

Antagonism and Insurrection in Italian *Operaismo**

Alberto Toscano

This paper was originally delivered at a session of the Capitalism and Philosophy Lab organised by Ray Brassier and Christian Kerslake at Middlesex University, May 2003.

This paper sets out from a basic premise: Behind the seemingly apologetic and impressionistic character of the figures of Empire and the multitude sketched out in Hardt & Negri's widely-debated work, lies a long history of theoretical work and political practice aimed at testing the validity of Marxist categories in light of empirical transformations in modes of (re)production, tendencies in class composition and the command function exerted by capital, with specific reference to political struggles and changes in post-war Italy. Behind the non-dialectical, or quasi-rhizomatic, pairing of Empire and multitude, one needs to discern the figures of a far more classical albeit 'mutant' antagonism between capital and labour, of the kind formulated in what can loosely be defined as the 'workerist' (*operaista*) and 'post-workerist' (*post-operaista*) development of Marxism initially around the figure of Raniero Panzieri and the *Quaderni Rossi* journal, and then gaining greater prominence with Mario Tronti and Antonio (Toni) Negri, the two figures who we'll consider here.

My question will then be the following: Why the move, in the work of Negri especially, from the 'workerist' dialectic of antagonism and suppression, through the insurrectionary unilaterality of *autonomia* to the recent theories of exodus? In other words, what needs to be investigated is the juncture between a political logic of capital and a revolutionary logic of separation – of *communism as separation*.¹ In the epoch of what Marx referred to as 'real subsumption', wherein all processes of labour and production take place within the ambit of capitalist relations, it is only a real process of antagonistic separation that can elicit the emergence of living labour as a collective subject capable of appropriating the production process based on the exploitation of its capacities. As Negri remarks, capitalist 'totality is a texture in which we find ourselves and in which we must separate ourselves in order to exist – but it is the intensity of the separation, the force with which antagonism is recognised, that constitutes us as singularities – as subjects' (*Fabbriche del Soggetto*, p. 224). The open paradox of the workerist 'tradition' (I recognise this term is quite an imposition, but viewed with sufficient geographical and historical distance, it'll do...) and of the philosophy of the multitudes that has followed in its wake – which is of course a paradox entirely faithful to some of the key insights of Marx – is precisely the twin affirmation of an integral *immanence* of capitalist relations to the social and political world (of a thoroughgoing *socialisation* of production) and of the radicalisation of the antagonism between capital and labour, such that this subsumption is revealed as an irrational command and the possibility of a communist appropriation of production is given. In a nutshell, the problem is that of the realisation of communism in a situation of advanced and dynamic capitalism, in which political crisis and antagonism are by no means necessarily accompanied by scarcity or stagnation (as witnessed by the fact that the golden age of FIAT in Italy

* This paper was originally delivered at a session of the Capitalism and Philosophy Lab organised by Ray Brassier and Christian Kerslake at Middlesex University, May 2003. I thank the participants at the Lab for their lively discussion of my theses.

¹ For a treatment of this concept with reference to the work of the French philosopher Alain Badiou, see my 'Communism as Separation' in *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*, edited by Peter Hallward (London: Continuum, 2004).

was concurrent with fierce struggles that invested the factories themselves, whilst the relative social peace of the 80s and 90s saw its progressive enfeeblement and eventual collapse).

The context for this position is the rupture within the political dimension of capital of any possibility for mediation, dialectics, measure. Rupture, catalysed by worker's struggles, of any social-democratic, Rooseveltian, or Keynesian project. This does not mean that there isn't a dialectics or determinacy of the collapse of mediation. It is the concept of *tendency* that provides determinacy, not that of a closed dialectical totality. Negri defines it as follows:

