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POSTMODERNIZATION, OR THE INFORMATIZATION OF PRODUCTION

Postmodernism is not something we can settle once and for all and then use with a clear conscience. The concept, if there is one, has to come at the end, and not at the beginning, of our discussions of it.

Fredric Jameson

The good news from Washington is that every single person in Congress supports the concept of an information superhighway. The bad news is that no one has any idea what that means.

Congressman Edward Markey

It has now become common to view the succession of economic paradigms since the Middle Ages in three distinct moments, each defined by the dominant sector of the economy: a first paradigm in which agriculture and the extraction of raw materials dominated the economy, a second in which industry and the manufacture of durable goods occupied the privileged position, and a third and current paradigm in which providing services and manipulating information are at the heart of economic production.¹ The dominant position has thus passed from primary to secondary to tertiary production. Economic *modernization* involves the passage from the first paradigm to the second, from the dominance of agriculture to that of industry. Modernization means industrialization. We might call the passage from the second paradigm to the third, from the domination of industry to that of services and information, a process of economic *postmodernization*, or better, *informatization*.

The most obvious definition and index of the shifts among these three paradigms appear first in quantitative terms, in reference either to the percentage of the population engaged in each of these productive domains or to the percentage of the total value produced by the various sectors of production. The changes in employment statistics in the dominant capitalist countries during the past one hundred years do indeed indicate dramatic shifts.² This quantitative view, however, can lead to serious misunderstandings of these economic paradigms. Quantitative indicators cannot grasp either the *qualitative* transformation in the progression from one paradigm to another or the *hierarchy* among the economic sectors in the context of each paradigm. In the process of modernization and the passage toward the paradigm of industrial dominance, not only did agricultural production decline quantitatively (both in percentage of workers employed and in proportion of the total value produced), but also, more important, agriculture itself was transformed. When agriculture came under the domination of industry, even when agriculture was still predominant in quantitative terms, it became subject to the social and financial pressures of industry, and moreover agricultural production itself was industrialized. Agriculture, of course, did not disappear; it remained an essential component of modern industrial economies, but it was now a transformed, industrialized agriculture.

The quantitative perspective also fails to recognize hierarchies among national or regional economies in the global system, which leads to all kinds of historical misrecognitions, posing analogies where none exist. From a quantitative perspective, for example, one might assume a twentieth-century society with the majority of its labor force occupied in agriculture or mining and the majority of its value produced in these sectors (such as India or Nigeria) to be in a position analogous to a society that existed sometime in the past with the same percentage of workers or value produced in those sectors (such as France or England). The historical illusion casts the analogy in a dynamic sequence so that one economic system occupies the same position or stage in a sequence of develop-

ment that another had held in a previous period, as if all were on the same track moving forward in line. From the qualitative perspective, that is, in terms of their position in global power relationships, however, the economies of these societies occupy entirely incomparable positions. In the earlier case (France or England of the past), the agricultural production existed as the dominant sector in its economic sphere, and in the later (twentieth-century India or Nigeria), it is subordinated to industry in the world system. The two economies are not on the same track but in radically different and even divergent situations—of dominance and subordination. In these different positions of hierarchy, a host of economic factors is completely different—exchange relationships, credit and debt relationships, and so forth.³ In order for the latter economy to realize a position analogous to that of the former, it would have to invert the power relationship and achieve a position of dominance in its contemporary economic sphere, as Europe did, for example, in the medieval economy of the Mediterranean world. Historical change, in other words, has to be recognized in terms of the power relationships throughout the economic sphere.

Illusions of Development

The discourse of economic *development*, which was imposed under U.S. hegemony in coordination with the New Deal model in the postwar period, uses such false historical analogies as the foundation for economic policies. This discourse conceives the economic history of all countries as following one single pattern of development, each at different times and according to different speeds. Countries whose economic production is not presently at the level of the dominant countries are thus seen as developing countries, with the idea that if they continue on the path followed previously by the dominant countries and repeat their economic policies and strategies, they will eventually enjoy an analogous position or stage. The developmental view fails to recognize, however, that the economies of the so-called developed countries are defined not only by certain quantitative factors or by their internal structures, but also and more important by *their dominant position in the global system*.

The critiques of the developmentalist view that were posed by underdevelopment theories and dependency theories, which were born primarily in the Latin American and African contexts in the 1960s, were useful and important precisely because they emphasized the fact that the evolution of a regional or national economic system depends to a large extent on its place within the hierarchy and power structures of the capitalist world-system.⁴ The dominant regions will continue to develop and the subordinate will continue to underdevelop as mutually supporting poles in the global power structure. To say that the subordinate economies do not develop does not mean that they do not change or grow; it means, rather, that *they remain subordinate in the global system* and thus never achieve the promised form of a dominant, developed economy. In some cases individual countries or regions may be able to change their position in the hierarchy, but the point is that, regardless of who fills which position, the hierarchy remains the determining factor.⁵

The theorists of underdevelopment themselves, however, also repeat a similar illusion of economic development.⁶ Summarizing in schematic terms, we could say that their logic begins with two valid historical claims but then draws from them an erroneous conclusion. First, they maintain that, through the imposition of colonial regimes and/or other forms of imperialist domination, the underdevelopment of subordinated economies was created and sustained by their integration into the global network of dominant capitalist economies, their partial articulation, and thus their real and continuing dependence on those dominant economies. Second, they claim that the dominant economies themselves had originally developed their fully articulated and independent structures in relative isolation, with only limited interaction with other economies and global networks.⁷

From these two more or less acceptable historical claims, however, they then deduce an invalid conclusion: if the developed economies achieved full articulation in relative isolation and the underdeveloped economies became disarticulated and dependent through their integration into global networks, then a project for

the relative isolation of the underdeveloped economies will result in their development and full articulation. In other words, as an alternative to the “false development” pandered by the economists of the dominant capitalist countries, the theorists of underdevelopment promoted “real development,” which involves delinking an economy from its dependent relationships and articulating in relative isolation an autonomous economic structure. Since this is how the dominant economies developed, it must be the true path to escape the cycle of underdevelopment. This syllogism, however, asks us to believe that the laws of economic development will somehow transcend the differences of historical change.

The alternative notion of development is based paradoxically on the same historical illusion central to the dominant ideology of development it opposes. The tendential realization of the world market should destroy any notion that today a country or region could isolate or delink itself from the global networks of power in order to re-create the conditions of the past and develop as the dominant capitalist countries once did. Even the dominant countries are now dependent on the global system; the interactions of the world market have resulted in a generalized disarticulation of all economies. Increasingly, any attempt at isolation or separation will mean only a more brutal kind of domination by the global system, a reduction to powerlessness and poverty.

Informatization

The processes of modernization and industrialization transformed and redefined all the elements of the social plane. When agriculture was modernized as industry, the farm progressively became a factory, with all of the factory’s discipline, technology, wage relations, and so forth. Agriculture was modernized as industry. More generally, society itself slowly became industrialized even to the point of transforming human relations and human nature. Society became a factory. In the early twentieth century, Robert Musil reflected beautifully on the transformation of humanity in the passage from the pastoral agricultural world to the social factory: “There was a

time when people grew naturally into the conditions they found waiting for them and that was a very sound way of becoming oneself. But nowadays, with all this shaking up of things, when everything is becoming detached from the soil it grew in, even where the production of soul is concerned one really ought, as it were, to replace the traditional handicrafts by the sort of intelligence that goes with the machine and the factory.”⁸ The processes of becoming human and the nature of the human itself were fundamentally transformed in the passage defined by modernization.

In our times, however, *modernization has come to an end*. In other words, industrial production is no longer expanding its dominance over other economic forms and social phenomena. A symptom of this shift is manifest in the quantitative changes in employment. Whereas the process of modernization was indicated by a migration of labor from agriculture and mining (the primary sector) to industry (the secondary), the process of postmodernization or informatization has been demonstrated through the migration from industry to service jobs (the tertiary), a shift that has taken place in the dominant capitalist countries, and particularly in the United States, since the early 1970s. Services cover a wide range of activities from health care, education, and finance to transportation, entertainment, and advertising. The jobs for the most part are highly mobile and involve flexible skills. More important, they are characterized in general by the central role played by knowledge, information, affect, and communication. In this sense many call the postindustrial economy an informational economy.

