of motion” of the working class and its class composition. At the heart of this whole debate is, of course, the oscillation, elicited by the term “social factory,” between the actual factory (say, the Fiat Mirafiori plant novelized in Balestrini’s Vogliamo Tutto) and the factory as a conceptual, rather than material, site, a kind of capitalist diagram.24

It was to be a few years until the contradiction that Wright discerns in the political assumption
of the thesis of the social factory was to be made painfully urgent by the strategies of restructuring that invested the factory in reaction to the virulent struggles of 1968–69 and were in turn militantly interpreted by groups such as Potere Operaio as a call to move beyond the factory gates. By any standard, the 1970s in Italy saw a veritable spatial attack upon the social hegemony of the working class, which had manifested itself, beyond the factory dialectic of the unions, in the political form of autonomy. This forced dislocation was not simply a creative destruction, or dispossession, for the sake of profitability, but involved a truly political confrontation over the control and experience of space. For Bologna, importantly, this was accompanied by the incapacity on the part of the left to make a durable political link between the factory proper and the social factory (which included the movements of the unemployed, of women, of students) and by a peculiarly Italian co-opting of the independent organization of the working class in the factories by the party system – via a corruption of what had been the system of delegates and the workers’ councils. Bologna thus deemed the “retreat from the factories” (and from the thematics of class composition) as “suicidal.” In his sights, among others, was the 1971 “turn” by the extra-parliamentary grouping Potere Operaio, led, among others, by Negri.

There is here a very complex knot of themes, many of which were vigorously, even violently, debated at the time: the question of mobility, both in the sense of migration into the factories and flight (whether forced or intentional) from them; the tactical and strategic role of the factory; the relation between class composition, militancy and the shifting spaces of production. A Potere operaio pamphlet from 1971 gives a sense of this debate:

The new political composition of the class, the connotation of the majority of employed labour as proletariat, is not given in the objectivity of the production process [...]. No, the political figure of the reunited proletariat is given only as estrangement, as antagonism, as struggle against the capitalist system, as will of destruction and as Communist programme.

Amid the oscillations between a revamped Leninism and a dissolution of militancy into a radical politics of the everyday what emerged from this turn was a key shift in emphasis from the dialectical, if extreme, antagonism situated in the factory to an almost entirely unilateral politics of autonomy, founded on notions such as need and desire (somewhat reductively treated as a politics of consumption by certain critics), and strikes, halts in production, grassroots committees — today, of course, all of this needs to be carried out, it needs to be accomplished wherever possible; but today, in the crisis, it is also a matter of setting out and realizing, within the time imposed by the crisis, a jump in the level of the political struggle, of the revolutionary struggle.
spread over the metropolis and the territory at large. At the level of the theory of class composition this was signalled by the absolutely pivotal passage from the mass worker that accompanied the centrality of the factory to the social worker of a higher state of socialization and diffusion of production. The theoretical question, which arguably still determines Negri’s recent work, is the following: can need (or desire) be considered as a form of localizing antagonism? If power is no longer indexed to the immediate process of production, is the new site of antagonism to be identified in the multiplicity of needs that try to counter the mechanisms of accumulation and command? In this regard, while there remains a fundamental conviction in the dualist matrix of class struggle, we can no longer speak of a site, be it in the sense of a matrix or paradigm, but rather must speak of sites, themselves generated by subjective needs. As Negri and his comrades wrote in 1983:

The autonomous movement […] sought to go beyond the previous “workerist factory” perspective and to understand the changes in the labour process which were taking place. But above all, it expressed the new subjectivity of the movement, the richness of its multiple differences, its rejection of formal politics and the mechanisms of representation. It did not seek a “political outlet” or “solution”. It embodied an immediate exercise of power within society. In this sense, localism and pluralism are a defining characteristic of the experience of autonomy.

These new subjectivities are therefore not pre-determined by a place that would already be given as the site of an articulation of politics and production. What is more, they inflect the relation between space and power, force and place. Retrospectively, the concept of power in classic Marxism and earlier phases of workerism is criticized for obliterating the space of needs in a particular temporality, for being a “projection into the future, rather than a lived experience within the liberated spaces of the present.”