The tendency gives us a forecast that is determinate, specified by a materialist dialectic which is developed by the factors comprising it. The tendency is the practical/theoretical process whereby the working-class point of view becomes explicit in its application to a determinate historical epoch. This means that to pose the tendency, to describe it and to define its contradictions is a far cry from economic determinism. Quite the opposite: to pose the tendency is to work up from the simple to the complex, from the concrete to the abstract, in order to achieve an adequate overall theoretical perspective within which the specificity and concreteness of the elements which were our initial starting point may then acquire meaning. [...] Thus the tendency method of proceeding is far from being rigid or deterministic. As a way of proceeding, we can see it as reason's adventure as it comes to encounter the complexities of reality. Reason is prepared to accept the risks of this adventure: in fact the truth of the tendency lies in its practical verification. You can hardly call this economism! (*Revolution Retrieved*, p. 125)

Without such tendency or determinacy we are simply faced with the unilateral purity and impotence of a terrorism that is incapable of intervening in the real articulations of systemic development. The reconsideration of workerism – as well as of the many transformations and revisions it has since undergone – can serve as a useful corrective to the dominant perception of Marxism as a theory of systemic transformation first and foremost, one that necessitates supplementation by specifically 'political' theories of antagonism, hegemony and subjectivation (whether in Foucauldian accounts of 'technologies of self', theories of reflexivity, Gramsci-inspired postcolonial theory...). The workerist gambit, which was later radicalised in Negri's theories of workers' autonomy and self-valorisation, lay in arguing that it is possible not simply to consider the dynamic of capitalism in terms of exploitation and the vampire-like 'absorption' of living labour as variable capital into the process of production, but that one must in fact consider the signal importance of the subjectivity and organisation of the working class, moving the analyses of the transformations of capitalism firmly onto the level of a materially and temporally determinate antagonism. In other words, what we have here is the making explicit of the rather classical Marxist thesis – which has alas too often been passed over for the sake of a dubious objectivism – that *the conditions overseeing the capitalist domination and exploitation of labour-power and the extraction of surplus-value are political through and through*. As we shall see, this is not simply a theoretical posit, but, at least in Negri, is accompanied by an analysis of the tendency at work in a given politico-economic conjuncture, one in which, again according to Negri, the complex mediations of the law of value that had played such a dominant role in the American New Deal, in the fortunes of Keynesianism and in the entire tradition of social democracy become ever more obsolescent, as capital manifests increasingly as a

form of political command desiring ever greater autonomy and ever lesser negotiation with labour power.

The workerist thesis, indeed, is that such an 'autonomisation' of capital – marked by an increasing reliance on monetary, fiscal, and financial policies to the detriment of social planning, as well as by the concomitant forms of enforcement and control – is in a sense the *effect* of an ever greater claim to autonomy and self-determination exerted in working-class struggles to appropriate a domain of production and reproduction which far from being relegated to the factory alone, now covers the entirety of the social fabric. Though the concepts of 'class composition' first and of 'organised autonomy' later mark the sensitivity of this approach to the complexity and power dynamics of antagonism, we could still say of 'antagonism in general' what Marx says of 'production in general', to wit, that it is 'an abstraction, but a rational abstraction insofar as it really brings out and fixes the common element and thus saves us repetition' (*Grundrisse*, p. 85).

The question is that of how to perpetuate, at the level of political strategy and organisation, the notion of communism as the suppression of work, how to effect a practical transition to communism in the conditions of a highly socialised but also politically repressive situation. In this line, Negri posits three theses that are key to his politics of antagonism 'All Marxist categories are categories of communism' (*Marx Beyond Marx*, p. 161); 'Communism has the form of subjectivity, communism is a constituting praxis' (*ibid.*, p. 163); 'communism is in no way a product of capitalist development, it is its radical inversion' (*ibid.*, p. 165). It is obvious that the principal theoretical enemy here is any variety of *socialism*, i.e. any attempt to think the suspension of capitalist relations as a possible result of a mediation internal to the capitalist mode of production, be it as a 'natural' consequence or as the gradual effect of the shows of force of the working class and its party leadership. Against any such faith in mediation, Negri wishes to affirm 'The antagonistic nature of Marxist logic' (*ibid.*, p. 168). And he wishes to do so both in line with the determinate class composition of this antagonism (which sets out the sites of appropriation and insurrection) and against any possible progressive or productivist dialectic. As he writes: 'The antagonism must become social, *global revolutionary power must become a revolutionary class* against capitalist development' (*ibid.*). This of course opens up some thorny problems, to say the least. To begin with: What is the nature of the purported 'independence' of the proletariat? Is it latent or a product of political will and organisation? How can we think the political and programmatic autonomy of the exploited, as well as the full immanence of the antagonistic class within capital, which for Marx, together with technology and socialisation, drew the difference between real and formal subsumption. In other words: What is an immanent antagonism? It is only by confronting this question that I think light can be shed on the practical-historical shortcomings and theoretical potential of workerism and autonomism, as well as upon the antagonistic theses that determine both *Empire* and much of the theoretical discourse of the anti-globalisation (or rather, anti-capitalist) movement.