The claim that modernization is over and that the global economy is today undergoing a process of postmodernization toward an informational economy does not mean that industrial production will be done away with or even that it will cease to play an important role, even in the most dominant regions of the globe. Just as the processes of industrialization transformed agriculture and made it more productive, so too the informational revolution will transform industry by redefining and rejuvenating manufacturing processes. The new managerial imperative operative here is, “Treat

manufacturing as a service.”⁹ In effect, as industries are transformed, the division between manufacturing and services is becoming blurred.¹⁰ Just as through the process of modernization all production tended to become industrialized, so too through the process of postmodernization all production tends toward the production of services, toward becoming informationalized.

Not all countries, of course, even among the dominant capitalist countries, have embarked on the project of postmodernization along the same path. On the basis of the change of employment statistics in the G-7 countries since 1970, Manuel Castells and Yuko Aoyama have discerned two basic models or paths of informatization.¹¹ Both models involve the increase of employment in postindustrial services, but they emphasize different kinds of services and different relations between services and manufacturing. The first path tends toward a *service economy model* and is led by the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada. This model involves a rapid decline in industrial jobs and a corresponding rise in service-sector jobs. In particular, the financial services that manage capital come to dominate the other service sectors. In the second model, the *info-industrial model*, typified by Japan and Germany, industrial employment declines more slowly than it does in the first model, and, more important, the process of informatization is closely integrated into and serves to reinforce the strength of existing industrial production. Services related directly to industrial production thus remain more important in this model relative to other services. The two models represent two strategies to manage and gain an advantage in the economic transition, but it should be clear that they both move resolutely in the direction of the informatization of the economy and the heightened importance of productive flows and networks.

Although the subordinated countries and regions of the world are not capable of implementing such strategies, the processes of postmodernization nonetheless impose irreversible changes on them. The fact that informatization and the shift toward services have taken place thus far primarily in the dominant capitalist coun-

tries and not elsewhere should not lead us back to an understanding of the contemporary global economic situation in terms of linear stages of development. It is true that as industrial production has declined in the dominant countries, it has been effectively exported to subordinated countries, from the United States and Japan, for example, to Mexico and Malaysia. Such geographical shifts and displacements might lead some to believe that there is a new global organization of economic stages whereby the dominant countries are informational service economies, their first subordinates are industrial economies, and those further subordinated are agricultural. From the perspective of stages of development, for example, one might think that through the contemporary export of industrial production, an auto factory built by Ford in Brazil in the 1990s might be comparable to a Ford factory in Detroit in the 1930s because both instances of production belong to the same industrial stage.

When we look more closely, however, we can see that the two factories are not comparable, and the differences are extremely important. First of all, the two factories are radically different in terms of technology and productive practices. When fixed capital is exported, it is exported generally at its highest level of productivity. The Ford factory in 1990s Brazil, then, would not be built with the technology of the Ford factory of 1930s Detroit, but would be based on the most advanced and most productive computer and informational technologies available. The technological infrastructure of the factory itself would locate it squarely within the informational economy. Second, and perhaps more important, the two factories stand in different relations of dominance with respect to the global economy as a whole. The Detroit auto factory of the 1930s stood at the pinnacle of the global economy in the dominant position and producing the highest value; the 1990s auto factory, whether in São Paulo, Kentucky, or Vladivostok, occupies a subordinate position in the global economy—subordinated to the high-value production of services. Today all economic activity tends to come under the dominance of the informational economy and to

be qualitatively transformed by it. The geographical differences in the global economy are not signs of the co-presence of different stages of development but lines of the new global hierarchy of production.

It is becoming increasingly clear from the perspective of subordinated regions that modernization is no longer the key to economic advancement and competition. The most subordinated regions, such as areas of sub-Saharan Africa, are effectively excluded from capital flows and new technologies, and they thus find themselves on the verge of starvation.¹² Competition for the middle-level positions in the global hierarchy is conducted not through the industrialization but through the informatization of production. Large countries with varied economies, such as India and Brazil, can support simultaneously all levels of productive processes: information-based production of services, modern industrial production of goods, and traditional handicraft, agricultural, and mining production. There does not need to be an orderly historical progression among these forms, but rather they mix and coexist. All of the forms of production exist within the networks of the world market and under the domination of the informational production of services.

The transformations of the Italian economy since the 1950s demonstrate clearly that relatively backward economies do not simply follow the same stages the dominant regions experience, but evolve through alternative and mixed patterns. After World War II, Italy was still a predominantly peasant-based society, but in the 1950s and 1960s it went through furious if incomplete modernization and industrialization, a first economic miracle. Then, however, in the 1970s and 1980s, when the processes of industrialization were still not complete, the Italian economy embarked on another transformation, a process of postmodernization, and achieved a second economic miracle. These Italian miracles were not really leaps forward that allowed it to catch up with the dominant economies; rather, they represented mixtures of different incomplete economic forms. What is most significant here, and what might usefully pose the Italian case as the general model for all other backward

economies, is that *the Italian economy did not complete one stage (industrialization) before moving on to another (informatization)*. According to two contemporary economists, the recent Italian transformation reveals “an interesting transition from proto-industrialism to proto-informationalism.”¹³ Various regions will evolve to have peasant elements mixed with partial industrialization and partial informatization. The economic stages are thus all present at once, merged into a hybrid, composite economy that varies not in kind but in degree across the globe.

Just as modernization did in a previous era, postmodernization or informatization today marks a new mode of becoming human. Where the production of soul is concerned, as Musil would say, one really ought to replace the traditional techniques of industrial machines with the cybernetic intelligence of information and communication technologies. We must invent what Pierre Levy calls an anthropology of cyberspace.¹⁴ This shift of metaphors gives us a first glimpse of the transformation, but we need to look more closely to see clearly the changes in our notion of the human and in humanity itself that emerge in the passage toward an informational economy.

The Sociology of Immaterial Labor

The passage toward an informational economy necessarily involves a change in the quality and nature of labor. This is the most immediate sociological and anthropological implication of the passage of economic paradigms. Today information and communication have come to play a foundational role in production processes.

A first aspect of this transformation is recognized by many in terms of the change in factory labor—using the auto industry as a central point of reference—from the Fordist model to the Toyotist model.¹⁵ The primary structural change between these models involves the system of communication between the production and the consumption of commodities, that is, the passage of information between the factory and the market. The Fordist model constructed a relatively “mute” relationship between production and consump-

tion. The mass production of standardized commodities in the Fordist era could count on an adequate demand and thus had little need to “listen” to the market. A feedback circuit from consumption to production did allow changes in the market to spur changes in productive engineering, but this communication circuit was restricted (owing to the fixed and compartmentalized channels of planning and design structures) and slow (owing to the rigidity of the technologies and procedures of mass production).

Toyotism is based on an inversion of the Fordist structure of communication between production and consumption. Ideally, according to this model, production planning will communicate with markets constantly and immediately. Factories will maintain zero stock, and commodities will be produced just in time according to the present demand of the existing markets. This model thus involves not simply a more rapid feedback loop but an inversion of the relationship because, at least in theory, the production decision actually comes after and in reaction to the market decision. In the most extreme cases the commodity is not produced until the consumer has already chosen and purchased it. In general, however, it would be more accurate to conceive the model as striving toward a continual interactivity or rapid communication between production and consumption. This industrial context provides a first sense in which communication and information have come to play a newly central role in production. One might say that instrumental action and communicative action have become intimately interwoven in the informationalized industrial process, but one should quickly add that this is an impoverished notion of communication as the mere transmission of market data.¹⁶

The service sectors of the economy present a richer model of productive communication. Most services indeed are based on the continual exchange of information and knowledges. Since the production of services results in no material and durable good, we define the labor involved in this production as *immaterial labor*—that is, labor that produces an immaterial good, such as a service, a cultural product, knowledge, or communication.¹⁷ One face of

immaterial labor can be recognized in analogy to the functioning of a computer. The increasingly extensive use of computers has tended progressively to redefine laboring practices and relations, along with, indeed, all social practices and relations. Familiarity and facility with computer technology is becoming an increasingly general primary qualification for work in the dominant countries. Even when direct contact with computers is not involved, the manipulation of symbols and information along the model of computer operation is extremely widespread. In an earlier era workers learned how to act like machines both inside and outside the factory. We even learned (with the help of Muybridge's photos, for example) to recognize human activity in general as mechanical. Today we increasingly think like computers, while communication technologies and their model of interaction are becoming more and more central to laboring activities. One novel aspect of the computer is that it can continually modify its own operation through its use. Even the most rudimentary forms of artificial intelligence allow the computer to expand and perfect its operation based on its interaction with its user and its environment. The same kind of continual interactivity characterizes a wide range of contemporary productive activities, whether computer hardware is directly involved or not. The computer and communication revolution of production has transformed laboring practices in such a way that they all tend toward the model of information and communication technologies.¹⁸ Interactive and cybernetic machines become a new prosthesis integrated into our bodies and minds and a lens through which to redefine our bodies and minds themselves. The anthropology of cyberspace is really a recognition of the new human condition.