The problem of power over space, thus linked to the subjectivity of need and political organization, is one of the key contributions of workerism. As Harvey writes: “Whoever controls space can always control the politics of place even if – and this is an important aspect – one must first control some specific space.” The shifts from the factory to the metropolis and to the overall territory as a complex, differentiated fabric of productive needs could also be considered as a privileged prism for understanding the problem of violence, namely the manner in which the latter is linked to determinate forms of spatial expression (think of the difference between the occupation of a neighbourhood and the occupation of a factory, for instance). The passage from workerism proper to autonomy can thus be understood in terms of the drive to conquer and control one’s own spaces. But it is also connected to the importance of the overall sphere of reproduction outside the immediate process of production, as emphasized by the influence of feminism. No longer intrinsically tied to the capitalist regime of antagonism via the factory, politics now emphasized the distance of its insurgent power (potentia) from commanding power (potestas). As Negri and his comrades remarked, what really defined the movement that peaked in 1977 was its being “asymmetrical in its relation to power”: an asymmetry which showed “the authentic basis of the social processes that underlay it” and evaded “frontal counterposition.” From within the political topology of this sequence of Italian politics we can thus witness the division of antagonism into the dialectical antagonism of the factory struggle, on the one hand, and the capillary, self-organized antagonism of metropolitan needs, on the other.

A move toward the latter did not necessarily mean abandoning the question of political composition, the “objective” side of political topology. Whence the attempt, which in a sense continues in the theoretical and sociological research of the heirs of workerism, to formulate a theory of the diffuse factory, linked to a figure of diffuse labour, which could take many forms: the marginal or peripheral work of illegal labour, the invisible work of reproduction and domestic labour, the sometimes creative, sometimes auto-exploitative forms of autonomous labour. This research also had a privileged locus, the Italian Northeast, what Bologna called “a
prime laboratory of the new system of flexible accumulation. The attempt to understand the passage from waged factory workers to “autonomous workers” and formation of highly technological industrial districts in that region, thereto relatively poor and agriculturally driven, can thus be seen as the Italian counterpart to the anglophone debate over post-Fordism and flexible accumulation, for instance in the New Times theorists of Marxism Today – but a counterpart which is singularized by its focus on antagonism and class composition as the motor of the political and spatial transformation of production.

Negri himself, presenting his collective sociological work on new forms of “postfordist” production emerging in the 1980s and 1990s, asks: “Why has my research moved from the big factory to the territorial diffusion of production?” His own thinking started from an experience of Fordist militancy, under the banner of Potere Operaio, at Porto Marghera, the massive petrochemical plant near Venice. After the relative collapse of factory work, Negri experienced first hand the phenomenon of unemployed workers building forms of autonomy and counter-power in the territory surrounding the plant, using their lay-off payments (Cassa Integrazione) as a basis for entrepreneurship, “operations of centering,” departing from the density and localization of factory antagonism and its relation to the efficacy and productivity of capital. It is crucial to the maintenance of the workerist thesis of the primacy of struggle that this phenomenon be thought not just a result of the unilateral impetus of capital but also a product of antagonistic subjectivity – of the desire to spread cooperation over the territory and flee factory discipline. In this regard, Negri emphasizes the role of the political entrepreneur, “the autonomous agent of an ever more cooperative social work on the territories of production,” the weaver of the objective, institutional and subjective networks that made “industrial districts” possible, of the kind capitalized on by Benetton, “a multinational of the informal organization of diffuse production.”

The various concepts and periodizations put forth by workerism with respect to the question of political spatialization – from the social factory to the diffuse factory, from the productive territory to the insurgent, post-Fordist metropolis – present us with a rich resource for the development of a political topology for our time. What emerges from this materialist lineage, through its political initiatives and crises, and the manner in which these latter inflected the development and construction of its theoretical apparatus, is not a single transcendental aesthetic for the phenomenology of labour-power and antagonism, but a series of spatio-temporal dynamisms, dramatizations of class struggles in different sites, marked by different tactics.

Yet we may ask whether, with the full deployment of real subsumption and its correlate of non-dialectical antagonism, as developed by Negri from his writings on the social worker to his research with Hardt, we have not just abandoned the spatial anchoring of a social dialectics in the factory, but any even theoretical localization of political analysis and project. Above all, the one afforded by the part/whole relationship of working-class to capitalist system of production which, in the theory of Empire, is abandoned for the sake of an unlocalizable, immeasurable interplay between a parasitical regime of command and accumulation, on the one hand, and a smooth space of cooperating subjectivities, on the other.