The source for this turn to an explicitly and systemically antagonistic brand of Marxism is twofold. Historically speaking, it was born of the resurgence – outside of the mediations of the PCI (Italian Communist Party) and the trade unions – of fierce workers' struggles in the late 50s and throughout the 60s, struggles in which what was at stake was no longer the participation in the nationalist and

productivist agenda of progress and negotiation still defended by the Italian communists, but rather the unilateral demand for the *immediate* satisfaction of workers' needs outside of any rationale that would see these needs as derivative upon the health of the economy, the continuation of high levels of investment and a general increase in production and profitability. Theoretically speaking, this wave of openly 'egotistical' struggles, marked by the refusal of any socialist idolatry of work as the essence of the human as well as by an utter disdain for the political impetus behind economic planning, was eminently registered in the Mario Tronti's epoch-making *Operai e Capitale (Workers and Capital)*. This work, together with the productions of some Tronti's colleagues in the journal *Quaderni Rossi*, tried to operate a radical inversion to the theoretical standpoint, which remained the PCI's, which saw labour-power as a factor within the cycles of production and their political rationalisation, a factor that could at best delegate political command over itself to the party as class representative, but which, until the attainment of a magical threshold of communism, would remain fettered by the exigencies and the discipline of the essentially capitalist relations obtaining in the factory and beyond.

Against this ideology of productivism, economic planning and worker sacrifice, Tronti attempted to translate the antagonistic demands for appropriation that had marked 10 years of workers' struggles into an adequate theoretical framework. Contrary to the view whereby it was possible interminably to engage capital in reformist political mediations safeguarding the livelihood – if not the desires – of the working class, Tronti argued for the illusory character of this position, on the basis of the following thesis, which is becoming more persuasive by the day: The political history of capital is *the history of the successive attempts of the capitalist class to emancipate itself from the working class*.

The working class *does* what it *is*. But it is, at one and the same time, the *articulation* of capital, and its *dissolution*. Capitalist power seeks to use the workers' antagonistic will-to-struggle as a motor of its own development. The workers' party must take this same real mediation by the workers of capital's interests and organise it in an antagonistic form, as the tactical terrain of struggle and as a strategic potential for destruction ('The Strategy of Refusal' in *Autonomia: A Post-Political Politics*, p. 29).

What we have here is neither an organic dialectic nor a Manichean theory of pure antagonism. Rather we have the idea that capital is concerned with a *dialectical use of antagonism*, whose ultimate if utopian horizon is the withering away of the working class and the untrammelled self-valorisation of capital; whilst the working class and its political vanguard aim at an *antagonistic use of antagonism*, which refuses precisely the capitalisation of antagonism whereby, for example, the flight from the factory is turned into an opportunity for profitable technological leaps and the exploitation of a de-unionised 'flexible' work force.