Robert Reich calls the kind of immaterial labor involved in computer and communication work "symbolic-analytical services"—tasks that involve "problem-solving, problem-identifying, and strategic brokering activities."¹⁹ This type of labor claims the highest value, and thus Reich identifies it as the key to competition in the new global economy. He recognizes, however, that the growth of these knowledge-based jobs of creative symbolic manipu-

lation implies a corresponding growth of low-value and low-skill jobs of routine symbol manipulation, such as data entry and word processing. Here begins to emerge a fundamental division of labor within the realm of immaterial production.

We should note that one consequence of the informatization of production and the emergence of immaterial labor has been a real homogenization of laboring processes. From Marx's perspective in the nineteenth century, the concrete practices of various laboring activities were radically heterogeneous: tailoring and weaving involved incommensurable concrete actions. Only when abstracted from their concrete practices could different laboring activities be brought together and seen in a homogeneous way, no longer as tailoring and weaving but as the expenditure of human labor power in general, as *abstract labor*.²⁰ With the computerization of production today, however, the heterogeneity of concrete labor has tended to be reduced, and the worker is increasingly further removed from the object of his or her labor. The labor of computerized tailoring and the labor of computerized weaving may involve exactly the same concrete practices—that is, manipulation of symbols and information. Tools, of course, have always abstracted labor power from the object of labor to a certain degree. In previous periods, however, the tools generally were related in a relatively inflexible way to certain tasks or certain groups of tasks; different tools corresponded to different activities—the tailor's tools, the weaver's tools, or later a sewing machine and a power loom. The computer proposes itself, in contrast, as the universal tool, or rather as the central tool, through which all activities might pass. Through the computerization of production, then, labor tends toward the position of abstract labor.

The model of the computer, however, can account for only one face of the communicational and immaterial labor involved in the production of services. The other face of immaterial labor is the *affective labor* of human contact and interaction. Health services, for example, rely centrally on caring and affective labor, and the entertainment industry is likewise focused on the creation and manipulation of affect. This labor is immaterial, even if it is corporeal

and affective, in the sense that its products are intangible, a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, or passion. Categories such as “in-person services” or services of proximity are often used to identify this kind of labor, but what is really essential to it are the creation and manipulation of affect. Such affective production, exchange, and communication are generally associated with human contact, but that contact can be either actual or virtual, as it is in the entertainment industry.

This second face of immaterial labor, its affective face, extends well beyond the model of intelligence and communication defined by the computer. Affective labor is better understood by beginning from what feminist analyses of “women’s work” have called “labor in the bodily mode.”²¹ Caring labor is certainly entirely immersed in the corporeal, the somatic, but the affects it produces are nonetheless immaterial. What affective labor produces are social networks, forms of community, biopower. Here one might recognize once again that the instrumental action of economic production has been united with the communicative action of human relations; in this case, however, communication has not been impoverished, but production has been enriched to the level of complexity of human interaction.

In short, we can distinguish three types of immaterial labor that drive the service sector at the top of the informational economy. The first is involved in an industrial production that has been informationalized and has incorporated communication technologies in a way that transforms the production process itself. Manufacturing is regarded as a service, and the material labor of the production of durable goods mixes with and tends toward immaterial labor. Second is the immaterial labor of analytical and symbolic tasks, which itself breaks down into creative and intelligent manipulation on the one hand and routine symbolic tasks on the other. Finally, a third type of immaterial labor involves the production and manipulation of affect and requires (virtual or actual) human contact, labor in the bodily mode. These are the three types of labor that drive the postmodernization of the global economy.

We should point out before moving on that in each of these forms of immaterial labor, cooperation is completely inherent in the labor itself. Immaterial labor immediately involves social interaction and cooperation. In other words, the cooperative aspect of immaterial labor is not imposed or organized from the outside, as it was in previous forms of labor, but rather, *cooperation is completely immanent to the laboring activity itself.*²² This fact calls into question the old notion (common to classical and Marxian political economics) by which labor power is conceived as “variable capital,” that is, a force that is activated and made coherent only by capital, because the cooperative powers of labor power (particularly immaterial labor power) afford labor the possibility of valorizing itself. Brains and bodies still need others to produce value, but the others they need are not necessarily provided by capital and its capacities to orchestrate production. Today productivity, wealth, and the creation of social surpluses take the form of cooperative interactivity through linguistic, communicational, and affective networks. In the expression of its own creative energies, immaterial labor thus seems to provide the potential for a kind of spontaneous and elementary communism.

Network Production

The first geographical consequence of the passage from an industrial to an informational economy is a dramatic decentralization of production. The processes of modernization and the passage to the industrial paradigm provoked the intense aggregation of productive forces and mass migrations of labor power toward centers that became factory cities, such as Manchester, Osaka, and Detroit. Efficiency of mass industrial production depended on the concentration and proximity of elements in order to create the factory site and facilitate transportation and communication. The informatization of industry and the rising dominance of service production, however, have made such concentration of production no longer necessary. Size and efficiency are no longer linearly related; in fact, large scale has in many cases become a hindrance. Advances in telecommunications and information technologies have made possible a deterritorialization of production that has effectively dispersed the mass facto-

ries and evacuated the factory cities. Communication and control can be exercised efficiently at a distance, and in some cases immaterial products can be transported across the world with minimal delay and expense. Several different production facilities can be coordinated in the simultaneous production of a single commodity in such a way that factories can be dispersed to various locations. In some sectors even the factory site itself can be done away with as its workers communicate exclusively through new information technologies.²³

In the passage to the informational economy, the assembly line has been replaced by *the network* as the organizational model of production, transforming the forms of cooperation and communication within each productive site and among productive sites. The mass industrial factory defined the circuits of laboring cooperation primarily through the physical deployments of workers on the shop floor. Individual workers communicated with their neighboring workers, and communication was generally limited to physical proximity. Cooperation among productive sites also required physical proximity both to coordinate the productive cycles and to minimize the transportation costs and time of the commodities being produced. For example, the distance between the coal mine and the steel mill, and the efficiency of the lines of transportation and communication between them, are significant factors in the overall efficiency of steel production. Similarly, for automobile production the efficiency of communication and transportation among the series of subcontractors involved is crucial in the overall efficiency of the system. The passage toward informational production and the network structure of organization, in contrast, make productive cooperation and efficiency no longer dependent to such a degree on proximity and centralization. Information technologies tend to make distances less relevant. Workers involved in a single process can effectively communicate and cooperate from remote locations without consideration to proximity. In effect, the network of laboring cooperation requires no territorial or physical center.

The tendency toward the deterritorialization of production is even more pronounced in the processes of immaterial labor that involve the manipulation of knowledge and information. Laboring

processes can be conducted in a form almost entirely compatible with communication networks, for which location and distance have very limited importance. Workers can even stay at home and log on to the network. The labor of informational production (of both services and durable goods) relies on what we can call *abstract cooperation*. Such labor dedicates an ever more central role to communication of knowledges and information among workers, but those cooperating workers need not be present and can even be relatively unknown to one another, or known only through the productive information exchanged. The circuit of cooperation is consolidated in the network and the commodity at an abstract level. Production sites can thus be deterritorialized and tend toward a virtual existence, as coordinates in the communication network. As opposed to the old vertical industrial and corporate model, production now tends to be organized in horizontal network enterprises.²⁴

The information networks also release production from territorial constraints insofar as they tend to put the producer in direct contact with the consumer regardless of the distance between them. Bill Gates, the co-founder of the Microsoft Corporation, takes this tendency to an extreme when he predicts a future in which networks will overcome entirely the barriers to circulation and allow an ideal, “friction-free” capitalism to emerge: “The information highway will extend the electronic marketplace and make it the ultimate go-between, the universal middleman.”²⁵ If Gates’s vision were to be realized, the networks would tend to reduce all distance and make transactions immediate. Sites of production and sites of consumption would then be present to one another, regardless of geographical location.

