



# Where is Hardt and Negri's Multitude?: Real Networks in Open Spaces

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## Abstract

Negri's political direction—from workerism in the 1960s, through *Autonomia* in the 1970s, to the notion of "Empire" with Hardt in the 1990s—is an important path in Italian Marxism. Since the 1960s, the search for a critical Marxism, beyond Leninism and outside the communist party structure, has led a generation of Italian scholars to new conceptualizations. These have followed from several seasons of struggle by the Italian antagonistic movements. Over the past twenty years, new actors have stepped on stage within the composite Italian anti-neoliberal movement, including Social Centres, grassroots union organizations (*COBAS*), *Disobbedienti* (Dissenters), environmentalists and anarchists. The individual members of these groups propose different interpretations of Negri's work or, specifically, his notion of "multitude". Many of them reject Negri's approach, while others have directly adopted his language and suggestions. This paper provides a short analysis of Negri's political action and main writings, focusing on the potential and limits of the concept of multitude when applied to the situation in Italy. The multitude, described by Hardt and Negri as an open network, is embedded in an open spatiality. How can we analyze and link a real network to a deterritorialised space? Hardt and Negri's proposal remains problematically undertheorized and significantly removed from the real practices of Italian movements, when considering, for example, the Genoa 2001 demonstrations.



## Introduction

Negri's political action helped shape the antagonistic (anti-capitalist and anti-fascist) movements of the Seventies in Italy. His later theoretical approach in *Empire* and other publications, though stirring up much critical comment, has made its way into the current anti-neoliberal movement in part.<sup>2</sup> Besides leading a major theoretical current of Italian Marxist thought, at subsequent stages of his life Negri developed modes of practical political action, which to varying extents were adopted by *Potere Operaio* (Workers' Power), *Autonomia Operaia* (Workers' Autonomy), the *Tute Bianche* (White Overalls), the *Disobbedienti* (Dissenters) and sections of the anti-neoliberal movement in Italy.

The degree to which an analysis of the current composition of the exploited classes and the resulting introduction of the concept of multitude as part of a fresh attack on capital are central to Negri's latest theoretical work is confirmed by the very title of the sequel to *Empire* published at the end of 2004: *Multitude*. Significantly enough, in an interview with the political weekly *l'Espresso* in August 2004, the Minister of the Interior of Italy's Berlusconi government, the former Christian Democrat Giovanni Pisanu who joined Forza Italia, remarked that

[s]ome groups seem to share a common theoretical basis provided by Toni Negri's *Empire*, where they find, if not an attractive re-interpretation of Marxism, an approach to globalisation which purports that the oppressed are no longer the working class, but a "multitude" of individuals oppressed by the financial markets of a globalized world: salaried workers, outcasts from society, migrants and all of the world's dispossessed (Riva, 2004, 54; translation by author).

On the same subject, in February 2005, Mr. Pisanu commented that "Toni Negri is the true leader of the Italian Left" (see Conti, 2005). Despite years in exile and prison, in the eyes of the repressive Italian establishment, Negri is still considered a "wicked teacher", a *cattivo maestro*.

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<sup>2</sup> The Italian edition of *Empire* was published two years after the first English version, published in 2000.



**Figure 1. Negri, the “leader of the Italian Left”. Source: *Il Messaggero*, 5 February 2005**

After a brief description of the Genoa 2001 demonstrations and a cursory analysis of responses given to ‘the multitude’ concept by the relevant institutions and groups of the Italian left, I will discuss and analyze the genesis and meaning of the multitude approach as proposed by Hardt and Negri (2004). Besides defining the extent to which Negri’s notion of multitude is applicable to the Italian context, I will also try to establish its potential as a general criterion for analyzing the anti-neoliberal movements. In the end I will share with the reader some thoughts on Hardt and Negri’s spatiality that I consider problematically undertheorized and significantly removed from the real practices of the Italian movements, even if valuable as a practical question to be investigated. The main question lies in the need to explore more carefully the evolution of the spatio-temporal formation of networks of resistance.

## The Genoa G8 Meeting of 2001

Finally, the globalization movements that have extended from Seattle to Genoa and the World Social Forums in Porto Alegre and Mumbai and have animated the movements against war are the clearest example to date of distributed network organizations (Hardt and Negri, 2004, 86). [...] What is most important for our argument here, however, is the form of the movements. These movements constitute the most developed example to date of the network model of organization (Hardt and Negri, 2004, 87). [...] We have to look not only at the form but also the content of what they do (Hardt and Negri, 2004, 93).

The concept of multitude, more than an academic outcome, is the result of a political analysis that has a lot of connections with the Italian situation (Kohan, 2005). For this reason it is worth analysing the highest point of the anti-neoliberal struggle in Italy, which is the Genoa 2001 demonstrations against the G8 Meeting. Negri's main theoretical propositions on empire and multitude were developed in the 1990s, when all revolutionary creeds and even social democratic platforms were in the throes of marginalization, if not dramatic crisis, the world over. In Italy, the revisionist policies of the communist and socialist parties (variously and gradually inspired by Turati, Gramsci, Nenni, Basso, Togliatti or Berlinguer) reached a stalemate in the 1980s, when left-wing parties embraced the bible of liberalism. Even smaller groups were on the verge of collapsing, including neo-Marxists, Maoists, workerists and, generally, libertarians (including anarchists and situationists) who had gained visibility, also due to State propaganda and repression in the 1970s. The efforts of some to fend off this assault and the armed struggle, waged by the Red Brigades and dozens of other groups with the aim of bringing the State to its knees, foundered once and for all. The ascent of *Autonomia* to the summit of the Italian antagonist movement ended in tragedy: the inevitable backlash from the State involved arrests and torture, obliging many to seek shelter abroad and depriving Italian political life of potential input from a generation of activists and intellectuals.

### ***Relevant Groups and Networks in the Italian Anti-Neoliberal Globalization Movements***

The 1980s were marked by new forms of struggle (e.g. pro-peace, antinuke, environmentalist) and the birth of Social Centres, the new seedbed of the Italian antagonist movement (Mudu, 2004). These forms of struggles were matched by a large-scale networking process on the part of social centres, independent media, grassroots unions and organizations representing the interests of workers under temporary or atypical employment contracts. The most telling output of this process is probably the mobilization of all Italian grass-roots movements on the occasion of the anti-G8 demonstration in Genoa in July 2001. Before we discuss this in greater detail, it is worth noting that within the composite and unstable

Italian anti-neoliberal movement we can distinguish a number of nation-wide groups that appear to have been the real driving force behind mass mobilization over the past fifteen years. In parallel to the institutional parties of the Left,<sup>3</sup> there is a vast archipelago of groups and associations. The largest of these—the *Cobas* grass-roots unions and the *White Overalls* (now *Disobbedienti*)—are the true heirs of *Autonomia*; the *lilliput network* comprises both left-wing Catholics (e.g. *Pax Christi*), environmentalists (e.g. *Legambiente*) and other left-wing associations (e.g. *ARCI*), which advocate non-violence, ethical and solidarity-based trading or ethical finance. Lastly, there are numerous anarchist and a few Marxist-Leninist groups, which by now are mostly active on a purely local basis.