In a sense, the exasperation of capital's bid for freedom, which became more obvious in 60s in the transformation of the organic composition of capital (ratio of constant to variable capital, increase in controllable technologies and marginalisation of uncontrollable workers for the sake of increased productivity) did nothing but reveal that process, indicated by Marx in the *Results of the Immediate*

Process of Production, whereby the working class (living labour) confronts the seemingly monolithic character of capital's command over the production process (see *Results of the Immediate Process of Production* in *Capital Vol. One*, pp. 987-988). Here then lies the vampirism of capital, whose only fluidity is offered by the process of absorption of living labour. 'Capital is truly *capital* only if it becomes "value in process"; only if, *within* the process of production, the magic touch of human labour transforms it from a constant to a variable magnitude.' (Maffi, in the Italian edition of the *Results*, p. xi)

This dual phenomenology of the production process, split between the immediate point of view of production and the point of view of capitalist self-valorisation is precisely the object of Tronti's attempt at forcing a political assumption of this antagonism, in the here and now, which would not subordinate itself to an economic rationalisation (the prelude of capital's emancipation from the working class). By facing the totality of the conditions of labour as capital, together with the increasing bond between these conditions and a practice of command and discipline (such that exploitation is sedimented by and articulated through objective technologies of discipline in production), we can, according to Tronti, begin to project the political constitution, through antagonism, of an explicitly insurrectionary working class. On the terrain of the command over production, what serves as a structural or phenomenological antagonism must be assumed, doubled and reinforced (to the point of crisis) by a political antagonism that directly attacks the capitalistic process of self-valorisation and command, and tends towards a self-valorisation of the working class, which is to say, towards a destabilization and de-structuring of capitalist command. The entire point, strategically and tactically (a point that saw numerous splits on the Italian left), concerned the means of moving from certain practices of autonomy that characterised workers' struggles to the political formation of what Tronti refers to as a *class against capital*.

This is not simply a voluntaristic or Leninist adjunct to Marxism, since it is based on emphasising the *reactive* character of capital, a character recognised by Marx himself in his accounts of the pirating of workers' information and intelligence and ensuing structural adjustments in the process of production, as he once quipped, capital chases strikes. The question is thus not simply one of 'miraculating' workers' autonomy (to use the terminology of Deleuze & Guattari in the *Anti-Oedipus*) into being, since, in the form of resistance (though not of command) this autonomy already exists. The key thesis here, which proved a huge influence on Negri's work throughout the 70s, and which remains embedded in the latest analyses of the 'multitude' is the following: there is primacy of resistance over exploitation (with its corollary: 'capital is a consequence of worker's labour'). In Tronti's own words: 'it is the specific moments of the class struggle which have determined every technological change in the mechanisms of industry' ('The Strategy of Refusal', p. 30). Against the neutrality of technology, its manipulation and 'evolution', this position argues for the use of the political antagonism of labour and capital as a reading grille for social transformations, attentive to the subjection and absorption of living labour by dead capital, as well as to the subjective character and counter-subjective moves of the working class, to be considered as a *condition sine qua non* for social and economic reproduction.

There follows what Tronti regards as the paradox of capitalism: 'the only thing which does not come

from the workers is, precisely, [the conditions of] labour' ('The Strategy of Refusal', pp. 30-31). That is, it is the explicitly political framework of command and planning that serves to shackle living labour to the demands of capital, such that the 'ontological' primacy and ineluctability of living labour is subjected to a thoroughgoing instrumentalisation. As Marx himself had bitterly indicated: 'It is not the worker who buys the means of production and subsistence, but the means of subsistence that buy the worker to incorporate him into the means of production' (*Capital Vol. One*, p. 1004). However, for Tronti, Negri and the workerist line, these mechanisms of coercion that situate the bearer of labour-power within the system of production, circulation and distribution, mask the very real *dependency* of capital, which cannot be simply done away with by means of changes in organic composition – a dependency upon the capacity, relative docility and availability of the working class. As Tronti writes, 'Exploitation is born, historically, from the necessity for capital to escape from its *de facto* subordination to the class of worker-producers' (ibid.).