These tendencies toward the deterritorialization of production and the increased mobility of capital are not absolute, and there are significant countervailing tendencies, but to the extent that they do proceed, they place labor in a weakened bargaining position. In the era of the Fordist organization of industrial mass production, capital was bound to a specific territory and thus to dealing contrac-

tually with a limited laboring population. The informatization of production and the increasing importance of immaterial production have tended to free capital from the constraints of territory and bargaining. Capital can withdraw from negotiation with a given local population by moving its site to another point in the global network—or merely by using the potential to move as a weapon in negotiations. Entire laboring populations, which had enjoyed a certain stability and contractual power, have thus found themselves in increasingly precarious employment situations. Once the bargaining position of labor has been weakened, network production can accommodate various old forms of non-guaranteed labor, such as freelance work, home work, part-time labor, and piecework.²⁶

The decentralization and global dispersal of productive processes and sites, which is characteristic of the postmodernization or informatization of the economy, provokes a corresponding centralization of the control over production. The centrifugal movement of production is balanced by the centripetal trend of command. From the local perspective, the computer networks and communications technologies internal to production systems allow for more extensive monitoring of workers from a central, remote location. Control of laboring activity can potentially be individualized and continuous in the virtual panopticon of network production. The centralization of control, however, is even more clear from a global perspective. The geographical dispersal of manufacturing has created a demand for increasingly centralized management and planning, and also for a new centralization of specialized producer services, especially financial services.²⁷ Financial and trade-related services in a few key cities (such as New York, London, and Tokyo) manage and direct the global networks of production. As a mass demographic shift, then, the decline and evacuation of industrial cities has corresponded to the rise of global cities, or really cities of control.

Information Highways

The structure and management of communication networks are essential conditions for production in the informational economy.

These global networks must be constructed and policed in such a way as to guarantee order and profits. It should come as no surprise, then, that the U.S. government poses the establishment and regulation of a global information infrastructure as one of its highest priorities, and that communications networks have become the most active terrain of mergers and competition for the most powerful transnational corporations.

An adviser to the Federal Communications Commission, Peter Cowhey, provides an interesting analogy for the role these networks play in the new paradigm of production and power. The construction of the new information infrastructure, he says, provides the conditions and terms of global production and government just as road construction did for the Roman Empire.²⁸ The wide distribution of Roman engineering and technology was indeed both the most lasting gift to the imperial territories and the fundamental condition for exercising control over them. Roman roads, however, did not play a central role in the imperial production processes but only facilitated the circulation of goods and technologies. Perhaps a better analogy for the global information infrastructure might be the construction of railways to further the interests of nineteenth- and twentieth-century imperialist economies. Railways in the dominant countries consolidated their national industrial economies, and the construction of railroads in colonized and economically dominated regions opened those territories to penetration by capitalist enterprises, allowing for their incorporation into imperialist economic systems. Like Roman roads, however, railways played only an external role in imperialist and industrial production, extending its lines of communication and transportation to new raw materials, markets, and labor power. *The novelty of the new information infrastructure is the fact that it is embedded within and completely immanent to the new production processes.* At the pinnacle of contemporary production, information and communication are the very commodities produced; the network itself is the site of both production and circulation.

In political terms, the global information infrastructure might be characterized as the combination of a *democratic* mechanism and

an *oligopolistic* mechanism, which operate along different models of network systems. The democratic network is a completely horizontal and deterritorialized model. The Internet, which began as a project of DARPA (the U.S. Defense Department Advanced Research Projects Agency), but has now expanded to points throughout the world, is the prime example of this democratic network structure. An indeterminate and potentially unlimited number of interconnected nodes communicate with no central point of control; all nodes regardless of territorial location connect to all others through a myriad of potential paths and relays. The Internet thus resembles the structure of telephone networks, and indeed it generally incorporates them as its own paths of communication, just as it relies on computer technology for its points of communication. The development of cellular telephony and portable computers, unmooring in an even more radical way the communicating points in the network, has intensified the process of deterritorialization. The original design of the Internet was intended to withstand military attack. Since it has no center and almost any portion can operate as an autonomous whole, the network can continue to function even when part of it has been destroyed. The same design element that ensures survival, the decentralization, is also what makes control of the network so difficult. Since no one point in the network is necessary for communication among others, it is difficult for it to regulate or prohibit their communication. This democratic model is what Deleuze and Guattari call a rhizome, a nonhierarchical and noncentered network structure.²⁹

The oligopolistic network model is characterized by broadcast systems. According to this model, for example in television or radio systems, there is a unique and relatively fixed point of emission, but the points of reception are potentially infinite and territorially indefinite, although developments such as cable television networks fix these paths to a certain extent. The broadcast network is defined by its centralized production, mass distribution, and one-way communication. The entire culture industry—from the distribution of newspapers and books to films and video cassettes—has traditionally operated along this model. A relatively small number of corporations

(or in some regions a single entrepreneur, such as Rupert Murdoch, Silvio Berlusconi, or Ted Turner) can effectively dominate all of these networks. This oligopolistic model is not a rhizome but a tree structure that subordinates all of the branches to the central root.

The networks of the new information infrastructure are a hybrid of these two models. Just as in a previous era Lenin and other critics of imperialism recognized a consolidation of international corporations into quasi-monopolies (over railways, banking, electric power, and the like), today we are witnessing a competition among transnational corporations to establish and consolidate quasi-monopolies over the new information infrastructure. The various telecommunication corporations, computer hardware and software manufacturers, and information and entertainment corporations are merging and expanding their operations, scrambling to partition and control the new continents of productive networks. There will, of course, remain democratic portions or aspects of this consolidated web that will resist control owing to the web's interactive and decentralized structure; but there is already under way a massive centralization of control through the (de facto or de jure) unification of the major elements of the information and communication power structure: Hollywood, Microsoft, IBM, AT&T, and so forth. The new communication technologies, which hold out the promise of a new democracy and a new social equality, have in fact created new lines of inequality and exclusion, both within the dominant countries and especially outside them.³⁰

COMMONS

There has been a continuous movement throughout the modern period to privatize public property. In Europe the great common lands created with the break-up of the Roman Empire and the rise of Christianity were eventually transferred to private hands in the course of capitalist primitive accumulation. Throughout the world what remains of the vast public spaces are now only the stuff of legends: Robin Hood's forest, the Great Plains of the Amerindians, the steppes of the nomadic tribes, and so forth. During the consolidation of industrial society, the construction and destruction of

public spaces developed in an ever more powerful spiral. It is true that when it was dictated by the necessities of accumulation (in order to foster an acceleration or leap in development, to concentrate and mobilize the means of production, to make war, and so forth), public property was expanded by expropriating large sectors of civil society and transferring wealth and property to the collectivity. That public property, however, was soon reappropriated in private hands. In each process the communal possession, which is considered natural, is transformed at public expense into a second and third nature that functions finally for private profit. A second nature was created, for example, by damming the great rivers of western North America and irrigating the dry valleys, and then this new wealth was handed over to the magnates of agribusiness. Capitalism sets in motion a continuous cycle of private reappropriation of public goods: the expropriation of what is common.

The rise and fall of the welfare state in the twentieth century is one more cycle in this spiral of public and private appropriations. The crisis of the welfare state has meant primarily that the structures of public assistance and distribution, which were constructed through public funds, are being privatized and expropriated for private gain. The current neoliberal trend toward the privatization of energy and communication services is another turn of the spiral. This consists in granting to private businesses the networks of energy and communication that were built through enormous expenditures of public monies. Market regimes and neoliberalism survive off these private appropriations of second, third, and nth nature. The commons, which once were considered the basis of the concept of the public, are expropriated for private use and no one can lift a finger. The public is thus dissolved, privatized, even as a concept. Or really, the immanent relation between the public and the common is replaced by the transcendent power of private property.

We do not intend here to weep over the destruction and expropriation that capitalism continually operates across the world, even though resisting its force (and in particular resisting the expropriation of the welfare state) is certainly an eminently ethical and important task. We want to ask, rather, what is the operative notion of the common today, in the midst of postmodernity, the information revolution, and the consequent transforma-

tions of the mode of production. It seems to us, in fact, that today we participate in a more radical and profound commonality than has ever been experienced in the history of capitalism. The fact is that we participate in a productive world made up of communication and social networks, interactive services, and common languages. Our economic and social reality is defined less by the material objects that are made and consumed than by co-produced services and relationships. Producing increasingly means constructing cooperation and communicative commonalities.

The concept of private property itself, understood as the exclusive right to use a good and dispose of all wealth that derives from the possession of it, becomes increasingly nonsensical in this new situation. There are ever fewer goods that can be possessed and used exclusively in this framework; it is the community that produces and that, while producing, is reproduced and redefined. The foundation of the classic modern conception of private property is thus to a certain extent dissolved in the postmodern mode of production.