From the vantage point of Empire, and its assumption of the Deleuzo-Guattarian distinction between smooth and striated space, it is possible to retrospectively elucidate the strong spatial content of Negri’s reading of the Marxist notion of real subsumption such that the latter, by extending the social factory beyond any possible measure (of time and value) and beyond any univocal indexing of production, any privileged point for the dialectical articulation of capital, labour, and insurgency, necessitates a renewed effort to abandon the “transcendental aesthetic” of traditional radical politics and think both production and subversion in terms of divergent constructions of space (and time). Turned “right side up” and viewed from the autonomous standpoint of a cooperative class of exploited producers (proletariat, social worker, multitude)
socialized within capital, the thematic of real subsumption has led Negri, in his most recent speculative venture, to a notion of space as “constitutive of the common,” whereby “co-operation is the space constituted by the common and so is multiplied in its productivity.”

Whilst globality and locality are not generated or accounted for by a dialectical matrix, Negri does maintain the line, which he regards as being of the utmost tactical importance, that locality is never given but is produced (whether as discrete, commanded or common is a matter for struggle). This line is based on a fundamentally antagonistic interpretation of the relation between smooth (or molar) and striated (or molecular) space. Indeed, we could hazard the observation that Negri’s most recent work in this direction, in collaboration with Hardt and on his own, rests in great part on reading *A Thousand Plateaus* through the lenses of class struggle (and vice versa). When he writes that “the global world is a striated world,” this should therefore be understood in the sense that the deterritorializing logic of capitalist accumulation and the common spaces of cooperation are crosscut by a territorial logic of power. Conversely, if the territorial striations of the world system may lead us to acknowledge the endurance of the nation-state, “from a molecular perspective,” that is, from the standpoint of the productive and antagonistic dynamics behind social transformation, for example, “we can see the period of the cold war as one in which there was a transformation in the effective form of sovereignty,” whose outcome was “a sovereignty with no outside, or rather one that does not recognize the distinction between inside and outside.” Crucially, this abolition of the outside, whose Marxist analysis “classical” workerism had inaugurated via the notions of the “social factory” and “real subsumption,” also rescinds the more or less dialectical articulation of (welfare or planner) state, bourgeoisie, and working class as principally mediated via the locus, both physical and formal, of the factory. This time reading antagonism via Deleuze and Guattari’s onto-ethology of difference, Negri can thus state that “*Molecular civil war* is characterized by overlapping structures that fight one another in a common space, along multiple variable fronts.”

Notice the shift here from the frontal confrontation, which “classical” workerism endeavoured to intensify, between (the state of) capital and (the party of) labour, to a refracted and non-synthesizable multitude of struggles which, though they may be theoretically identified with the vestigial antagonism of the exploiters and the exploited, nevertheless do not converge on a site of antagonism, on a critical point that would be like the historical a priori for any insurgency, any anti-systemic movement. Notice, too, that instead of seeking out tactics for the recomposition of class as the prelude to a confrontation – whether this be organizing at the factory gates or constructing “red bases” throughout the metropolis – the emphasis on the ontological notion of “a common space” both makes any a priori placement of antagonism ineffective and, by the same token, tends to make the struggle more virulent. After all, a molar, factory-centred class struggle certainly seems more recuperable than a “molecular civil war”!

This is not to say, however, that the problem of localization has been simply passed over by Negri. Indeed, his account of the “crisis of political space” is closely wedded to the thinking of non-dialectical forms of territorialization that would eschew the traditional relationships between modes of accumulation and figures of sovereignty, that “machine of authority which traverses and structures the territory.” In contradistinction to a dialectical schema that would deduce the site of antagonism and the critical point, or lever, of insurrection, within a social totality oriented by a more or less irreversible temporal motor, Negri’s recent work is very sensitive to the undecidability of the place of politics. Whilst general regimes of spatial production may be identified, for instance in line with the intuitions of Harvey’s Marxist geography, they do not as such amount to the deployment of a veritable political topology. For the latter, bereft of the transcendental aesthetic that would link the sovereign space of the nation, the productive place of the factory and the time of development and crisis, must now turn its attention to the evental, non-totalizable nature of antagonism and try to glean the spatio-temporal
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dynamisms that would permit such an event to individuate itself in a body capable of struggle and antagonism, of exodus and separation. Having acknowledged “the difficulty of recognizing the spatial dimension of a new Leninist project,” in this absence of an a priori spatio-temporal determination of politics, Negri’s neo-Leninism, very much unlike that of Tronti’s in *Operai e capitale*, is predicated upon the reciprocal determination of the event and the place of resistance, and the concomitant thesis that the production of subjectivity depends on a body which is “always localized and is always in *that time*.” In a certain respect, the dislocation of the industrial link between the sites of production and the places of politics, which workerism had experienced in *practice* ever since the setbacks in the factory struggles of 1971 and the consequent determination to “take over the city,” serves only to intensify the need to think the fugitive schemata and urgent tactics of localization.