Thus, it can be argued that capital is in a double bind, which demands of it both a ruthless command and minimisation of workers' demands (or at least of any of those demands that would interfere with capitalist valorisation) *and* a capacity to absorb not simply living labour in terms of the physical expenditure of the worker, but a whole host of skills, knowledges and capacities for cooperation that are inseparable from workers' struggles for an emancipation *from* and not *of* work. The problem of capitalist command becomes that of a parasitic capture of the political vitality of the working class joined to a neutralisation of its deeply threatening nature. This is where Tronti points to the role of 'organic forms of political dictatorship' in the history of capitalism, and we may consider today the twin phenomena of the *grand enfermement* of the American 'underclass' (see the recent work of Loïc Wacquant, and Alessandro De Giorgi for transofrmations in UK penal regimes) and the punitive treatment of political and economic migrants (see the work of Sandro Mezzadra). The fact that this is a political problem and that for all intents and purposes we live in the *State of* capitalism means that the antagonism at the heart of the process of production can only manifest itself as an attack – a destabilisation and de-structuring, to speak like Negri – on the State. What we have for Tronti is thus the tendency towards the ever more explicit face-off between two separate but reciprocal processes of subjectivation: the subject of capitalist command and the subject of communist resistance. Here he introduces the specific *political difference* of labour and capital: the first does not need institutions, but only organisation, whilst the second must be institutionally articulated. As he writes, 'From the very beginning, the proletariat is nothing more than the immediate *political interest* in the abolition of every aspect of the existing order. As far as its internal development is concerned, it has no need of "institutions" in order to bring to life what it is, since what it is is nothing other than the *life-force* of that immediate destruction. It doesn't need *institutions*, but it does need *organisation*. [...] *The concept of the revolution and the reality of the working class are one and the same.*' ('The Strategy of Refusal', p. 34)

Against the politics of mediation and social democracy, Tronti argues that the strategic collapse of the working class movement has always based on attempting to transfer the model of the bourgeois revolution to the communist revolution (i.e. slow takeover of economic power, followed by the reversal of political control). In other words, the perpetual delay of a full assumption of antagonism and autonomy on the part of working-class movements has 'Basically, all the communist movement

has done has been to break and overturn, in some aspects of its practice, the social democratic logic of what has been its own theory' [...] 'here we see the working class articulation of political development: at first as an initiative that is positive for the functioning of the system, an initiative that only needs to be organised via institutions; in the second instance, as a "No", a refusal to manage the mechanism of society as it stands, merely to improve it – a "No" which is repressed by pure violence. This is the difference of content which can exist – even within one and the same set of working class demands – between *trade union demands* and *political refusal*'(ibid.).

Whilst Tronti returned to the PCI and tried to formulate the idea of an 'autonomy of the political' as a way of achieving working class hegemony over economic planning and rationalisation, Negri's entire political and theoretical development is founded on the idea of radicalising the antagonism and finding an insurrectional and organisational outlet for this pronouncement of Tronti: 'As a matter of urgency we must get hold of, and start circulating, a photograph of the worker-proletariat that shows him as he really is – "proud and menacing"' (ibid., p. 31). The basis for this position has to do with a certain assessment of the political tendency (in the sense of the term discussed above) at work within late capitalism, a tendency that for Negri sees an ever increasing use of command, crisis and control on the side of capital aimed at the subjection of workers, the decomposition of any possible form of class unity and an extraction of surplus-value which tries to emancipate itself from any dialectic or negotiation with the purveyors of labour-power. In this phenomenon of tendency – which included the blackmail of austerity policies, cold war and nuclear emergencies, and the ever increasing role of monetary policies after the oil crisis of 1973 – Negri registers an increasing violence and irrationality on the part of capital. This violence ultimately lies in trying to maintain the *measure* and *command* of salary relations in a situation of such integral socialisation and technological progress that the violence of such a situation not only becomes patent but must turn ever more political (as witnessed by the 'crisis politics' and 'strategy of tension' that characterised the Italian State, but also by the systematic demolition of any possibility of class solidarity by the class decomposition that marked Thatcherism and Reaganism, and which made way for the present regime of flexibility). As Negri remarks, 'My denunciation is not therefore directed against the normality of violence, but against the fact that in the enterprise form of capitalist domination, violence has lost all intrinsic, "natural" rationale ("naturalness" being always a product of historic forces), and all relation with any project that could be deemed progressive. If anything, the enterprise form of violence is precisely the opposite: it is an irrational form within which exchange value is imposed on social relations in which the conditions of the exchange relation no longer exist. It is the intelligent form of this irrationality, simultaneously desperate in its content and rational in its effectiveness' (*Revolution Retrieved*, p. 131). In other words, the tendency to an integral *socialisation* of capitalism (in line with Marx's work in the *Grundrisse*, the key text of *operaismo*), moving far beyond the walls of the factory to the inclusion of all facets of social reproduction within the extraction of surplus value (what Negri would later connect to the Foucauldian theme of biopolitics) comes into conflict with the endurance, enforced with exquisitely political means, of the measurability of production in the form of wages. Arguing from the loss of any proportionality or translatability between a production now entirely socialized (real subsumption) and its measure in labour-power or wage, Negri identifies the tendency as the site of a *communist transition*. This transition however does not take the form of a plan, but of an outright refusal of capitalist command