One should object, however, that this new social condition of production has not at all weakened the juridical and political regimes of private property. The conceptual crisis of private property does not become a crisis in practice, and instead the regime of private expropriation has tended to be applied universally. This objection would be valid if not for the fact that, in the context of linguistic and cooperative production, labor and the common property tend to overlap. Private property, despite its juridical powers, cannot help becoming an ever more abstract and transcendental concept and thus ever more detached from reality.

A new notion of “commons” will have to emerge on this terrain. Deleuze and Guattari claim in *What Is Philosophy?* that in the contemporary era, and in the context of communicative and interactive production, the construction of concepts is not only an epistemological operation but equally an ontological project. Constructing concepts and what they call “common names” is really an activity that combines the intelligence and the action of the multitude, making them work together. Constructing concepts means making exist in reality a project that is a community. There is no other way to construct concepts but to work in a common way. This commonality is, from the standpoint of the phenomenology of production,

from the standpoint of the epistemology of the concept, and from the standpoint of practice, a project in which the multitude is completely invested. The commons is the incarnation, the production, and the liberation of the multitude. Rousseau said that the first person who wanted a piece of nature as his or her own exclusive possession and transformed it into the transcendent form of private property was the one who invented evil. Good, on the contrary, is what is common.

4.3

THE MULTITUDE AGAINST EMPIRE

The great masses need a *material religion of the senses* [*eine sinnliche Religion*]. Not only the great masses but also the philosopher needs it. Monotheism of reason and the heart, polytheism of the imagination and art, this is what we need . . . [W]e must have a new mythology, but this mythology must be at the service of ideas. It must be a mythology of *reason*.

Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus,
by Hegel, Hölderlin, or Schelling

We do not lack communication, on the contrary we have too much of it. We lack creation. *We lack resistance to the present.*

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari

Imperial power can no longer resolve the conflict of social forces through mediatory schemata that displace the terms of conflict. The social conflicts that constitute the political confront one another directly, without mediations of any sort. This is the essential novelty of the imperial situation. Empire creates a greater potential for revolution than did the modern regimes of power because it presents us, alongside the machine of command, with an alternative: the set of all the exploited and the subjugated, a multitude that is directly opposed to Empire, with no mediation between them. At this point, then, as Augustine says, our task is to discuss, to the best of our powers, “the rise, the development and the destined ends of the two cities . . . which we find . . . interwoven . . . and mingled with one another.”¹ Now that we have dealt extensively with Empire, we should focus directly on the multitude and its potential political power.

The Two Cities

We need to investigate specifically how the multitude can become a *political subject* in the context of Empire. We can certainly recognize the existence of the multitude from the standpoint of the constitution of Empire, but from that perspective the multitude might appear to be generated and sustained by imperial command. In the new postmodern Empire there is no Emperor Caracalla who grants citizenship to all his subjects and thereby forms the multitude as a political subject. The formation of the multitude of exploited and subjugated producers can be read more clearly in the history of twentieth-century revolutions. Between the communist revolutions of 1917 and 1949, the great anti-fascist struggles of the 1930s and 1940s, and the numerous liberation struggles of the 1960s up to those of 1989, the conditions of the citizenship of the multitude were born, spread, and consolidated. Far from being defeated, the revolutions of the twentieth century have each pushed forward and transformed the terms of class conflict, posing the conditions of a new political subjectivity, an insurgent multitude against imperial power. The rhythm that the revolutionary movements have established is the beat of a new *aetas*, a new maturity and metamorphosis of the times.

The constitution of Empire is not the cause but the consequence of the rise of these new powers. It should be no surprise, then, that Empire, despite its efforts, finds it impossible to construct a system of right adequate to the new reality of the globalization of social and economic relations. This impossibility (which served as the point of departure for our argument in Section 1.1) is not due to the wide extension of the field of regulation; nor is it simply the result of the difficult passage from the old system of international public law to the new imperial system. This impossibility is explained instead by the revolutionary nature of the multitude, whose struggles have produced Empire as an inversion of its own image and who now represents on this new scene an uncontrollable force and an excess of value with respect to every form of right and law.

To confirm this hypothesis, it is sufficient to look at the contemporary development of the multitude and dwell on the

vitality of its present expressions. When the multitude works, it produces autonomously and reproduces the entire world of life. Producing and reproducing autonomously mean constructing a new ontological reality. In effect, by working, the multitude produces itself as singularity. It is a singularity that establishes a new place in the non-place of Empire, a singularity that is a reality produced by cooperation, represented by the linguistic community, and developed by the movements of hybridization. The multitude affirms its singularity by inverting the ideological illusion that all humans on the global surfaces of the world market are interchangeable. Standing the ideology of the market on its feet, the multitude promotes through its labor the biopolitical singularizations of groups and sets of humanity, across each and every node of global interchange.

Class struggles and revolutionary processes of the past undermined the political powers of nations and peoples. The revolutionary preamble that has been written from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries has prepared the new subjective configuration of labor that comes to be realized today. Cooperation and communication throughout the spheres of biopolitical production define a new productive singularity. The multitude is not formed simply by throwing together and mixing nations and peoples indifferently; it is the singular power of a *new city*.

One might object at this point, with good reason, that all this is still not enough to establish the multitude as a properly political subject, nor even less as a subject with the potential to control its own destiny. This objection, however, does not present an insuperable obstacle, because the revolutionary past, and the contemporary cooperative productive capacities through which the anthropological characteristics of the multitude are continually transcribed and reformulated, cannot help revealing a telos, a material affirmation of liberation. In the ancient world Plotinus faced something like this situation:

“Let us flee then to the beloved Fatherland”: this is the soundest counsel . . . The Fatherland to us is There whence we have

come, and There is the Father. What then is our course, what the manner of our flight? This is not a journey for the feet; the feet bring us only from land to land; nor need you think of a coach or ship to carry you away; all this order of things you must set aside and refuse to see: you must close the eyes and call instead upon another vision which is to be waked within you, a vision, the birth-right of all, which few turn to use.²

This is how ancient mysticism expressed the new telos. The multitude today, however, resides on the imperial surfaces where there is no God the Father and no transcendence. Instead there is our immanent labor. The teleology of the multitude is theurgical; it consists in the possibility of directing technologies and production toward its own joy and its own increase of power. The multitude has no reason to look outside its own history and its own present productive power for the means necessary to lead toward its constitution as a political subject.

A material mythology of reason thus begins to be formed, and it is constructed in the languages, technologies, and all the means that constitute the world of life. It is a material religion of the senses that separates the multitude from every residue of sovereign power and from every “long arm” of Empire. The mythology of reason is the symbolic and imaginative articulation that allows the ontology of the multitude to express itself as activity and consciousness. The mythology of languages of the multitude interprets the telos of an *earthly city*, torn away by the power of its own destiny from any belonging or subjection to a *city of God*, which has lost all honor and legitimacy. To the metaphysical and transcendent mediations, to the violence and corruption are thus opposed the absolute constitution of labor and cooperation, the earthly city of the multitude.

Endless Paths (The Right to Global Citizenship)

The constitution of the multitude appears first as a spatial movement that constitutes the multitude in limitless place. The mobility of

commodities, and thus of that special commodity that is labor-power, has been presented by capitalism ever since its birth as the fundamental condition of accumulation. The kinds of movement of individuals, groups, and populations that we find today in Empire, however, cannot be completely subjugated to the laws of capitalist accumulation—at every moment they overflow and shatter the bounds of measure. 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. When we look closer at how this constitutive process of subjectivity operates, 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. 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. Is it possible to imagine U.S. agriculture and service industries without Mexican migrant labor, or Arab oil without Palestinians and Pakistanis? Moreover, where would the great innovative sectors of immaterial production, from design to fashion, and from electronics to science in Europe, the United States, and Asia, be without the “illegal labor” of the great masses, mobilized toward the radiant

horizons of capitalist wealth and freedom? Mass migrations have become necessary for production. Every path is forged, mapped, and traveled. It seems that the more intensely each is traveled and the more suffering is deposited there, the more each path becomes productive. These paths are what brings the “earthly city” out of the cloud and confusion that Empire casts over it. This is how the multitude gains the power to affirm its autonomy, traveling and expressing itself through an apparatus of widespread, transversal territorial reappropriation.