### **Genoa 2001**

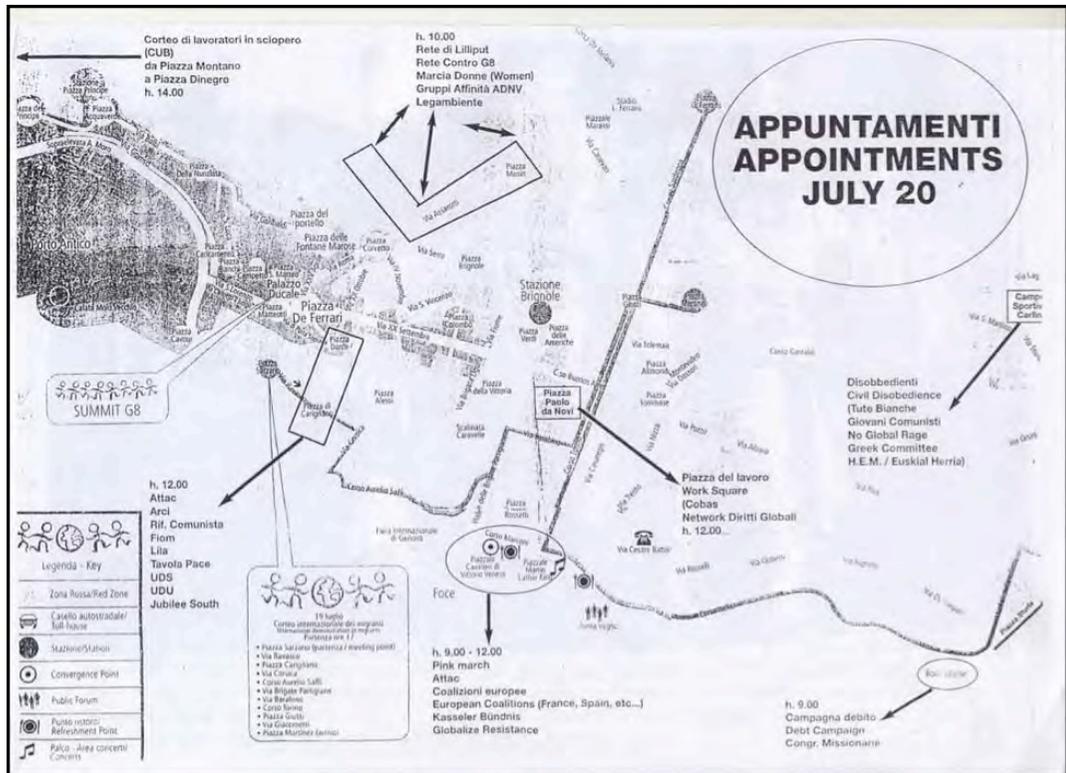
All these groups plus thousands of sympathizers gathered together to oppose the G8 in July 2001 in Genoa. Two years before, many of the groups had formed the “Genoa Social Forum” that discussed and prepared for the forthcoming event all over Italy (Federici and Caffentzis, 2001). The Genoa July 2001 demonstrations were aimed at questioning the legitimacy of the G8 in altering global and local arrangements. In order to do so, the official geography of the summit had to be contested. The Genoa G8 Summit demonstrations partly aimed to oppose a high-handed zoning scheme imposed by the participating world powers. At the order of the Italian government, one part of the city was divided into a red zone and a yellow zone separated by physical barriers run by soldiers. Protest marches and theme gatherings were arranged to oppose this zoning scheme and enjoyed extensive media coverage. The three-day (19-21 July) event was opened by a parade of immigrants. For the first time, immigrants were joining forces with a number of grassroots organizations which had resolved to move the immigrant issue to the forefront of attention. On July 20<sup>th</sup>, the “*pinks*” (*lilliput network*) gathered on *Manin* square and the *Cobas*-led global rights network on Paolo Novi square, while the *Disobbedienti*'s protest march started from the Carlini sports ground (see **Error! Reference source not found.**Figure 2). The anarchists did not join the Genoa Social Forum and marched from piazza Montano to piazza Di Negro (Gubitosa, 2003).

On the two closing days of the event, the government responded with brutal repression: the police were instructed to attack the protesters during theme gatherings and the activist Carlo Giuliani was killed in the resulting disorder. The importance of the Genoa demonstrations is that: 1) for the first time a large coalition was formed by the vast majority of groups opposing neoliberalism in Italy; 2) it marked the end of public space as it was experienced in Italy in the last

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<sup>3</sup> Upon its dissolution, the PCI gave rise to three distinct parties: the Left Democrats (DS), the PRC and the Party of Italian Communists (PdCI).

twenty years due to a new material and digital spatial order of power relations that neglects all forms of opposition.



**Figure 2. The “multitude” network in Genoa on July 20, 2001. Source: Genoa Social Forum**

The Genoa experience led to many questions and directly defined, to any critical mind, what a network of subjects capable of challenging neoliberal dogmas is. The “crowd” that concentrated in Genoa was a new fact originating through a long social process of recomposition of political struggles in Italy. It is then important to try to define the complex articulation of the groups participating in the demonstrations. The concept of multitude was proposed by Hardt and Negri to analyse such movement and organization and was also applied to analyse similar events: “[...] the concept of the multitude can be usefully applied to the level of scale of the crowd event” (Milburn 2005, 2). But was the Genoa movement a multitude? Before answering this question I will offer a cursory outline of the criticisms levelled against the concept of “multitude” by a part of the Italian anti-neo-liberal network of movements.

## Institutions and Group Responses to the Concept of ‘The Multitude’

To grasp the varied reactions to the concept of “multitude”, I restrict my focus on the main institutions and groups that promote anti-neoliberal events in Italy: the Communist Refoundation Party, the anarchists, the COBAS and the *Disobbedienti*.

### *The Communist Refoundation Party (PRC) within the Multitude*

Negri’s work has aroused much interest within the PRC, whose political platform has in common a number of points with the anti-neoliberal movement. The fact that the PRC youth federation partnered with the *Disobbedienti* shows that younger rank-and-file supporters are in tune with the approach of this group. The PRC as a whole has been keen on the “movement of movements” ever since the Genoa G8 protest marches. In the radical left-wing daily *Il Manifesto* Rossana Rossanda<sup>4</sup> (2005) accused the PRC of giving too much attention to a movement that opposes injustice rather than capitalism, advocates a radical break away from the traditional workers’ movement and, following in Negri’s steps, induces thousands of people to take to the streets in protest against a war they are in any case unable to avert or otherwise influence.

Even fiercer criticisms were voiced by PRC Secretariat member Vinci, who argued that in Hardt and Negri’s work:

it is no longer possible to identify vast geographical areas with a clear middle, suburbs, a north and a south. From an ontological perspective, if capital is basically smooth and the Empire tends to “sprawl out”, the antagonist of capital, or ‘anti-capitalist entity’, must necessarily be as smooth (composed of working people only). From an anarchistic perspective [...] Hardt and Negri contend that ‘local’ struggles are all that is needed for members of the multitude to secure spaces they can freely self-manage and use for collective actions aimed at establishing an economy of ‘enjoyment’: modes of cooperative work capable of satisfying the multitude’s longing for freedom. [...] No room is left—nor could there be—for the grand issues of modern humankind including women’s empowerment or environment protection policies, and no proletarians in the flesh are left either in the North or South of the world (Vinci, 2002, 25; translation by author).

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<sup>4</sup> In 1969, Rossana Rossanda and Luigi Pintor founded *Il Manifesto*.

### ***The Multitude and Anarchism***

An equally cursory outline of the composite archipelago of anarchist movements in Italy may also be of interest to the reader, considering that Hardt and Negri have often been blamed with anarchist leanings and have discussed these charges themselves (Hardt and Negri, 2004, 222).

The Italian anarchist map is fairly differentiated, but it essentially falls into two main sections, one of which accepts the basics of the Italian Anarchist Federation's programme expounded in the journal *L'Umanità Nova*, while the other has as its main organs *Anarchismo* and *Provocazione*. The former groups advocate "revolutionary gradualism", i.e. they think that an effective strategy to contrast existing power structures is to take part in whatever struggles are under way; the latter is organized into clandestine cells that advocate sabotage, armed struggle and fight to the death in an effort to sweep away capitalism once and for all. Elements common to both these sections are the rejection of hierarchies or top-down commands in any form; the practice of decentralized bottom-up political action; and the idea of an egalitarian society not organized into states.