As an aside, we might here ask whether in the final analysis there isn’t an irreparable disjunction between the conceptualization of molecular antagonism and the idea that such an antagonism is localized in a body. How symptomatic of a fundamental theoretical weakness is Negri’s oscillation between the molecular and the incarnate? Not only are the body and the flesh constantly attacked by Deleuze and Guattari for their incircumventable ties to phenomenological humanism, but, as Alain Badiou has noted in *The Century*, isn’t the most problematic and potentially disastrous localization of politics the one that saw the call for revolution linked to the creation of “passive bodies of subjectivation,” monumental reifications of subjectivity that shifted the attention from the concrete and diversified places of politics to its transcendental place and agency? Negri contends that the tactical point and event of revolution depends on the strength of the cooperative subject or multitude, but that the latter cannot be linked to a pre-given space or a “date with history”: “the theme of the space for the party is thus subordinated to a specific kairos, to the untimely power of an event.”

The real question here is whether the non-dialectical articulation of subject and event takes the common space as a product or as a presupposition and, more specifically, whether such a space is to be understood as the space of flows of real subsumption or in terms of the loci of insurgent political subjectivity.

The difficulty is compounded by the fact that the thinking of Empire, whilst hostile to Hegelian dialectics or to cybernetically enhanced systemic logics à la Luhmann, does maintain a preoccupation with totality, with capitalism as totality, as a system which is both deprived of an outside and endowed with a kind of parasitical transcendence (the sovereignty of Empire). To understand the maintenance of a kind of totality (be it of an open or a virtual sort) in conjunction with the abandonment of a dialectical articulation of production and politics, of the two halves of class composition, is perhaps the key to assessing Negri’s relation to the Marxist tradition. What must be kept in mind, in light of the narrative we have outlined here, is the fact that the termination of the dialectical schema is for Negri a *concrete and localized historical event*, itself determined by the transformations in the regime of accumulation and political forms of capitalism – not a capricious metaphysical preference. More specifically, it is the collapse of the factory as the nexus of anti-capitalist struggle, not just as a concrete site with bodies, protests, machines, but as a paradigmatic function within the capitalist system, that makes the dialectical comprehension of politics anachronistic. Negri’s concern with totality, and in particular with the “totalization” of space as a smooth space traversed by vectors of accumulation and subjectivity, or by molecular civil wars, is not, however, aimed at the identification of a point of negative critique or a consciousness that could extricate itself from the nets of real subsumption. Rather, it promises a renewal of materialism founded on the articulation of political subjectivity, in its various states and figures of composition and organization, on the one hand, and the concrete transformations in the forms taken by capitalist accumulation and command, on the other. It is in this respect that the work of Hardt and Negri remains tied by a red thread to the earlier “thought of class composition” which, Balestrini and Moroni argue:
radically contests the possibility of grounding consciousness in the “idealist nostalgia” of the human and formulates the conception according to which the revolutionary process is born from the social and material dynamic (without a presupposition of any originary ideality or alienated authenticity): the dynamic that finds its motor in the sphere of work, and more precisely in the workers’ refusal of work (in the refusal to give one’s time to activity that is expropriated and commanded by capital). [...] The reading of Grundrisse [...] makes possible a new notion of totality, understood as a totality in situation (from the point of view of work and struggle) and at the same time as the subsumption of the singular within the [...] process of capital. [...] We must therefore consider two distinct aspects: on the one hand, totalisation is a process indiscernible from subjectivity, from historical, social and militant partiality (“the whole can be understood only by the part”, writes Mario Tronti); on the other, however, capitalist subjectivity constitutes a process of totalisation [...] articulated as subsumption, as the despotic assumption of real existences within its functioning. This is Marx’s reign of abstract labour.47