Recognizing the potential autonomy of the mobile multitude, however, only points toward the real question. What we need to grasp is how the multitude is organized and redefined as a positive, political power. Up to this point we have been able to describe the potential existence of this political power in merely formal terms. It would be a mistake to stop here, without going on to investigate the mature forms of the consciousness and political organization of the multitude, without recognizing how much is already powerful in these territorial movements of the labor power of Empire. How can we recognize (and reveal) a constituent political tendency within and beyond the spontaneity of the multitude’s movements?

This question can be approached initially from the other side by considering the policies of Empire that repress these movements. Empire does not really know how to control these paths and can only try to criminalize those who travel them, even when the movements are required for capitalist production itself. The migration lines of biblical proportions that go from South to North America are obstinately called by the new drug czars “the cocaine trail”; or rather, the articulations of exodus from North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa are treated by European leaders as “paths of terrorism”; or rather still, the populations forced to flee across the Indian Ocean are reduced to slavery in “Arabia *félix*”; and the list goes on. And yet the flows of population continue. Empire must restrict and isolate the spatial movements of the multitude to stop them from gaining political legitimacy. It is extremely important

from this point of view that Empire use its powers to manage and orchestrate the various forces of nationalism and fundamentalism (see Sections 2.2 and 2.4). It is no less important, too, that Empire deploy its military and police powers to bring the unruly and rebellious to order.³ These imperial practices in themselves, however, still do not touch on the political tension that runs throughout the spontaneous movements of the multitude. *All these repressive actions remain essentially external to the multitude and its movements.* Empire can only isolate, divide, and segregate. Imperial capital does indeed attack the movements of the multitude with a tireless determination: it patrols the seas and the borders; within each country it divides and segregates; and in the world of labor it reinforces the cleavages and borderlines of race, gender, language, culture, and so forth. Even then, however, it must be careful not to restrict the productivity of the multitude too much because Empire too depends on this power. The movements of the multitude have to be allowed to extend always wider across the world scene, and the attempts at repressing the multitude are really paradoxical, inverted manifestations of its strength.

This leads us back to our fundamental questions: How can the actions of the multitude become political? How can the multitude organize and concentrate its energies against the repression and incessant territorial segmentations of Empire? The only response that we can give to these questions is that the action of the multitude becomes political primarily when it begins to confront directly and with an adequate consciousness the central repressive operations of Empire. It is a matter of recognizing and engaging the imperial initiatives and not allowing them continually to reestablish order; it is a matter of crossing and breaking down the limits and segmentations that are imposed on the new collective labor power; it is a matter of gathering together these experiences of resistance and wielding them in concert against the nerve centers of imperial command.

This task for the multitude, however, although it is clear at a conceptual level, remains rather abstract. What specific and concrete

practices will animate this political project? We cannot say at this point. What we can see nonetheless is a first element of a political program for the global multitude, a first political demand: *global citizenship*. During the 1996 demonstrations for the *sans papiers*, the undocumented aliens residing in France, the banners demanded "Papiers pour tous!" Residency papers for everyone means in the first place that all should have the full rights of citizenship in the country where they live and work. This is not a utopian or unrealistic political demand. The demand is simply that the juridical status of the population be reformed in step with the real economic transformations of recent years. Capital itself has demanded the increased mobility of labor power and continuous migrations across national boundaries. Capitalist production in the more dominant regions (in Europe, the United States, and Japan, but also in Singapore, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere) is utterly dependent on the influx of workers from the subordinate regions of the world. Hence the political demand is that the existent fact of capitalist production be recognized juridically and that all workers be given the full rights of citizenship. In effect this political demand insists in postmodernity on the fundamental modern constitutional principle that links right and labor, and thus rewards with citizenship the worker who creates capital.

This demand can also be configured in a more general and more radical way with respect to the postmodern conditions of Empire. If in a first moment the multitude demands that each state recognize juridically the migrations that are necessary to capital, in a second moment it must demand control over the movements themselves. The multitude must be able to decide if, when, and where it moves. It must have the right also to stay still and enjoy one place rather than being forced constantly to be on the move. *The general right to control its own movement is the multitude's ultimate demand for global citizenship*. This demand is radical insofar as it challenges the fundamental apparatus of imperial control over the production and life of the multitude. Global citizenship is the multitude's power to reappropriate control over space and thus to design the new cartography.

Time and Body (The Right to a Social Wage)

Many elements arise on the endless paths of the mobile multitude in addition to the spatial dimensions we have considered thus far. In particular, the multitude takes hold of time and constructs new temporalities, which we can recognize by focusing on the transformations of labor. Understanding this construction of new temporalities will help us see how the multitude has the potential to make its action coherent as a real political tendency.

The new temporalities of biopolitical production cannot be understood in the frameworks of the traditional conceptions of time. In the *Physics*, Aristotle defines time by the measure of the movement between a before and an after. Aristotle's definition has the enormous merit of separating the definition of time from individual experience and spiritualism. Time is a collective experience that embodies and lives in the movements of the multitude. Aristotle, however, proceeds to reduce this collective time determined by the experience of the multitude to a transcendent standard of measure. Throughout Western metaphysics, from Aristotle to Kant and Heidegger, time has continuously been located in this transcendent dwelling place. In modernity, reality was not conceivable except as measure, and measure in turn was not conceivable except as a (real or formal) a priori that corralled being within a transcendent order. Only in postmodernity has there been a real break with this tradition—a break not with the first element of Aristotle's definition of time as a collective constitution but with the second transcendent configuration. In postmodernity, instead, time is no longer determined by any transcendent measure, any a priori: time pertains directly to existence. Here is where the Aristotelian tradition of measure is broken. In fact, from our perspective the transcendentalism of temporality is destroyed most decisively by the fact that it is now impossible to measure labor, either by convention or by calculation. Time comes back entirely under collective existence and thus resides within the cooperation of the multitude.

Through the cooperation, the collective existence, and the communicative networks that are formed and reformed within the

multitude, time is reappropriated on the plane of immanence. It is not given a priori, but rather bears the stamp of collective action. The new phenomenology of the labor of the multitude reveals labor as the fundamental creative activity that through cooperation goes beyond any obstacle imposed on it and constantly re-creates the world. The activity of the multitude constitutes time beyond measure. Time might thus be defined as the immeasurability of the movement between a before and an after, an immanent process of constitution.⁴ The processes of ontological constitution unfold through the collective movements of cooperation, across the new fabrics woven by the production of subjectivity. This site of ontological constitution is where the new proletariat appears as a constituent power.

This is a *new proletariat* and not a *new industrial working class*. The distinction is fundamental. As we explained earlier, “proletariat” is the general concept that defines all those whose labor is exploited by capital, the entire cooperating multitude (Section 1.3). The industrial working class represented only a *partial* moment in the history of the proletariat and its revolutions, in the period when capital was able to reduce value to measure. In that period it seemed as if only the labor of waged workers was productive, and therefore all the other segments of labor appeared as merely reproductive or even unproductive. In the biopolitical context of Empire, however, the production of capital converges ever more with the production and reproduction of social life itself; it thus becomes ever more difficult to maintain distinctions among productive, reproductive, and unproductive labor. Labor—material or immaterial, intellectual or corporeal—produces and reproduces social life, and in the process is exploited by capital. This wide landscape of biopolitical production allows us finally to recognize the full generality of the concept of proletariat. The progressive indistinction between production and reproduction in the biopolitical context also highlights once again the immeasurability of time and value. As labor moves outside the factory walls, it is increasingly difficult to maintain the fiction of any measure of the working day and thus separate the time of

production from the time of reproduction, or work time from leisure time. There are no time clocks to punch on the terrain of biopolitical production; the proletariat produces in all its generality everywhere all day long.

This generality of biopolitical production makes clear a second programmatic political demand of the multitude: *a social wage and a guaranteed income for all*. The social wage stands opposed first of all to the family wage, that fundamental weapon of the sexual division of labor by which the wage paid for the productive labor of the male worker is conceived also to pay for the unwaged reproductive labor of the worker's wife and dependents at home. The family wage keeps family control firmly in the hands of the male wage earner and perpetuates a false conception of what labor is productive and what is not. As the distinction between production and reproductive labor fades, so too fades the legitimation of the family wage. The social wage extends well beyond the family to the entire multitude, even those who are unemployed, because the entire multitude produces, and its production is necessary from the standpoint of total social capital. In the passage to postmodernity and biopolitical production, labor power has become increasingly collective and social. It is not even possible to support the old slogan "equal pay for equal work" when labor cannot be individualized and measured. The demand for a social wage extends to the entire population the demand that all activity necessary for the production of capital be recognized with an equal compensation such that a social wage is really a guaranteed income. Once citizenship is extended to all, we could call this guaranteed income a citizenship income, due each as a member of society.