The Northern Italian anarchists Crisso and Odoteo are the authors of *Barbari* (Barbarians), an attack on *Empire*; their parodic aim is reflected clearly even in the cover design of the book (see Figure 3). In it, Hardt and Negri are charged with advocating a reformist approach to capitalism. According to Crisso and Odoteo, instead of opposing the devastating capitalistic globalization processes in progress, Hardt and Negri suggest countering them in manners that will bring them into line with democracy, and thereby pave the way for the access of the movement to institutional arenas. In practice, behind the approach in *Empire* Crisso and Odoteo perceive a very special strategy: "in an effort to secure more and more institutional spaces, ever greater political and trade union consensus as well as legitimacy, the movement offers to put its potential for mediation in the service of the power structure" (Crisso/Odoteo, 2002, 8; translation by author). Unlike Vinci (2002), far from thinking that "local" forms of struggle are aimed at securing liberated spaces needed for self-sufficiency, they suspect that the reason Hardt and Negri urge the movement to abstain from their attempts to destroy the so-called Empire through subversion is their belief that globalization will ultimately play into the hands of its victims (Crisso/Odoteo, 2002).

The aim of these anarchists is to have the Empire destroyed by hordes of barbarians, instead of remodeled, reorganized or democratized: "Let the barbarians launch their attack in manners they will think expedient at their own discretion, provided no parliaments, no banks, no supermarkets, barracks or factories are left after their passage" (Crisso/Odoteo, 2002, 67). The assumption for the successful overthrow of the older order and its replacement with a new order is forceful opposition and the rejection of any attempt at mediation (Crisso/Odoteo, 2002).



**Figure 3. Barbarians: an anarchical pamphlet aimed to belittle *Empire* (on the right, the Italian paperback edition)**

All in all, Chrisso and Odoteo present a simple dualism between ‘Empire’ and ‘Barbarians’, not elaborating on the peculiar aspects of the creature they promote for attacking and destroying the empire, confining themselves to a Luddite perspective.

The other section of the anarchist movement is only partially prepared to subscribe to the criticisms levelled against *Empire* in *Barbari* (K, 2003). In striking disagreement with Chrisso and Odoteo’s critical approach in *Barbari*, K argues that they should rather have taken exception to the very notion of Empire, because:

[...] a much more forceful objection to Negri’s theories and the *Disobbedienti*’s methods would be to emphasize that the kind of Empire postulated in the book is ultimately non-existent [...] Another weak point of the critical analysis of Negri’s theories developed in “Barbari” is related to the identification of the ‘enemy’ of the Empire. In the opinion of Negri and the *Disobbedienti*, this enemy is civil society, i.e. citizens and multitudes. But what relation is there between

the 'Multitude' and proletarians, the exploited, the working class, within a world-view hinged on the replacement of 'the factory' with 'immaterial work'? Are we to assume that all contradictions and class struggle itself act themselves out within such an abstract interclass category as the 'multitude'? [...]. The authors of 'Barbari' have failed to concern themselves with this side of Negri's approach. (K, 2003; translation by author).

As was to be expected, opinions vary and a reference to grass-roots unionism and to the *Disobbedienti* completes the picture.

### ***The Place of COBAS Rank-and-File Unions within the Multitude***

It is no overstatement to say that after the terrorism-stricken "*anni di piombo*" [repression years] decade in Italy (1975-85) the COBAS grass-roots unions were the only groups to fuel a confrontational climate in Italy and that they are now in the process of gaining a power position of some sort. For over a year now, the railwaymen's and teachers' 'Cobas' unions, currently the strongest of these organisations, have managed to bring work to a stop whenever they thought it expedient [...] and lately they seem to have prioritised political discourse over collective bargaining (Negri, 1996, 28; translation by author).

As recognized by Negri, since the mid 1980s, the *Cobas* rank-and-file unions have effectively worked towards the establishment of a sort of informal union system without official representation that seems to have played a leading role. From this perspective, the *Cobas* unions epitomize one major step theorized by Hardt and Negri: the transition from merely wage-oriented unions to organizations representing "the becoming common of labor in all its generality—economically, politically and socially" (Hardt and Negri, 2004, 137). The *Cobas* confederation is based on both the principle of workers' self-organisation and on the struggle to overcome a culture of 'passivity', by rejecting the practice of fully delegating the defense of one's own rights to professional trade unionists, forcing workers to become passive and ignorant of their own condition and how they can change it (*Cobas*, 2002). Yet, despite a twenty-year historical track record, the *Cobas* unions are not mentioned by Hardt and Negri; instead, they discuss other shorter-lived examples, such as "piqueteros" in Argentina or "intérimaires" in France.

In the words of *Cobas* spokesman Bernocchi, two major parallel processes are emerging: the proliferation of mass intellectuals and the growing subjugation of intellectual work to capitalist production. The strongly confrontational antagonistic climate and the tendency of white-collar workers to seek employment as a means of integration resembles the condition of blue-collars in the twentieth century.

Despite similarities between his own and Negri's approach, Bernocchi has disparagingly commented that:

[...] Negri once again [has] stepped to the forefront to articulate in his theories a new mass intelligentsia, the general intellect and other myths [...] In point of fact, this is not the first time, in these past three decades, that Negri has tried to reflect credit and visibility on himself by picking up a given theory and developing it to extremes (Bernocchi, 1997, 18; translation by author).

Bernocchi also claims that the success of the concept of multitude has originated from a lexical shortage to describe new movements (Bernocchi, 2002). In contrast, a moderately favourable review with only a few reservations is found in a SinCobas<sup>5</sup> publication by Ambrogio (2002). In the opinion of the national secretary of SinCobas, Negri's notion of the multitude has a distinct bearing on the analysis of the Italian movement (Muhlbauer, 2004). While very few *Cobas* members seem to have accepted Negri's approach, the differences between this approach and the practices of those interpreting them—*White Overalls* yesterday, *Disobbedienti* today—are great indeed (D'Ubaldo and Miliucci, 2000).

### ***The Disobbedienti as Part of the Multitude***

While not analyzing sections of the Italian multitude in detail, Hardt and Negri devote a whole paragraph of *Multitude* to the *Disobbedienti* (Hardt and Negri, 2004, 264-67). They even draw some Shakespearean parallels that are probably a bit exaggerated: "Their [the *Disobbedienti*'s] demonstrations seemed to erupt from thin air, the way Ariel suddenly appears in *The Tempest*" (Hardt and Negri, 2004, 265). In Italy, disobedience—i.e. questioning the State's power to issue binding commands—was unprecedented in at least two respects: it was an opportunity for spectacularising politics and it helped create a political entity whose aim was to interact with others, including political parties. This strategy was first devised by social centres in North-Eastern Italy, but was later developed jointly with social centres and collectives based elsewhere:

although the concept of multitude was not accepted by everybody, it surfaced time and again in Multiverso debates on the collective political actions modes that were likely to prove most effective after the dramatic experience of the Genoa G8 Summit (Multiverso, 2002, 10).

One of the leaders of the *Disobbedienti*, Luca Casarini, borrowed the language and categories of *Empire* to illustrate the political programme of the *Disobbedienti* (see Vecchi, 2001, 2). Negri was often welcomed as a guest during

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<sup>5</sup> SinCobas is a grassroots trade union very close to the PRC.

their debates (see Figure 4) and supported the *Disobbedienti's* nominee during the Center-Left convention (16 October 2005) for choosing the Coalition's candidate for President of the Italian Council of Ministers.



**Figure 4. 2003 meeting with Negri in Rome at a social centre liaising with the “*Disobbedienti*”**

Ultimately, the *Disobbedienti* hold that the most effective political action modes are those that, much like Greenpeace initiatives in the 1980s, bring visibility to political agents. In support of protests from workers under temporary and atypical employment contracts (*precari*), from 2003 onwards the *Disobbedienti* proposed a set of exemplary initiatives, such as purchases at self-reduced prices in shopping centres, bookstores or cinemas. At the *Coop* supermarket in Milan on 29<sup>th</sup> February, they celebrated Saint Precario, “the patron saint who demands more rights, including guaranteed incomes, cuts the cost of living by stopping checkout tills in hypermarkets, manages to gain hosts of worshippers in larger towns and forges a new jargon for the antagonist movement”. Among the books that a group supporting San Precario recommends to those wishing to gain a better understanding of the crisis of democracy in capitalist societies are Hardt and

Negri's *Multitude*, C. Lasch's *Revolt of the Elites*, Crouch's *Post-democracy*, Castells' *Network Society*, Amartya Sen's books, and Paolo Virno's *A Grammar of the Multitude* (Vecchi, 2004).