Whilst Negri maintains his corrosive scepticism vis-à-vis any figure of “national” politics, something that has led to sometimes myopic denunciations by more orthodox Marxist or political theorists, this does not mean that, as a reading of Empire might plausibly suggest, he has dissolved the problem of the politics of place in the non-place of imperial command. The metaphysical focus on the construction of a common space as constitutive of the antagonistic subjectivity of the multitude has been accompanied by a renewed interest in the theme of the metropolis as a potential site for the production of subjectivity and the confrontation with the mechanism of command and accumulation dictated by the logic of capital. To dispel the impression of a clear historical sequence that might have been elicited by our title, and to try to problematize some of the more simplistic understanding of the legacy of workerism fostered by a combination of the popularizing intentions, and undeniable shortcomings, of the revolutionary decision today must base itself on another constituent schema: it no longer poses as preliminary to an industrial and/or developmental axis but, through that multitude in which mass intellectuality configures itself, it will forward the programme of a freed city in which industry will be bent to the urgencies of life, society to science, work to the multitude.49

Negri asks himself whether the metropolis plays the same political-topological role for the multitude as the factory did for the working class. Can the social worker (here the earlier term is used as a synonym for multitude) overturn productive subordination and the violence of exploitation within metropolitan space? But what kind of political space is the metropolis? What Negri called the crisis of the planner-state30 could also be linked to the crisis of the planned city, of those projects of organic rationalization that wished to tie the urban fabric to the teleology of production, to create an urban factory within the social factory. Even, or especially, in their social-democratic guise, these projects foundered when confronted with the irreducibility of the metropolis to a univocal organization. Writing about the...
failure of such architectural visions of the metropolis as a regulated space of production and circulation, and even emancipation, Tafuri writes:

Extending its manner of existence to the entire region, the metropolis gave rise to the spiralling problem of development-disequilibrium. And indeed the planning theories based on the hypothesis of a reestablishment of equilibrium – and first among them, those of the Soviet Union – were destined to be revolutionized after the great crisis of 1929. Improbability, multifunctionality, multiplicity, and lack of organic structure – in short, all the contradictory aspects assumed by the modern metropolis – are thus seen to have remained outside the attempts at a rationalization pursued by central European architecture.51

But what becomes of the metropolis in the era of the crisis-state and later of an imperial capitalism driven by financial capital?

For an anticipation of the spatial phenomenology of this “imperial” metropolis, Negri chooses to turn to Rem Koolhas and his book *Delirious New York*. Beyond the more or less coherence of various forms of planning, Koolhas, according to Negri, shows how the city nevertheless was traversed by “dynamics, conflicts and powerful superimpositions of cultural strata, forms and styles of life, a multiplicity of ideas and projects about the future.” In other words, Koolhas allows us to grasp the passage from the frontal counterposition of plan, on the one hand, and working class, on the other, to the metropolis as a “molecular” space of antagonism which, moving beyond the “prescriptions of power and utopias of opposition” revives the thinking of political spaces of autonomy that was the hallmark of the autonomist movement in the 1970s. Beyond project and utopia, Koolhas’s work heralded, for Negri, a microphysical analysis of the metropolis which, against the macrophysical analysis of urban planning, could reveal a “common world,” the metropolis as “the product of all – not general will but common aleatory space.”52