Telos (The Right to Reappropriation)

Since in the imperial realm of biopower production and life tend to coincide, class struggle has the potential to erupt across all the fields of life. The problem we have to confront now is how concrete instances of class struggle can actually arise, and moreover how they can form a coherent program of struggle, a constituent power

adequate to the destruction of the enemy and the construction of a new society. The question is really how the body of the multitude can configure itself as a telos.

The first aspect of the telos of the multitude has to do with the senses of language and communication. If communication has increasingly become the fabric of production, and if linguistic cooperation has increasingly become the structure of productive corporeality, then the control over linguistic sense and meaning and the networks of communication becomes an ever more central issue for political struggle. Jürgen Habermas seems to have understood this fact, but he grants the liberated functions of language and communication only to individual and isolated segments of society.⁵ The passage to postmodernity and Empire prohibits any such compartmentalization of the life world and immediately presents communication, production, and life as one complex whole, an open site of conflict. The theorists and practitioners of science have long engaged these sites of controversy, but today all of labor power (be it material or immaterial, intellectual or manual) is engaged in struggles over the senses of language and against capital's colonization of communicative sociality. All the elements of corruption and exploitation are imposed on us by the linguistic and communicative regimes of production: destroying them in words is as urgent as doing so in deeds. This is not really a matter of ideology critique if by ideology we still understand a realm of ideas and language that is superstructural, external to production. Or rather, in the imperial regime ideology, critique becomes directly the critique of both political economy and lived experience. How can sense and meaning be oriented differently or organized in alternative, coherent communicative apparatuses? How can we discover and direct the performative lines of linguistic sets and communicative networks that create the fabric of life and production? Knowledge has to become linguistic action and philosophy has to become a real *reappropriation of knowledge*.⁶ In other words, knowledge and communication have to constitute life through struggle. A first aspect of the telos is posed when the apparatuses that link communication to modes of life are developed through the struggle of the multitude.

To every language and communicative network corresponds a system of machines, and the question of machines and their use allows us to recognize a second aspect of the telos of the multitude, which integrates the first and carries it further. We know well that machines and technologies are not neutral and independent entities. They are biopolitical tools deployed in specific regimes of production, which facilitate certain practices and prohibit others. The processes of construction of the new proletariat that we have been following go beyond a fundamental threshold here when the multitude recognizes itself as machinic, when it conceives of the possibility of a new use of machines and technology in which the proletariat is not subsumed as “variable capital,” as an internal part of the production of capital, but is rather an autonomous agent of production. In the passage from the struggle over the sense of language to the construction of a new system of machines, the telos gains a greater consistency. This second aspect of the telos serves to make what has been constructed in language become a lasting, corporeal progression of desire in freedom. The hybridization of human and machine is no longer a process that takes place only on the margins of society; rather, it is a fundamental episode at the center of the constitution of the multitude and its power.

Since great collective means must be mobilized for this mutation, the telos must be configured as a collective telos. It has to become real as a site of encounter among subjects and a mechanism of the constitution of the multitude.⁷ This is the third aspect of the series of passages through which the material teleology of the new proletariat is formed. Here consciousness and will, language and machine are called on to sustain the collective making of history. The demonstration of this becoming cannot consist in anything but the experience and experimentation of the multitude. Therefore the power of the dialectic, which imagines the collective formed through mediation rather than through constitution, has been definitively dissolved. The making of history is in this sense the construction of the life of the multitude.

The fourth aspect deals with biopolitics. The subjectivity of living labor reveals, simply and directly in the struggle over the

senses of language and technology, that when one speaks of a collective means of the constitution of a new world, one is speaking of the connection between the power of life and its political organization. The political, the social, the economic, and the vital here all dwell together. They are entirely interrelated and completely interchangeable. The practices of the multitude invest this complex and unitary horizon—a horizon that is at once ontological and historical. Here is where the biopolitical fabric opens to the constitutive, constituent power.

The fifth and final aspect thus deals directly with the constituent power of the multitude—or really with the product of the creative imagination of the multitude that configures its own constitution. This constituent power makes possible the continuous opening to a process of radical and progressive transformation. It makes conceivable equality and solidarity, those fragile demands that were fundamental but remained abstract throughout the history of modern constitutions. It should come as no surprise that the postmodern multitude takes away from the U.S. Constitution what allowed it to become, above and against all other constitutions, an imperial constitution: its notion of a boundless frontier of freedom and its definition of an open spatiality and temporality celebrated in a constituent power. This new range of possibilities in no way guarantees what is to come. And yet, despite such reservations, there is something real that foreshadows a coming future: the telos that we can feel pulsing, the multitude that we construct within desire.

Now we can formulate a third political demand of the multitude: *the right to reappropriation*. The right to reappropriation is first of all the right to the reappropriation of the means of production. Socialists and communists have long demanded that the proletariat have free access to and control over the machines and materials it uses to produce. In the context of immaterial and biopolitical production, however, this traditional demand takes on a new guise. The multitude not only uses machines to produce, but also becomes increasingly machinic itself, as the means of production are increasingly integrated into the minds and bodies of the multitude. In this

context reappropriation means having free access to and control over knowledge, information, communication, and affects—because these are some of the primary means of biopolitical production. Just because these productive machines have been integrated into the multitude does not mean that the multitude has control over them. Rather, it makes more vicious and injurious their alienation. The right to reappropriation is really the multitude's right to self-control and autonomous self-production.

Posse

The telos of the multitude must live and organize its political space against Empire and yet within the “maturity of the times” and the ontological conditions that Empire presents. We have seen how the multitude moves on endless paths and takes corporeal form by reappropriating time and hybridizing new machinic systems. We have also seen how the power of the multitude materializes within the vacuum that remains necessarily at the heart of Empire. Now it is a matter of posing within these dimensions the problem of the becoming-subject of the multitude. In other words, the virtual conditions must now become real in a concrete figure. Against the divine city, the earthly city must demonstrate its power as an apparatus of the mythology of reason that organizes the biopolitical reality of the multitude.

The name that we want to use to refer to the multitude in its political autonomy and its productive activity is the Latin term *posse*—power as a verb, as activity. In Renaissance humanism the triad *esse–nosse–posse* (being–knowing–having power) represented the metaphysical heart of that constitutive philosophical paradigm that was to go into crisis as modernity progressively took form. Modern European philosophy, in its origins and in its creative components that were not subjugated to transcendentalism, continually tended to pose *posse* at the center of the ontological dynamic: *posse* is the machine that weaves together knowledge and being in an expansive, constitutive process. When the Renaissance matured and reached the point of conflict with the forces of counterrevolu-

tion, the humanistic posse became a force and symbol of resistance, in Bacon's notion of *inventio* or experimentation, Campanella's conception of love, and Spinoza's usage of *potentia*. Posse is what a body and what a mind can do. Precisely because it continued to live in resistance, the metaphysical term became a political term. Posse refers to the power of the multitude and its telos, an embodied power of knowledge and being, always open to the possible.

Contemporary U.S. rap groups have rediscovered the term "posse" as a noun to mark the force that musically and literarily defines the group, the singular difference of the postmodern multitude. Of course, the proximate reference for the rappers is probably the *posse comitatus* of Wild West lore, the rough group of armed men who were constantly prepared to be authorized by the sheriff to hunt down outlaws. This American fantasy of vigilantes and outlaws, however, does not interest us very much. It is more interesting to trace back a deeper, hidden etymology of the term. It seems to us that perhaps a strange destiny has renewed the Renaissance notion and has, with a grain of madness, made the term once again deserving of its high political tradition.

From this perspective we want to speak of posse and not of "res-publica," because the public and the activity of singularities that compose it go beyond any object (*res*) and are constitutionally incapable of being corralled there. On the contrary, the singularities are producers. Like the Renaissance "posse," which was traversed by knowledge and resided at the metaphysical root of being, they too will be at the origin of the new reality of the political that the multitude is defining in the vacuum of imperial ontology. Posse is the standpoint that best allows us to grasp the multitude as singular subjectivity: posse constitutes its mode of production and its being.

As in all innovative processes, the mode of production that arises is posed against the conditions from which it has to be liberated. The mode of production of the multitude is posed against exploitation in the name of labor, against property in the name of cooperation, and against corruption in the name of freedom. It self-valorizes bodies in labor, reappropriates productive intelligence

through cooperation, and transforms existence in freedom. The history of class composition and the history of labor militancy demonstrate the matrix of these ever new and yet determinate reconfigurations of self-valorization, cooperation, and political self-organization as an effective social project.