All in all, in Italy, the reactions to the concept of multitude range from total acceptance, as in the case of the *Disobbedienti*, to complete dismissal. Although all these critics do not sketch out alternatives, some points have been raised on concepts like the general intellect and immaterial work, and the smooth nature of the multitude, which deserve more attention.

### **Negri's Approach: From Operaismo through Potere Operaio to Autonomia Operaia**

Some lasting influences on Negri's work deserve to be mentioned because they have surfaced in various forms time and again, including in his latest theoretical approach. The broad outlines of the theoretical framework behind Negri's *operaismo* (*workerism*) and the Italian antagonistic movement overall were provided by Karl Marx's *Grundrisse* (published in Italian in 1968-70) and especially the Italian version of Marx's "fragment on machinery" printed in *Quaderni Rossi* in 1964.<sup>6</sup>

#### ***Operaismo***

Italian workerism had its apostles in Raniero Panzieri and Romano Alquati and its organs in the magazines named *Quaderni Rossi*, *Classe Operaia*, *Contropiano* and *Potere Operaio*. Its most important representative was probably Mario Tronti, author of *Operai e Capitale* (1966), with whom Negri broke in 1968. The core aim of workerism was to define the actual composition of the working class and its behavioral patterns. The working class composition was defined and analyzed not only as the structure of the labour force but also for its connected political and cultural features that all together determine the potential class antagonism.

The workerist group split mainly over two issues: the prospects for successfully influencing the policies of the PCI (*Partito Comunista Italiano*, Italian Communist Party) and the CGIL (*Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro*, General Italian Confederation of Workers) and the need for greater emphasis on interventionist methods in social struggle. Negri denied the possibility of bringing about a major turn in the PCI's political platform; others, including Tronti, thought the goal well worth an attempt. Tronti joined the PCI despite knowing that he

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<sup>6</sup> The "fragment on machinery" is quoted in most of Negri's works. Negri discussed *Grundrisse* in a series of lectures that he delivered in Paris in 1978 and then collected in book form (Negri, 1991).

would hardly be able to translate his strategy into action, while the economic and social decline following the 1960s “boom” induced Negri to head in a different direction.

### ***Potere Operaio***

In some of his major political works of the 1970s, Negri described the transformation of “mass workers” into “socialized workers”, i.e. of hegemonic Fordist workers into post-Fordist social operators, arguing that “the analysis must give priority to the task of determining exactly the characteristics of technical and political class composition” (see *Partito Operaio contro il Lavoro*, in Negri, 2005a, 53). In synthesis, the concept of “socialized worker” was designed to describe a new political subject, highly educated, produced by the standardization and proletarianization of intellectual work, very different from the demoted “mass worker”. In 1975, he wrote: “the proletariat once made himself into the worker, but now the process is inverted: the worker makes himself into the tertiary worker, the socialized worker, the proletarian worker” (see *Proletari e Stato*, in Negri, 2005a, 126). In practice, from Negri’s perspective this entailed a definitive move away from the idea, concordantly held by a social democrat such as Kautsky and by communists such as Luxemburg, Lukàcs or Gramsci, that thanks to its ideology of labour the working class would manage to subvert the existing organizational structure and thereby prepare the ground for the new socialist order (see Negri, 2005a, 12). In practice, convinced that the political and organizational recomposition of the proletariat was hampered by the organic link between work and capital, Negri forcefully rejected the “revisionist” Communist Party’s then predominantly Gramscian approach (see *Partito Operaio contro il Lavoro* in Negri, 2005a). In the process, he also discarded state monopoly capitalism, imperialism and other mainstream theories propounded by Marxist thinkers in those years.

### ***Autonomia***

To account for changes observed in capitalist work modes over the 1970s, Negri denounced the paradox of growing capital accumulation in periods of industrial destaffing. To round off the whole, he emphasized the basic tenet of the new workers’ autonomy, i.e. the belief that more and more workers were joining the antagonist front because they were tired of being simple tools in the hands of capitalists. In Negri’s opinion, it was capitalists who instigated changes in labour modes, and the type of reorganization to which they resorted from time to time depended on the kind of struggle they had to counter. This subject is dealt with in greater detail in “*Domination and Sabotage*”, where Negri argued that none of the “catastrophic” forecasts, however motivated, had come true, and that “[a]ll the elements of destabilization that the workers’ and proletarian struggle have brought into action against the state have, one by one, been taken up by capital and transformed into weapons of restructuring” (see *Dominio e Sabotaggio* in Negri, 2005a, 233). Major points discussed within *Autonomia* include the tendency to self-

valorisation observed in workers who have acquired inherently antagonistic social, collective and scientific skills during their involvement in and real subsumption under production processes. In 1974, Negri provided a clear definition of worker self-valorization as “[...] the alternative that the working class sets in motion on the terrain of production and reproduction, by appropriating power and reappropriating wealth, in opposition to the capitalist mechanisms of accumulation and development” (see *Dominio e Sabotaggio*, in Negri, 2005a, 255), adding that shirking work, absenteeism, sabotage and a wide gamut of other penally relevant or deviant behaviour he observed day after day were clear signs of the positive role that worker self-valorisation had played in history (see *Dominio e Sabotaggio* in Negri, 2005a).

The entire Negri’s production during the 1970s contains extremely limited references to spatial issues. To be more precise, until the mid 1970s, the main reference was the factory. “[...] productive labor [...] expresses itself in its highest form, i.e., in the factory, in the most advanced capitalist enterprise” (see *Partito Operaio contro il Lavoro* in Negri, 2005a, 72). According to Negri, the working class of the large factories was the privileged subject of exploitation, the cutting edge of class unification, displaying “[...] an absolutely hegemonic political and theoretical configuration within the current class composition” (see *Partito Operaio contro il Lavoro* in Negri, 2005a, 79-80). In the second half of the 1970s, Negri occasionally added that the struggle had to be organized through the appropriation and diffusion of particular spaces. “The organizational unit that must extend itself molecularly is the *red base*” (see *Partito operaio contro il lavoro* in Negri, 2005a, 103; emphasis in original).

### ***Insurrection***

Faced with the changing composition of the proletariat and the transition from a Keynesian “Planner-State” to the “State-as-Enterprise”, Negri theorized insurrection in place of revolution. By insurrection he meant a personal and private process that comes about within single individuals. “We say ‘insurrection’ and not ‘revolution’: what is important today is continually to combat the precise initiatives capital sets in motion to rupture the unified front of the proletariat” (*Crisi dello Stato-Piano*, in Negri, 2005a, 42). Without denying that Lenin correctly interpreted the original relations between the composition of a class and its organizational structure, using the category of “historically constituted social formation”, he argued that the direction of Lenin’s unification process of the proletariat was to be reversed in the modern world, which necessitated a bottom-up process kindled by mass avant-gardes in place of a party-led top-down process. Within a society composed both of peasants and lower-middle class people engaging in production and classes inimical to work as such—he explained—the party had better cease harping on the prospect of a communistic system founded on better working modes. A new relation between the working class and capital, fuelled by the

rejection of work, became a major leitmotif in Negri's political approach (see *Partito Operaio contro il Lavoro*, in Negri, 2005a) and it surfaced again in all his later work (see Negri and Guattari, 1989; Hardt and Negri, 2000), and is a basis for his concept of *exodus* of multitude.