What is more, Negri’s working hypothesis is that a renewed focus on the metropolis as a space of subjectivation, in which antagonism is inseparable from practices of construction and forms of life, permits the assumption of the unhinging of politics from the factory–(nation–)state axis. The metropolis is thus grasped not only as a “hybrid and internally antagonistic aggregate,” a “beehive,”53 but, in its strategic location vis-à-vis financial and informational flows, not to mention flows of people, it is, following the work of Saskia Sassen, “a homologous figure of the general structure that capitalism has assumed in its imperial phase.”54 Does this mean that we have returned to the implicit dialectic governing the relation between factory and social factory, with metropolis and Empire as the two poles of our political topology? Not really. Whilst such an analysis of the metropolis, by delineating the points of conflict between needs and commands, construction and exploitation, permits a localization of antagonism which the theory of Empire might seem to evade, that antagonism is not itself directly reducible to a single, “frontal” figure. Unlike the factory, the metropolis is a hybrid space, which in a sense demands a further emphasis on political over technical composition. And, showing that the tools of workerism have not been abandoned, Negri even explicitly revives the categories of classical workerist analysis: “The capitalist recomposition of the metropolis constructs traces of recomposition for the multitude.”55 Labour-power becomes multitude in the metropolis inasmuch as it weaves “internal” relations of cooperation, which, whilst not directly mediated by the spatial organization of production (factory), are the object of the extraction of surplus value. It is in this respect that the multitude, and the metropolis with it, is always a deeply ambivalent phenomenon, a multiplicity that can be decomposed into a material functional to accumulation or recomposed into various foyers of antagonism. As always, the workerist emphasis on anticipation and intervention asks how theory might work to identify differential and antagonistic tendencies, in this case within the fabric of the metropolis, for the sake of the recomposition and construction of common, but not homogeneous, spaces that would not be subjected to the measure of capital.
Finally, what sets these latest hypotheses at a remove from the sequence of dislocations we have tracked up to this point is the fact that the socialization of production is no longer simply thought in terms of a diffusion of the factory, but rather in terms of the increasing importance of “immaterial labour,” of the subjective, affective, volitional aspects of production and reproduction which tend to become the main sources for the extraction of surplus value. Inasmuch as we exit the dialectic of the factory, this extraction – relying on the autonomous existence of (metropolitan) cooperation between subjectivities – becomes ever more parasitic, often engaging in a mere capture of creativity that does not contribute anything by way of fixed capital, or real investment, turning more and more into pure command (as in the “new enclosures” that permit drawing surplus value from such “parasitic” activities as patenting and copyright). The spatial dislocation out of the factory is thus accompanied by the formation of distributed sites of immaterial cooperation (the metropolis), in which exploitation is no longer accompanied by the dialectical measure of labour-time, but rather extends over the entirety of social existence – whence Negri’s insistent focus on the theme of biopolitics. It is in this respect that, rather than defusing antagonism, the multiplicitous character of metropolitan life and production can be seen, in Negri’s schema, to exacerbate it. Inasmuch as in today’s “immaterial” society (and in the political topology that accompanies it) there is no longer any objective measure of productive value: “The new standard of measurement can only be a standard of power. [...] Measure thus becomes the measure of control, the measure of the capitalist capacity to develop production in the absence of any objective criterion of measurement and in the presence of relations of force that require domination.”

On this basis, the research programme laid out by Negri is quite unique, in so far as it points us to a dimension outside (or beside) the classical sites of political topology, to spaces of conflict and subjectivation that are no longer determinate, in the manner of the factory, but lie in the borderland or no man’s land (Negri writes of terreni di mezzo) between the immaterial and ideal interactions of what Marx called the general intellect and the concrete places of material production.

notes

1 See, for instance, Kumar 146–48, where he cites Foucault’s characterization of the twentieth century as “the epoch of space.”

2 On all these debates see the superb insights provided by Marramao’s Il passaggio a occidente. Filosofia e globalizzazione.

3 This is the case, in some respects, in David Harvey’s historical geographical materialism, and its theorization of uneven development and the “spatial fixes” that capitalism produces in order to tame its internal contradictions. See The Limits to Capital 431–45.

4 Though methodologically Harvey maintains a classical Marxist perspective somewhat at odds with the theses of workerism, he has undertaken some very interesting studies of the construction of spaces and places from below; see “Body Politics and the Struggle for a Living Wage” in Spaces of Hope 117–30. In “The Geography of Class Power” in Spaces of Capital 381, he tellingly speaks of “the non-neutrality of spatial organization in the dynamics of class struggle.”

5 It almost goes without saying that such a political topology would require to be complemented by an account of the temporalizing character of political subjectivity, coupling the dislocation of the place of production and the “biopolitical” extension of labour time. As Bologna writes in “La percezione dello spazio e del tempo nel lavoro indipendente”: “The labour time of the waged worker is a regulated time, the time of the independent worker is a labour time without rules, and therefore without limits.”

6 By far the most thorough and insightful treatment of workerism is to be found in Wright (2002); a bold attempt to update some of the tradition’s theses, accompanied by an impressive CD-ROM archive of interviews with its political and theoretical protagonists, is available in the Italian volume by Borio et al.; aside from Negri’s work, much of which has been or will soon be
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translated, the anglophone reader can refer to the excellent collection by Lotringer and Marazzi or, for a more philosophical take, to Virno and Hardt’s volume.