The first phase of properly capitalist worker militancy, that is, the phase of industrial production that preceded the full deployment of Fordist and Taylorist regimes, was defined by the figure of the *professional worker*, the highly skilled worker organized hierarchically in industrial production. This militancy involved primarily transforming the specific power of the valorization of the worker's own labor and productive cooperation into a weapon to be used in a project of *reappropriation*, a project in which the singular figure of the worker's own productive power would be exalted. A republic of worker councils was its slogan; a soviet of producers was its telos; and autonomy in the articulation of modernization was its program. The birth of the modern trade union and the construction of the party as vanguard both date from this period of worker struggles and effectively overdetermine it.

The second phase of capitalist worker militancy, which corresponded to the deployment of Fordist and Taylorist regimes, was defined by the figure of the *mass worker*. The militancy of the mass worker combined its own self-valorization as a refusal of factory work and the extension of its power over all mechanisms of social reproduction. Its program was to create a real *alternative* to the system of capitalist power. The organization of mass trade unions, the construction of the welfare state, and social-democratic reformism were all results of the relations of force that the mass worker defined and the overdetermination it imposed on capitalist development. The communist alternative acted in this phase as a counter-power within the processes of capitalist development.

Today, in the phase of worker militancy that corresponds to the post-Fordist, informational regimes of production, there arises the figure of the *social worker*. In the figure of the social worker the various threads of immaterial labor-power are being woven to-

gether. A constituent power that connects mass intellectuality and self-valorization in all the arenas of the flexible and nomadic productive social cooperation is the order of the day. In other words, the program of the social worker is a project of *constitution*. In today's productive matrix, the constituent power of labor can be expressed as self-valorization of the human (the equal right of citizenship for all over the entire sphere of the world market); as cooperation (the right to communicate, construct languages, and control communications networks); and as political power, or really as the constitution of a society in which the basis of power is defined by the expression of the needs of all. This is the organization of the social worker and immaterial labor, an organization of productive and political power as a biopolitical unity managed by the multitude, organized by the multitude, directed by the multitude—absolute democracy in action.

The posse produces the chromosomes of its future organization. Bodies are on the front lines in this battle, bodies that consolidate in an irreversible way the results of past struggles and incorporate a power that has been gained ontologically. Exploitation must be not only negated from the perspective of practice but also annulled in its premises, at its basis, stripped from the genesis of reality. Exploitation must be excluded from the bodies of immaterial labor-power just as it must be from the social knowledges and affects of reproduction (generation, love, the continuity of kinship and community relationships, and so forth) that bring value and affect together in the same power. The constitution of new bodies, outside of exploitation, is a fundamental basis of the new mode of production.

The mode of production of the multitude reappropriates wealth from capital and also constructs a new wealth, articulated with the powers of science and social knowledge through cooperation. Cooperation annuls the title of property. In modernity, private property was often legitimated by labor, but this equation, if it ever really made sense, today tends to be completely destroyed. Private property of the means of production today, in the era of the hegemony of cooperative and immaterial labor, is only a putrid and tyranni-

cal obsolescence. The tools of production tend to be recomposed in collective subjectivity and in the collective intelligence and affect of the workers; entrepreneurship tends to be organized by the cooperation of subjects in general intellect. The organization of the multitude as political subject, as *posse*, thus begins to appear on the world scene. The multitude is biopolitical self-organization.

Certainly, there must be a moment when reappropriation and self-organization reach a threshold and configure a real event. This is when the political is really affirmed—when the genesis is complete and self-valorization, the cooperative convergence of subjects, and the proletarian management of production become a constituent power. This is the point when the modern republic ceases to exist and the postmodern *posse* arises. This is the founding moment of an earthly city that is strong and distinct from any divine city. The capacity to construct places, temporalities, migrations, and new bodies already affirms its hegemony through the actions of the multitude against Empire. Imperial corruption is already undermined by the productivity of bodies, by cooperation, and by the multitude's designs of productivity. The only event that we are still awaiting is the construction, or rather the insurgence, of a powerful organization. The genetic chain is formed and established in ontology, the scaffolding is continuously constructed and renewed by the new cooperative productivity, and thus we await only the maturation of the political development of the *posse*. We do not have any models to offer for this event. Only the multitude through its practical experimentation will offer the models and determine when and how the possible becomes real.

MILITANT

In the postmodern era, as the figure of the people dissolves, the militant is the one who best expresses the life of the multitude: the agent of biopolitical production and resistance against Empire. When we speak of the militant, we are not thinking of anything like the sad, ascetic agent of the Third International whose soul was deeply permeated by Soviet state reason, the same way the will of the pope was embedded in the hearts of the knights

of the Society of Jesus. We are thinking of nothing like that and of no one who acts on the basis of duty and discipline, who pretends his or her actions are deduced from an ideal plan. We are referring, on the contrary, to something more like the communist and liberatory combatants of the twentieth-century revolutions, the intellectuals who were persecuted and exiled in the course of anti-fascist struggles, the republicans of the Spanish civil war and the European resistance movements, and the freedom fighters of all the anticolonial and anti-imperialist wars. A prototypical example of this revolutionary figure is the militant agitator of the Industrial Workers of the World. The Wobbly constructed associations among working people from below, through continuous agitation, and while organizing them gave rise to utopian thought and revolutionary knowledge. The militant was the fundamental actor of the "long march" of the emancipation of labor from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries, the creative singularity of that gigantic collective movement that was working-class struggle.

Across this long period, the activity of the militant consisted, first of all, in practices of resistance in the factory and in society against capitalist exploitation. It consisted also, through and beyond resistance, in the collective construction and exercise of a counterpower capable of destructuring the power of capitalism and opposing it with an alternative program of government. In opposition to the cynicism of the bourgeoisie, to monetary alienation, to the expropriation of life, to the exploitation of labor, to the colonization of the affects, and so on, the militant organized the struggle. Insurrection was the proud emblem of the militant. This militant was repeatedly martyred in the tragic history of communist struggles. Sometimes, but not often, the normal structures of the rights state were sufficient for the repressive tasks required to destroy the counterpower. When they were not sufficient, however, the fascists and the white guards of state terror, or rather the black mafias in the service of "democratic" capitalisms, were invited to lend a hand to reinforce the legal repressive structures.

Today, after so many capitalist victories, after socialist hopes have withered in disillusionment, and after capitalist violence against labor has been solidified under the name of ultra-liberalism, why is it that instances of militancy still arise, why have resistances deepened, and why does struggle continually reemerge with new vigor? We should say right away that this

new militancy does not simply repeat the organizational formulas of the old revolutionary working class. Today the militant cannot even pretend to be a representative, even of the fundamental human needs of the exploited. Revolutionary political militancy today, on the contrary, must rediscover what has always been its proper form: not representational but constituent activity. Militancy today is a positive, constructive, and innovative activity. This is the form in which we and all those who revolt against the rule of capital recognize ourselves as militants today. Militants resist imperial command in a creative way. In other words, resistance is linked immediately with a constitutive investment in the biopolitical realm and to the formation of cooperative apparatuses of production and community. Here is the strong novelty of militancy today: it repeats the virtues of insurrectional action of two hundred years of subversive experience, but at the same time it is linked to a new world, a world that knows no outside. It knows only an inside, a vital and ineluctable participation in the set of social structures, with no possibility of transcending them. This inside is the productive cooperation of mass intellectuality and affective networks, the productivity of postmodern biopolitics. This militancy makes resistance into counterpower and makes rebellion into a project of love.

There is an ancient legend that might serve to illuminate the future life of communist militancy: that of Saint Francis of Assisi. Consider his work. To denounce the poverty of the multitude he adopted that common condition and discovered there the ontological power of a new society. The communist militant does the same, identifying in the common condition of the multitude its enormous wealth. Francis in opposition to nascent capitalism refused every instrumental discipline, and in opposition to the mortification of the flesh (in poverty and in the constituted order) he posed a joyous life, including all of being and nature, the animals, sister moon, brother sun, the birds of the field, the poor and exploited humans, together against the will of power and corruption. Once again in postmodernity we find ourselves in Francis's situation, posing against the misery of power the joy of being. This is a revolution that no power will control—because biopower and communism, cooperation and revolution remain together, in love, simplicity, and also innocence. This is the irrepressible lightness and joy of being communist.