and an appropriation – mediated by a careful analysis of class composition, that is to say of the power relations and differentiations within the working class itself – of workers' experience and productivity. The self-valorisation of capital through command is thus confronted by the self-valorisation of the working class through practices of autonomy and appropriation aimed at the destabilisation and de-structuring of the political conditions for the perpetuation of capitalism. The programme is thus that of 'the direct social appropriation of produced social wealth'. It is here that the concrete practices of the movements going under the banner of *Autonomia Organizzata* – agitating in Rome, Padua, Milan and other urban areas in the 70s – find their theoretical legitimacy. The practice of mass illegality (unilateral reduction of bills, house occupations, etc.) sabotage and violent affirmations of the material reality of worker independence, all of which characterised the 'autonomist' movement in the 70s, are thus conceptualised as an attempt to force the structural antagonism and its tendency towards an ever greater arbitrary or indifference of command into a situation of insurrection, such that the assumption of autonomy functions directly as means of destabilisation and de-structuring, re-composing class unity and countering the neutralisation of resistance that capital effects through means both punitive (repressions and redundancies) and programmatic (the decomposition of a factory-based working class and creation of a precarious and flexible class of 'immaterial' workers: a situation that backfired in '77, when the micropolitical strategies of the crisis-State – dispersion of workers, flexibilisation – led to mass uprisings of unemployed and often highly educated urban youth).

This insurrectionary programme of *operaismo* is thus based on an analysis of a twin tendency, that of the increasingly brutal attempt on the part of capital to emancipate itself from workers and workers' struggles (which force it into the 'dream of self-sufficiency') and of the increasing socialisation of value, such that processes of production and reproduction, as well as circulation and distribution, become more and more integrated and less and less linked to the mediating space of the factory and the official working class movement. The antagonism is therefore posited as extreme between, on the one hand, a capital hell-bent on the absoluteness of its own command and the fragmentation of any class initiative, and, on the other, a working class aiming to attain a direct appropriation of the social production that finds its source in its own living labour as well as in its everyday practises and desires (chiefly in the domain of consumption, where it is integrally 'put to work' according to Negri and his colleagues). The subjectivation, singularisation and socialisation of abstract labour is thus the aim of a movement which seeks to force the separation from the capitalist command of the conditions of labour, but it is a subjectivation that, as we move into the 70s and the decomposition of the factory, must spread itself across the entire social field. This is where the concept of class composition and the analysis of power-relations is of such importance, as without it only an entirely indeterminate dualism – ripe for a vanguardist and terrorist takeover à la Red Brigades – can take place. Here is where we encounter the fundamental non-homogeneity of class composition, the production of a *disseminated* figure of the worker and the necessity of generating new organisations of class struggle on this new basis. In this setting, the politicisation of marginal labour power into working class is never given (in the factory, in the 'movement') but must be conquered explicitly. This is where the notion of the 'refusal of work' – to be understood as the refusal of the reproduction of capitalist wage relations for the sake of an emancipation of social production, or what Negri calls the 'force of invention' – takes root and acquires a pivotal role

played both for class unity (crystallisation of a new class composition beyond the factory) and for the project of destruction by the unconditional demand for a *right to income*, a *political wage* entirely detached if not wholly destructive of the conditions for the reproduction of capitalist cycles of profit and investment (a proposal that notably recurs in the more recent *Empire*, co-authored with Hardt).