7 In his review of Wright’s Storming Heaven, Sergio Bologna pointedly asks:

Is it possible to apply the category of continuity to this movement? Doesn’t continuity belong to the traditional methods of writing history? Is it not proper to the histories of dynasties and parties? Those who, from the beginning, positioned themselves outside of a party perspective, who regarded the revolution as a lifeblood rather than an event, do they have a right to continuity, do they have to be subject to it? (105)

As far as this essay is concerned, the only continuity we have availed ourselves of is the continuity of a problematic, with all the internal ruptures and displacements that entails.

8 See Anthropologie du nom 166–76, where he discusses the factory as a multiple and non-dialectical place of politics.

9 The New Imperialism 137–82.

10 Tronti 39. Apropos of Lenin, Tronti proposes the “neoleninist principle”: “the chain will break not where capitalism is weakest, but where the working class is strongest.” In the introduction to Opera e capitale, Tronti makes this point very forcefully: “We will never tire of repeating that predicting the development of capital does not mean subjecting ourselves to its iron laws: it means forcing it into a certain path, waiting for it with weapons stronger than steel, and there assaulting it and breaking it” (21). More recently, see Negri’s Guide 176.

11 On the concept of real subsumption see Negri, Fabbriche del soggetto 9–25, 75–80. The principal source is the unpublished Book VI of chapter I of Das Kapital, “Results of the Immediate Process of Production,” now in Capital, Volume I: 1023–25 and 1034–38. A later formulation of real subsumption as socialization, but in the absence of the centrality of the factory, is the following: “production and living in society have become elements in one whole, and the consequent social productivity (generalized and without the factory) is captured by the company” (“Terreni di mezzo” 198).


13 Storming Heaven 3.

14 Search for a Method 81.

15 Balestrini and Moroni 46.

16 The phenomenon of migration was, of course, twofold, both to the north of Italy and giant factory complexes such as Fiat in Turin or the Petrochimico in Marghera, near Venice, and spreading out to the burgeoning industrial centres of Europe:

This new figure of the proletarian is the one that, emigrating from southern Italy, has made capitalist development throughout Europe: from Fiat to Volkswagen to Renault, from the mines of Belgium to the Ruhr. Who has made the great worker struggles of the last few years. Who has smashed everything, who has thrown Italy into crisis. Who determines today the desperate response of capital, at the level of both the factory and the institutions. Who today forces the owners to use the extreme weapon, the weapon of crisis. […] This enemy is the proletarian from the South: with a thousand trades because he has none, “uprooted, unemployed […] this mobile, disposable, interchangeable labour-power” […]. Who cannot find work in the South and therefore looks for it in Turin, in Milan, in Switzerland, in Germany, anywhere in Europe. (Nanni Balestrini, Vogliamo tutto, quoted in Balestrini and Moroni 281–82)

17 “La migrazione” in Balestrini and Moroni 48–49.

18 It is worth noting that in a recent article, “La moltitudine e la metropoli,” Negri says that these “often were not places, but urban spaces, sites of public opinion.”

19 Whilst I shall not be able to do justice to the sociological (or historiographic) contributions of workerism, these are dealt with admirably by Wright in Storming Heaven, chapters 2 and 8.

20 Tronti 49.

21 Ibid. 51.

22 “Il New Deal e il nuovo assetto delle politiche capitalistiche” (1971), Dal post-fordismo alla global-
izzaione 66. “Appeasement” is in English in the original.

23 Storming Heaven 40–41.

24 The question is whether the factory is to be defined as a specific place, the industrial establishment, or rather more generally as “the place (whether tangible or not) of the organisation of the process of production” (Futuro anteriore 19). See also Guido Borio’s comments in Dibattito su “Futuro Anteriore.”


26 It is in these experiences, as well as in a provocative reading of Marx’s writings, that authors from the workerist tradition draw the resources for a theory of “exodus.” See Hardt and Negri’s Empire, but especially Virno, “Dell’Esodo” in Esercizi di esodo 179–84.

27 As demonstrated by “Lotta sociale e organizzazione nella metropoli,” a text dated January 1971, from the Collettivo Politico Metropolitano – a group that was shortly thereafter to give birth to the Red Brigades – a particular take on the collapse of the factory as the site of a spatial dialectic between, on the one hand, accumulation and command, and, on the other, workers’ needs and autonomy could also be at the source of a turn to clandestine violence and armed struggle, a direct confrontation with a supposedly monolithic state in the absence of any social dialectic.