### **Material and Immaterial Production and the Notion of a "General Intellect"**

A 'prophecy' by Marx (in *Grundrisse*) runs thus: "the creation of real wealth comes to depend less on labor time and on the amount of labor employed [...] but depends rather on the general state of science and on the progress of technology, or the application of this science to production" (Marx, 1973, 705-6). Developing this statement to extremes, in the 1970s Negri theorized his own notion of the "general intellect". In Marx, it stood for science and the general knowledge needed to keep production going; in Negri it denotes the emergence of workers capable of manipulating information, communications and decisions. In Hardt and Negri, this concept is further extended and it does not remain "[...] *entirely on the plane of thought, as if the new powers of labor were only intellectual and not also corporeal*" (Hardt and Negri, 2000, 364; emphasis in original), but it assumes a biopolitical dimension, as depicted by Foucault. The "general intellect" is thus the basis of the concept of multitude,

At a certain point in capitalist development, which Marx only glimpsed as the future, the powers of labor are infused by the powers of science, communication, and language. General intellect is a collective, social intelligence created by accumulated knowledges, techniques, and knowhow. [...] What Marx saw as the future is our era. This radical transformation of labor power and the incorporation of science, communication, and language into productive force have redefined the entire phenomenology of labor and the entire world horizon of production (Hardt and Negri, 2000, 364).

This way, the value and measure of labour, in terms of working time, proposed by Marx and other classical economists are no longer valid. "Indeed, labor is the productive activity of a general intellect and a general body outside measure" (Hardt and Negri, 2000, 358). An essential turning point is then the shift from material to immaterial production, i.e. knowledge, information and communication, which assumes the central position in production. According to Negri:

[...] so long as production was material the bourgeoisie class could maintain its power because it was easy to confiscate the instruments of production. But once production became immaterial—what we call the passage from Fordism to post-Fordism—two things changed radically: on the one hand, production penetrated all the way into the brains of workers, because in fact it is intelligence—imagination, the capacity for invention and creation—that is now being put to work; and on the

other, since the instrument is no longer the machine but the brain, confiscation by capital of the instruments of production therefore became impossible (Negri, 2004, 91).

The analysis of a new revolutionary agent or, rather, of a multitude of agents sharing the “general intellect” was a necessary ingredient to a novel approach to Marxism. An approach that ignores the “classic” law of value, the ideology of work, the role of a political party or a trade union to represent the interests of the working class, the concept of industrial reserve army and even the Marxian notion of alienation, never mentioned in *Empire*, which could provide an awareness of the need for liberation, was the analysis of a new revolutionary agent or, rather, of a multitude of agents sharing the “general intellect. Through the adoption of a network analysis metaphor, adding Foucault’s and Derrida’s perspectives, the notions of socialized worker and autonomy were rescaled at a global level, giving birth to the concept of multitude.

### **The Concept of Multitude**

The collapse of extreme models such as Leninism and anarchism “[...] poses the issue of the tools and weapons that the movement must develop if it wants to emerge victorious in its struggle” (Negri and Guattari, 1989, 97). It also provides fresh focus on an (ever-present) problem with which each generation opposing rampant capitalism had to come to terms: how can we assess the composition of the antagonistic movement and identify changes under way in it? Departing from the approaches of other Marxists, over the past decade Negri has tackled this issue in a highly innovative way by formulating the political and philosophical concept of multitude.

#### ***Multitude from Spinoza?***

Considering that Negri wrote a number of purely philosophical works, mainly analyses of Spinoza, it is not surprising that the term ‘multitude’ was originally drawn from Spinoza’s political writings, specifically Spinoza’s unfinished *Tractatus Politicus*. However, it has to be recognized that the word ‘multitude’ recurs no more than six times in *Tractatus Politicus* (Negri, 1992, 72) and only once in *Ethics* (Negri, 1992, 75). From one side, it has been argued that deriving the notion of the multitude from Spinoza means stretching things a bit too far (see Giancotti, 1992; Balibar, 1998). On the other hand, other scholars share Negri’s theoretical view on the derivation of the notion of multitude from Spinoza:

[...] One must keep in mind that the choice between “people” and “multitude” was at the heart of the practical controversies (the establishing of centralized modern States, religious wars, etc.) and of the theoretical-philosophical controversies of the seventeenth century. [...] It was the notion of “people” which prevailed [...] The two

polarities, people and multitude, have Hobbes and Spinoza as their putative fathers (Virno, 2003, 21).

The notion of “people” was set aside because it was thought to be the product of middle-class ideology coined by modern state power by attraction and assimilation and, thus, misleading. Negri first introduced his notion of multitude in *Empire*, but recognizing that he had not worked it out in sufficient depth (Negri, 2004), he further developed it in *Multitude* in 2004. Before the publication of *Multitude*, Negri provided a threefold definition of the concept of multitude (Negri, 2004, 2003a). In philosophical terms, he sees the multitude as a plurality of subjects, i.e. single individuals, who cannot be collectively described as “the people”. In ontological terms, he gives it an ontological power, i.e. a tool for magnifying desire and forging the world in its likeness, a huge number of entities joined in a community of free individuals expressing their thoughts freely. In terms of class, he holds it to stand for the bulk of individuals engaging in productive work, viz. operators creating intangibles, i.e. a highly diversified compound of individualities devoted to creative work and using to their advantage the legacy that the struggles of past generations of the working class have bequeathed to them.

Hardt and Negri claimed that multitude is a class concept because it collectively describes those under the yoke of and producing value for capitalists. Production and the exploitation it, they argued, have spread to the whole of society, and this means that instead of working for “alliances” between such distinct fronts as the working class on the one hand and students and flexible, mobile, and precarious workers on the other, we should rather focus on the crucial role of intellectual and linguistic work in this value-creation process and urge the wretched of the world to seek unity by intercommunicating, sharing knowledge and working together (Hardt and Negri, 2004). Viewed as a new class concept, the multitude is thus definitively at odds with “classical” Marxism, but perfectly in tune with Negri’s earlier theorisations.

### ***Multitude from circulating networks***

Other notable definitions of multitude are associated with a network model. In *Empire*, Hardt and Negri wrote: “Resistances are no longer marginal but active in the center of a society that opens up in networks; the individual points are singularized in a thousand plateaus” (Hardt and Negri, 2000, 25). Explicating the notion of network in greater detail, Hardt and Negri defined the multitude as “an open and expansive network in which all differences can be expressed freely and, equally, a network that provides the means of encounter so that we can work and live in common” (Hardt and Negri, 2004, xiv). In the text, the network structure is also referred to as a “full-matrix”, i.e. one in which all nodes are cross-related. They also add:

[...] a distributed network such as the Internet is a good initial image or model for the multitude because, first the various nodes remain different but are all connected in the Web, and second, the external boundaries of the network are open such that new nodes and new relationships can always be added (Hardt and Negri, 2004: xv).

The construction of space of the multitude happens through circulation. “Through circulation the multitude reappropriates space and constitutes itself as an active subject” (Hardt and Negri, 2000, 397). This reappropriation is explained mainly by mass migrations that are necessary for production.

The movements of the multitude designate new spaces, and its journeys establish new residences. Autonomous movement is what defines the place proper to the multitude. [...] These movements often cost terrible suffering, but there is also in them a desire of liberation that is not satiated except by reappropriating new spaces, around which are constructed new freedoms. Everywhere these movements arrive, and all along their paths they determine new forms of life and cooperation—everywhere they create that wealth that parasitic postmodern capitalism would otherwise not know how to suck out of the blood of the proletariat, because increasingly today production takes place in movement and cooperation, in exodus and community (Hardt and Negri, 2000, 397).

These definitions and, indeed, the whole approach in *Empire* and *Multitude* conjure up the image of an “open rhizome-like” space of some sort. Deleuzian theory is central to Hardt and Negri’s ideas, the multitude being also based on the figure of the nomad and the dynamic of exodus. Moreover, “We can see that the new spaces are described by unusual topologies, by subterranean and uncontainable rhizomes, by geographical mythologies that mark the new paths of destiny” (Hardt and Negri, 2000, 397). Hardt and Negri further comment that:

This presentation is admittedly simplified, and many studies present much more sophisticated discussions of place. It seems to us, however, that these political analyses always come back to a notion of “defending” or “preserving” the bounded local identity or territory (Hardt and Negri, 2000, 426).