Ultimately the very terms of the antagonism, of the 'method of tendency' espoused by Negri, do demand the confrontation – determined by the particularities of class composition, organic composition and capital's strategies of restructuring and command but by no means mediated or dialogical – between the violence of a command that tries to maintain the wage relation and the measure of labour power, on the one hand, and the violence of a self-valorising working class, on the other. One could thus say that the validity and shortcomings of Negri's position do all lie in his determination not to evade the bleak prospects of reformist socialism and the necessity of addressing the question of *power* in its two senses of power over the State (of production) and of power-relations within classes themselves (class composition). To use the Spinozist distinction so dear to him, we have here the face-off between the *potentia* of the working class and the *potestas* of a State dominated by the logic of enterprise (see *The Savage Anomaly*). If the face-off cannot be evaded, whatever its forms, it is because the very analysis of tendency, means that a counter-autonomy or counter-self-valorisation – i.e. insurrection – is all that is given against the violence of capitalist command over the socialisation of production. As Negri says, in considerable contradiction with some of his later theses regarding the exodus of the multitudes: 'The *jouissance* that the working class seeks is the *jouissance* of power, not the tickle of illusions'. And later: 'Fantasy wears boots, desire is violent, invention is organised.' Or: 'The Party is the army that defends the borders of proletarian independence' (*I Libri del Rogo*). But this violence, which is the violence of a sabotage aimed both at the defence of worker's needs and experiences and at the destruction of capitalist relations is forced by its objective position of weakness into a strategy of provocation, a strategy which, at least in the Italian case, proved that, alas, in Negri's own words: 'Crisis is a risk taken by the working class and the proletariat. Communism is not inevitable.'

This notion of antagonism is intimately linked to a certain formulation – which Negri and many of his comrades (Virno, Mezzadra, Marazzi, Berardi, Lazzarato) have recently developed to a high degree of phenomenological specificity – of what has become the cognitive and creative wealth of 'abstract' labour, of a labour-power which was forced to become indifferent material in the hands of capitalist factory discipline, through Taylorism and Fordism, but became, in the period of 'decomposition' and socialization (recall Tronti's 'social factory') of that class figure, marked by a wealth of capacities and a flexibility and cooperative character not necessarily subjected to capitalist rationality. Behind the ever greater demand of capital to put the entirety of human capacity to work, Negri therefore sees the burgeoning wealth in the characteristics of living labour itself. As he writes, in a recent prologue to his texts of the 70s, his work leads to the 'theoretical observation that the social transformation of class relations is definitively over. Today, *against* capital, rises up the social figure of immaterial labour' (*I Libri del Rogo*, p. 16).

In this sense, he follows Marx, when the latter says in the *Grundrisse* that 'as a rule, the most general abstractions arise only in the midst of the richest possible concrete development, where

one thing appears as common to many, to all' (*Grundrisse*, p. 104).

To conclude we may ask the following, open-ended question: Isn't the real struggle today precisely that of identifying the conditions for an antagonism that would not be entirely detached (autonomous) from the conditions of production and reproduction of contemporary capitalism? In the sense that the simple positing of a duality, say between Empire and multitude, without the *composition* that can provide this duality with a certain degree of determinateness, can arguably be seen to generate a weak utopian stance, with all its attendant political inefficacy and its penchant for the grand (and sterile) symbolic gesture. The problem being that today we are faced with a situation in which it is the 'freedom' of capital and the brutality of its command which has the greatest visibility, whilst real figures of autonomy and organisation are few and far between, seemingly to emerge only as spectacle (the G8 protests in Genova) or in the midst of brutal social and economic crisis (the *piqueteros* and *cacerolazos* in Argentina).