32 “Do You Remember Revolution?” 236–37. This move out of the factory was also an exquisitely tactical question: “the extension of the struggles to the entire social sphere at a territorial level and the building of forms of counter-power were seen as necessary steps against the blackmail of economic crisis” (232).

33 By subjectivities I am not simply referring to a dimension of militancy and political organization, but also to the more widespread effects of these spatial dislocations of production on the “phenomenology” of work and the worker. We are dealing with a historical phase in which the organisation of space moulded by Taylorism, both in the factory and in offices, was being destructured. The perception of space of the waged worker was referred to clearly distinct “places,” two separate systems of culture and rules, the house and the factory, the flat and the office, the place of private life, of the family, of affections, on the one hand, and the place of work, on the other. […] Whilst the “alienation” of waged work divided the individual into two socio-affective cycles, the cycle of private life and the cycle of working life, the (apparent) non-alienation of independent work reduces existence to a single socio-affective cycle, that of private life. […] Whatever return to the Taylorist organisation of space we might imagine, it will no longer be possible to delete the new mental disposition of autonomous work, born of the superimposition of the socio-affective domestic sphere and the sphere of work. (See Sergio Bologna, “La percezione dello spazio e del tempo nel lavoro indipendente”)

34 “The Tribe of Moles” 56.

35 Quoted in Krasivyj, “For the Recomposition of Social Labour.”

36 “Do You Remember Revolution?” 237.

37 Revolution Retrieved 208, 214.


39 An “industrial district” was defined at the beginning of the century by Alfred Marshall, writing about areas such as Manchester, as a “factory without walls.” This theory, whose modern counterpart is the network intra muros – which emerges once the reticular structure of the industrial district is grasped as a model for the internal space of the factory and the company itself – was revived by those trying to think the
social reality of the Italian Northeast after the demise of the centrality of the large factory. In a more optimistic vein, the industrial district was viewed as a more positive terrain of struggle than the factory with its rigidity and its limits as a site for mobilization, especially to the extent it could incorporate the role of extra-economic variables in the functioning of networked "territorialized" industries, and brought about new forms of class composition in networks of interaction combining competition, imitation and cooperation. See Maurizio Grassi, “Distretti industriali” in Zanini and Fadini, Lessico postfordista 94–100.

40 “Reti produttive” 67. The research Negri is referring to is contained in the book Benetton et Sentier. Des entreprises pas comme les autres.

41 “Reti produttive” 73. For Negri, this sequence did peak around the years 1977–83, in the phenomenon of small to medium enterprises and was swallowed up again, after 1983, by the return of the large company hoarding information and services with the aid of state policies.

42 Time for Revolution 212–13.


44 Guide 63.

45 “La crisi dello spazio politico” in L’Europa e l’Impero 20. This is a crucial essay for capturing the role of political topology in the work of Negri.

46 Guide 175–76.

47 Balestrini and Moroni 276–77.

48 Tafuri, The Sphere and the Labyrinth 8. Tafuri collaborated with Massimo Cacciari, Asor Rosa, and Negri (who would stay only for the first issue) on Contropiano—a journal close to the workerist tendency. It was in the first issue of this journal that he published his pioneering study of the relation between architectural theory and the critique of ideology, “Per una critica dell’ideologia architettonica,” later incorporated in the book Progetto e utopia, translated into English as Architecture and Utopia.

49 Guide 175–76


51 Architecture and Utopia 124.

52 “La moltitudine e la metropoli.”

53 In “Terreni di mezzo” 198, Negri speaks of an alveare metropolitano to describe a formidable mobility of the spaces of production and a mixed site in which “are combined new productive places and new activities without place.”

54 “La moltitudine e la metropoli.”

55 “La moltitudine e la metropoli.”

56 See Maurizio Lazzarato’s key essay “Immaterial Labor” in Virno and Hardt, Radical Thought in Italy.

57 “Terreni di mezzo” 201. Whence Negri’s focus on the increasing role within “imperial” capitalism of non-dialectical spatial strategies of policing, exclusion, war. In this respect his reference to the works of Mike Davis on the militarization of Los Angeles is instructive.

58 It is as an interface between immaterial cooperation and material productivity that “the school” as a locus of formation, that is, of subjectivation, receives special attention from Negri in “Terreni di mezzo.”

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