For this reason, Hardt and Negri disagree with the views of Massey (1994), who “argues explicitly for a politics of place in which place is conceived not as bounded but as open and porous to flows beyond. We would contend, however, that a notion of place that has no boundaries empties the concept completely of its content” (Hardt and Negri, 2000, 426). And provided it is true that nothing is left outside the boundaries of the Empire, every war becomes by definition a civil war and the Empire’s map is one of “delocalisation”. As no national state preserves its

sovereignty, sovereignty seems to be but a figment and can be described as “a non-place”. At the same time, as value production is by now deterritorialised, what point is there in describing the factory as the locus of value production? More recently we also register a clear emphasis on a passage from the factory to the metropolis as the arena of struggles. In fact, Negri added that he is “convinced that metropolis is to multitude as working class was to factory” (Negri, 2006, 179).

### **Criticisms of the Notion of Multitude: Open Networks and Real Space**

Everything is reduced to time—space also—and to the evanescence of time—of collective time also—until it clashes with the plurality of local times of liberation (Negri, 2003b, 70).

In theory, as the concept of multitude is a substitute for notions such as people, proletarians, mass and, ultimately, class, it is Hardt and Negri's most ambitious proposition. Consequently, it is not surprising that it has come in for severe criticisms from orthodox Marxists fearing that it may blur the historical notion of working class (see among others Callinicos, 2001). In fact, Negri confuted the classical notion of class several decades ago, when he first propounded his idea of the *socialized worker* and his concept of the *general intellect*. The “socialized worker” was both a prop of capitalism and an agent working towards its overthrow; similarly, in the minds of Hardt and Negri, the creative forces of the multitude on which the Empire rests are also capable of autonomously constructing a counter-Empire, an alternative political organization of global flows and exchanges. Moreover, and even more importantly, Negri's method is at odds with the canons of traditional Marxism. In a recent article Negri clearly states:

We have resolved to do without those pure concepts that late advocates of state socialism and analytical Marxism press on us. We are not engaging in an effort to dismantle the last bastions of a past which needs to be conceptually purged and reorganized (the latest attempts at redefining the working class are simply laughable); we have to tackle a new reality whose revolutionary essence must be explored and defined and which seems to announce new openings and to hold out the prospect of full freedom (Negri, 2005b, 15; translation by author).

It is not so important herein to discuss the charges of anarchism, class betrayal, vanguardism and economism or the criticisms levelled against Hardt and Negri by the philosophical community (which have been countered by the authors themselves; see Hardt and Negri, 2004: 222-27). It is much more relevant to focus on the basic notion underlying the term multitude, the image of the network, and develop some reflections on the idea of space and the cross-relations between networks and space.

According to Hardt and Negri, networks are sprawling out and will soon span the whole world,<sup>7</sup> which means that work on linear assembly lines is rapidly being replaced by “[...] indeterminate relationships of distributed networks” (Hardt and Negri, 2004, 113). War has become “netwar” and, as commented by the authors, “Today [...] we see networks everywhere we look [...]” (Hardt and Negri, 2004, 142).

The work method devised is clear: “[...] Network has become a common form that tends to define our ways of understanding the world and acting in it” (Hardt and Negri, 2004, 142). Unfortunately, the use of this method leads up to a precise result, or, better still, to a rather objectionable tendency:

The global cycle of struggles develops in the form of a distributed network. Each local struggle functions as a node that communicates with all the other nodes without any hub or center of intelligence. This form of organization is the most fully realized political example we have of the concept of the multitude (Hardt and Negri, 2004, 217).

The tendency is objectionable primarily because it takes a form that has to be confirmed by data and analysis. It is at once clear that Hardt and Negri refer to a very special, idealized, fully interconnected network characterized by symmetrical instead of hierarchical links between its nodes.

The first point I wish to make is that Hardt and Negri offer an oversimplified concept of networks, where the complexity of multiple relational ties is most of the times restricted to one single link or connection, mainly communication. More complex systems are not examined. In their vision, the existence or the absence of a link is relevant, but little is known about the different possible weights attached to each link.

Secondly, Hardt and Negri’s network idea points to egalitarian networks in which all nodes can be reached from every other, not taking into account most of the real conditions of existence of networks and distances, however defined, between nodes and between networks. They give some generic examples for guerrilla movements and others, such as “[...] pack of wolves, with relatively autonomous clusters that can act independently or in coordination, then the distributed network might be imagined like a swarm of ants or bees” (Hardt and Negri, 2004, 57). Some of their examples recall the so-called ‘small world’ networks (Buchanan, 2002). ‘Small world’ networks are neither completely regular nor completely random, but develop in between these two extreme cases. They are

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<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, these arguments recall those by Castells on the world of flows, where networks are reified, atemporalized and apoliticized; concerning this network-induced cloud, see Marcuse (2002).

highly clustered, still presenting small, characteristic path lengths, like random graphs, and, more importantly, there are hubs that can dominate the network, ensuring connectivity. The swarm example of the Paris Commune in 1871 is also questionable (Hardt and Negri, 2004, 92). In fact, the resistance of the insurgents in the Paris Commune was built on a particular network, where pre-existing social ties among neighbours and organizational ties formed by the National Guard worked together to maintain solidarity in the insurgent ranks (see Gould, 1991).

Thirdly, in their vision, networks do not seem to reflect power structures, and it is not clear how power centres of capitalistic relations can be prevented from arising right within them. Hardt and Negri's Internet example suggests that power or authority relations are equally distributed on the web. But, class and gender inequalities are complicated by limited access to the web, by the transfer of dominant hegemonic practices onto the Internet, by reduced, i.e. only one-way communication capabilities of the web and by a preferential use of the Internet for trading activities. The development of the web renders unrealistic the example brought by Hardt and Negri. "[...The] evolution of a social network is governed by very different processes from those that govern the evolution of the World-Wide Web" (Jin et al., 2001, 1).

Fourthly, categorizing relational ties among agents as primary and attributes as secondary elements, Hardt and Negri proceeded with their network analysis without quoting any text from this perspective. In network analysis there are three main streams: a merely metaphorical use of the network concept, a particular set of methods (Scott, 1994) and a body of theory (Wellman and Berkowitz, 1988). Paraphrasing a remark from Mitchell addressed to Radcliffe-Brown (Mitchell, 1969, 2), every time Hardt and Negri likened the multitude to a network, they were using the term in a metaphorical sense, to provide a picture of the cross-links typical of social relations, without analyzing or even mentioning their properties. In fact, this network is governed by linguistic cross-links and the general intellect, but on closer analysis this is no great help when it comes to addressing the basic transition from a multitude in-itself to the multitude for-itself. The issue of the unequal access to language and maintenance of hierarchical relations is inverted, establishing a vision of social order in favour of the more marginalized. This leads Hardt and Negri to a position that grants the marginalized a higher status, the basis of which lies in the acceptance of their own condition and in their submission to the hierarchy principles constituting the social order (Bourdieu, 1992).

A more detailed analysis of Hardt and Negri's spatiality is apt at this point. The global geography imagined by Hardt and Negri is rather perplexing, and marked by some fundamental contradictions (Minca, 2003). Hardt and Negri even claim that someone like David Harvey is basically heading in the same theoretical "direction" as they are (Hardt and Negri, 2000, 202). Harvey shares with Hardt and Negri a grand-narrative of some kind (Hallvard, 2004), but in point of fact, taking

exception both to *Empire* and to the very notion of multitude, Harvey re-emphasized the importance of a notion such as imperialism and described the idea of the multitude as a “homogenizing banner” (Harvey, 2003, 169). Harvey’s attempt is to “[...] move forward the amorphous concept of ‘the multitude’ without falling into the trap of ‘my community, locality, or social group right or wrong’” (Harvey, 2003, 179). It is very difficult to fit the spatiality of the non-place Empire proposed by Hardt and Negri with the territorial and capitalist logics of power described by Harvey.

Hardt and Negri cannot even consider complex spatialities for the multitude. But, as many have shown, space is fundamental as a structuring force for social movements and political resistance (Featherstone, 2003). When the topology and topography of the network are introduced, Hardt and Negri limited themselves to the following: “The topography of global divisions of labor, poverty, and exploitation, in short, is a shifting matrix of politically constructed hierarchies” (Hardt and Negri, 2004, 165). Provided it is true that resistance and the construction of space for use by social movements, extended limits for political action and agent visibility/non-visibility are factors that count, what useful insights can come from Hardt and Negri’s analysis? As mentioned before, Hardt and Negri drew some of their ideas from Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari and adapted them to their needs.

The movements of the multitude designate new spaces, and its journeys establish new residences. Autonomous movement is what defines the place proper to the multitude. Increasingly less will passports or legal documents be able to regulate our movements across borders. A new geography is established by the multitude as the productive flows of bodies define new rivers and ports. The cities of the earth will become at once great deposits of cooperating humanity and locomotives for circulation, temporary residences and networks of the mass distribution of living humanity. Through circulation the multitude reappropriates space and constitutes itself as an active subject (Hardt and Negri, 2000, 193).

Here Hardt and Negri have provided the broad outlines of an entirely new map which, far from reflecting existing spatial relationships (or the controls—multiple, corporal, digital, satellite-operated, military—enforced on their borders), is described as the product of the autonomous choices made by a new category of migrants in defiance of the dramatic territorialization processes entailed in migration. In point of fact, there is no doubt that migration results in the appropriation of space, but there is no evidence that this space is actually as “limitless”, “open”, “new”, “smooth” or “unbounded” as the adjectives used in *Empire* and *Multitude* would suggest. “The example of the EU shows that freedom of movement is not tantamount to a free society” (Best, 2003, 198). So far, Hardt

and Negri's analysis of migration has been rather sketchy, for they describe migrants as a "special category of the poor" (Hardt and Negri, 2004, 133).

Ultimately, their discussion of open networks leaves out the construction of real spatialities implied by this assumption. They do not discuss an open space or other sort of space related to open networks, but they essentially replace space with networks. In the words of Massey (2005, 174-5), Hardt and Negri's concept of open space conjures up two antithetical fictional images: "bounded place" and "free flow", which pre-empt any attempt at serious political analysis. In Hardt's and Negri's opinion the somewhat widespread view that capitalism world-wide can be combated by protecting local cultures and groups from the homogenizing effects of ongoing globalization and the destruction that this entails must be reversed. According to them, we are to understand that migrating, processes of exodus, the mobility of deterritorializing flows are by far the better strategy. From their proposal we recognize a binary disjunction for the time of capitalism, rather homogeneous, empty and dead, and the one of the multitude, heterogeneous, full and living. Do we have a similar dichotomy for the space of capital and the one of the multitude? The underlying notion is that of a binary structure of a multitude, although heterogeneous, opposing the domination of the Empire, and "a binary structure makes it hard to see practices of resistance as always multiple and differentiated, and thus begins to close down a sense of the multiple spatialities of resistance" (Featherstone, 2003, 408). The Deleuze and Guattari approach is fully accepted and supported. "The smooth space is simultaneously local and yet not bounded. In this way the attack of the war machine on the state apparatus becomes possible from every local position" (Raunig, 2004). For the same reason, according to Hardt and Negri, Empire can be attacked everywhere, in every place because "it presents a superficial world, the virtual center of which can be accessed immediately from any point across the surface" (Hardt and Negri, 2000, 58). From an opposite starting point and with a simplified deleuzan geography, Hardt and Negri return to a kind of uniform, isotropic, unbounded space designed in locational theory, a space where it is difficult to locate or imagine multiple spatialities of the trajectories of real networks. In defining this space of action, Hardt and Negri blur the pluralities of local places within which the multiple hierarchical forms of oppression of neoliberal globalization, and therefore the multiple networks of resistance, operate. In the greater part of *Multitude*, this evolution of the multitude performing in open spaces acts itself out within circular spatial relations, although Hardt and Negri make it clear that "In time [...] the multitude can move through Empire and come out the other side, to express itself autonomously and rule itself" (Hardt and Negri, 2004, 101). And at the end of their book they state the need for a new constitutive temporality.

Even if Hardt and Negri's grand narrative has been shaped by the confrontational climate prevailing in Italy to this day, to a certain extent, it has played into the hands of the Italian anti-neoliberal movement. The next step in my

analysis is an attempt to read the map of Hardt and Negri's multitude with intent to answer the question: where is the multitude? Was it in Genoa?

### **Grass-roots Groups and Organizations in Italy: Real networks in Open Spaces?**

The general mobilization during the G8 Summit in Genoa was the very first attempt, by Italian grass-roots organizations, to foster dialogue between myriad different groups, associations and individuals that had never come together in recent Italian history. It is true that such protests enhance the visibility of political claims and shed light on the larger geographical dynamics that superintend the production and reproduction of scale to establish boundaries (D'Arcus, 2003). These dynamics of scaling and rescaling are apparent when social networks struggle for control over space (Swingedouw, 2004). And although many aspects of Hardt and Negri's multitude still call for further analysis, in this respect there can be little doubt that it superficially recalls this composite movement. But the dramatic events in Genoa—barriers, repression and bloodshed—revealed some limpness to Hardt and Negri's concept of multitude.

First of all, they fail to recognize the different positions of individuals and groups within the theorized open space. A spatial perspective sheds light on one major weakness of the Genoa G8 mobilization process: the way the demonstrations were distributed in space is clear evidence of an event-based, rather than dynamically distributed, network, i.e. of a network within which participants are compelled to select a specific group with which to identify, rather than follow multiple intersecting trajectories. This way of locating struggles renders very difficult the thinking of mixing 'differences' and the tension toward real networking. When the state barriers closed the city it was too late for a successful event built on the usual way of taking public place, with the "traditional" way of territorializing resistance. There was no way to attack a bounded place from open places because the demonstrations were already within a bounded space. Very importantly, the building of a new walled and gated Genoa before the G8 happened in the absence of any significant form of resistance to boycott and stop the closure of the city since the very first day that that idea came out. The closure of the city, from 7am 18 July to 10 pm 22 July, represented a grave suspension of the Italian Constitution (Gubitosa, 2003). The absence of any act of opposition, which should have been carried out by the people of Genoa, deterritorialized to the extreme the protesters coming from out of Genoa. An open network could not be built in such a deterritorialized space for demonstrators entrapped by military territorialization. At that point the decision to hold different demonstrations separately was the final and lethal mistake.

In Genoa, networks were not independent from the establishment (as the *White overalls* probably negotiated with the head of police, *questore*, a symbolic trespass of the barriers, for a few minutes) but from each other, absent in each

other's space but collectively defeated. These networks were interdependent until the moment of confrontation with the "establishment", then, they rejected their interdependency to be separated and separately beaten, crushed and subjugated one by one by the violence of the police. And in many spaces, many times, the only interdependency left was a masculine spectacle of violence glued by the black blocks' actions. In reality the mobilization included contradictory dynamics. From a network perspective, there were leadership issues, scant inter-group communication and difficult contacts with official media. From a subjective perspective, the participants were keen to identify themselves in a process instead of as a collective subject (Andretta, 2002). This lack of identification with a group or alternative symbolic icons and logos were not only a visible and non-mediatic event in force through the spaces of the demonstrations, but also an interesting and completely underestimated aspect. Most of the debate was instead centered on the issue of violence. The state's barriers and violence in Genoa G8 constituted a striation of the "smooth" space. They represented a defiance of the possibility of building large independent networks in an open space of contestation from where to attack temporary or fixed striated spaces.

In the post-Genoa summit period the "movement of movements" or "network of networks" tried to organize social forums in an effort to build on the first successful contacts in Genoa and encourage more inter-group communication. In COBAS journals (Bernocchi, 2001a, 2001b) and anarchist publications (Albertani, 2002) the Genoa event is said to have put an end to the *White Overalls'* street protest strategy and to have marked the final collapse of their approach. However, the creation of the necessary spaces turned out to be a much more difficult undertaking than had been originally assumed, since the political parties, trade unions and pre-existing groups and associations—in particular those that had instigated the Genoa protests—had been strengthened, rather than weakened, by the movement (Bernocchi, 2001b). In the aftermath of Genoa, Italy witnessed a new heyday of dissent, with hundreds of thousands of people marching for peace and against war, demonstrating in the streets to denounce corruption in government and protest against the neoliberal policies of the Berlusconi Cabinet, vindicating immigrant and gay rights and opposing neoliberal globalization. The most important meeting was the European Social Forum held in Florence in 2002 where the *Disobbedienti* interpreted again the practice of multitude. Interesting criticisms of disobedience are those by Mezzadra (who shares the greater part of Negri's approach):

A problem emerges, though, when such spectacularization becomes an end in itself, when it begins to colonize the entirety of political expression. In such circumstances, disobedience ceases to be one part in a combination of political actions, losing its connection to a program of political change. To descend for a moment into the practical politics of the movement, it is significant that at the European Social Forum the

disobbedienti excluded themselves from the fort, the main area in which the seminars and discussions were taking place. Within the fort, there was a genuine diffusion of disobedient practices as well as serious discussions about how the movement should proceed. But in this alternative space, the disobbedienti had nothing to do. In this context, there is a danger that disobedience becomes nothing so much as a kind of self-promotion. Something like a logo, one could say (Mezzadra, 2004).

### ***Anti-Neoliberal Movements, Their Spatializations and Theorizations***

We are facing a dominant global logic of production and domination that is place-sensitive in different ways with respect to the past. A logic that we can read as a rhizomatic geography “[...] that consist of complex combination and layers of nodes and linkages, which are interconnected in proliferating networks and flows of money, information, commodities and people” (Swingedouw, 2004, 31). Hardt and Negri’s proposal and the real practices of the Italian movement offer more questions than answers. We can accept the idea of networks to analyse the movement and also of open spatialities, but given a complex set of relations of exploitation that include labour, gender, migration and the environment, this idea must be then contextualized and articulated. Hardt and Negri’s divide between time and space is problematic, leading to an imperfect association between network change and nomadic movements in a continuous atemporal space. One lesson that comes from the Genoa event is that networks’ development cannot be conceived as separated not only from their spatialities but also, more generally, from their space-time trajectories (Massey, 2005). In particular, the rhythm and topography of mobilization and countermobilization is a sequence of political events, sometimes faster and other times slower, presenting both territorializing and deterritorializing acts. While many networks are static and do not change their topology for long periods, many others change substantially over time. Secondly, circulation is not *per se* a revolutionary act, particularly when the rules of restriction of spatio/temporal political trajectories are not challenged upon their emergence. Thirdly, this metaphor of open space as the political framework of resistance is ambivalent. On the one hand it represents the moving of multitude understood as a continuous process of circulation; on the other hand, it negates any complex geometry whereby class, gender and “ethnic” relations of inequality are located. Networks that link different classes of exploitation have to be built at least at different scales and recomposed according to the context and the concrete relations of force. Fourthly, in Hardt and Negri’s proposal only spectacular political actions, led by communicative groups, seem to enter into the global flows and challenge the new order. The limit of this political vision were all described regarding the *Disobbedienti*, although it remains an open issue how to build “unspectacular” political opposition, that is, political actions that are successful without being controlled and manipulated by media activity.

In the end we are left with three very relevant questions. What provides the space-time framework for the formation of anti-neoliberal movements? Which are the conditions that allow networks of resistance to loosen their links with existing devices of power and permit them to occupy and move through space-time frames left out of the neoliberal domain? Which are the space/time frames left out, where are the pores?

## Conclusions

When we speak of “multitude,” we run up against a complex problem: we must confront a concept without a history, without a lexicon, whereas the concept of “people” is a completely codified concept for which we have appropriate words and nuances of every sort. [...] With regard to the multitude, we are left, instead, with the absolute lack of codification, with the absence of a clear conceptual vocabulary. But this is a wonderful challenge for philosophers and sociologists, above all for doing research in the field (Virno, 2003, 43-4).

When analyzing social movements in Italy and their overall impact, we have to address a number of general issues related to groups that oppose neoliberal globalization. Within this context, Negri's approach has greatly helped understand the evolution of Marxist thought in Italy. Hardt and Negri's recent work has stirred up comments both from the greater part of the Italian antagonistic movement and from other fronts (Harvey, 2003).

On closer analysis, the multitude is an extended version of the idea—first theorized by workerism—that the more creative section of the working class, which once used to put its labour in the service of capitalism, has developed a number of competencies enabling it to seek autonomy and challenge the Empire. Extremely effective as populist political rhetoric, the concept of multitude is barely a useful political analysis tool due to its vagueness and lack of boundaries. This lack of boundaries, which we perceive both in the spatial and social notion of multitude, is responsible for a glaring misconception: the belief that open space and distributed networks, despite being the result of highly differentiated social processes, can actually achieve what their structural characteristics seem to promise (Massey, 2005); and we must acknowledge that the term ‘multitude’ can never be unproblematically used to describe a network of individuals and organizations. Instead of assuming that claims about multitude refer to a universal, monolithic agenda, we should ask what the term means in different contexts.

The actual effectiveness of the proposal and the method for turning it into practice depends on the organizational tools the movement will develop. A cursory analysis of the Italian multitude shows that a distributed network pattern is probably pursued within some of its components, e.g. the Social Centers or the Lilliput network, but not between them, and this is a matter of further research.

When these components are viewed altogether, they turn out to be a network with numerous weak and even missing ties. In this context, however, to speak of the strength of weak ties would be to miss the point, for instead of providing opportunities they are providing constraints for political behaviour. The Genoa Summit shed light on the potential extent of a large coalition, and the degree to which the differentiated approaches of individual groups are out of tune with the idea of the multitude. All in all, the multitude did not express itself in Genoa. In short, as soon as we try to test a metaphor against the reality of political analysis, the notion of multitude implodes and it becomes difficult to apply it to practical situations having regard to the actual material ties between network and space/time.

In conclusion, Hardt and Negri's spatiality is problematically undertheorized, being a patchwork of different suggestions going from definitions of open space to non-place while time is considered the main dimension of action and analysis. If space is reduced to time then what spaces remain for political action? Furthermore, the deleuzian spatiality adopted is not developed, rendering a construction in a smoothed space extremely fragile. These issues pose the multitude as a concept significantly removed from the real practices of the movements. Nevertheless, it is valuable as a political question to be investigated. The importance of the concept of multitude lies in generating two different questions: first, how to put together networks and space, not only in philosophical terms. In this case, the core question is the relation between networks and spaces, or better, between networks and space-time. Second, this concept is an invitation to intervene in our reality and abandon passive roles. In this sense the concept is not just metaphorical, but also a potential field and area of investigation and intervention for activists and social scientists. In a left agenda originating not from the relation between networks and space, but from the dynamics of networks in space/time, we should imagine networks of individuals able to articulate new proposals and to reflect on the possible multiple spaces of their trajectories and to anticipate, by sequences of practices and struggles, sequences of neoliberal political paths. The Genoa experience, from a network perspective, gave some novel results, considering that most of participants were keen to identify themselves in a process of building an opposition and an alternative to neoliberal globalization instead of a mere collective subject. The network concept and the space-temporal framework need to be conceptualized together if we do not want to fall into a "netopia", that is a utopia of networks of some kind, reproducing old answers to new questions.

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