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The "Social Factory" In Postwar Italian Radical Thought From Operaismo To Autonomia

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THE “SOCIAL FACTORY” IN POSTWAR ITALIAN RADICAL THOUGHT FROM
OPERAISMO TO AUTONOMIA

by

DAVID PETER PALAZZO

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the
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Abstract

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Adviser: Professor Jack Jacobs

This dissertation examines the “social factory” as it developed conceptually within postwar Italian Autonomist Marxism. This concept is defined historically as an outgrowth of the critique of political economy that accompanied a rethinking of Marxism in postwar Italian working class political thought through the experience of *Quaderni Rossi*, which culminated in the theoretical and practical work of *Potere Operaio*, with fragments in the area of *Autonomia*. Historically, this dissertation locates the “social factory” as derivative of two figures: Raniero Panzieri and Mario Tronti, as well as two subsidiary movements that were articulated, separately, by Antonio Negri and Mariarosa Dalla Costa. Conceptually, the “social factory” is understood in two differing modes: as the result of capitalist accumulation and, the other, as the consequence of the increasing tertiarization of economic life. Both are problematic and unresolved within Italian workerist thought; Negri and Dalla Costa contribute to the discussion of a “social factory” critique of political economy in terms of extending the conceptualization of class and the understanding of social relations within advanced, post-Fordist capitalism. The idea of the “social factory” is understood historically to signify the relationship between capital and class, to understand the role of capital as an element of command within a particular, historical mode of production. In this regard, the development of *operaismo* is delineated in terms of the critique of political economy and its secondary concept: class composition. The history of a rather rich and varied political orientation constitutes the substantive matter of this work, with the conceptual apparatus forming the definitive characteristics of a distinct political movement: *operaismo*. In short, the “social factory” is explained historically through its articulation in

Quaderni Rossi, *Classe Operaio*, the student movement, the “hot autumn,” *Potere Operaio*, and *Autonomia*. Between the early-1960s and the mid 1970s Italy was the country of class conflict. This dissertation tells a story of that historical moment as understood through the development of its main concept, the “social factory,” as a critique of political economy.

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struggle, and have struggled, to attain a better life for themselves, outside the boundaries of the wage-slavery offered to them by capital. I'm proud to have written this for my father. Thanks dad for being union and talking about your work-life. I have undoubtedly overlooked many people who in myriad ways contributed to this work (especially my professors from URI who, in my undergraduate years, were remarkable). To the Italians who constitute this history, I've tried my best to represent what I know of your struggles honestly and without discrimination. Yet, in standard fashion, all the errors within are my own.

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is a historical reconstruction of the “social factory” concept as developed within the intellectual tradition of Italian *operaismo* in the postwar period up through the end of the Bretton Woods period. As a critique of political economy, the “social factory” was formulated in order to understand how those living in advanced capitalist economies were subjected to capital’s unceasing pressure to develop individual and collective capacities and focus ones efforts and energies towards the needs and goal of capital accumulation. One purpose of introducing this concept is that it served as a unifying concept under the rubric of class that provided an open and fluid framework for heterogeneous social groups. Its fundamental thrust informs us that regardless of identity, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, or status, we are forced to sell ourselves, and in turn become that particular commodity, labor-power, that generates capital. Traditionally, the socialist conception of technological progress sought to lesson the burden of work, yet this has not occurred. Rather, with the achievements in technological development, work life has increased, with the amount of time spent on such items increasingly penetrating traditionally “private” realms of being. At the core of this phenomenon is not simply the role of money as the coercive tool of capital; nor is it the widespread dissemination of technological devices such as computers and hand-held devices that allow us to remain constantly “plugged-in” to work life. The critique of political economy developed as the “social factory” directs attention instead towards the making of the working class (class composition) and the behaviors and attitudes that this class presents. Thus, working class liberation is dependent on the working class and its “refusal” at collaboration in the ideological commitment and practice that capital relies upon. Resistance to capitalist

domination is a matter of altering values, of breaking its disciplinary strictures, and of creating new modes of living that generates new values around the affirmation of our human existence. In short, anti-capitalist projects are, in this sense, fundamentally, utopian.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Italy was characterized as the country of class struggle. Its “hot autumn” of 1968-1973 generated the most sustained and radical class movement in the Western capitalist countries. It was this aspect of the country’s history that first attracted me to this topic. Yet, relatively little is known about Italian political theory, and much less with regards to *operaismo*. For the most part, academic work in the Anglophone countries has focused on Euro-communism and Palmiro Togliatti’s *Italian Way to Socialism*, with little attention to the more anti-statist tendencies of this period. This oversight has recently begun to be addressed, most prominently, in Steve Wright’s work, but also in a multitude of web pages and activist-oriented circles.¹ Wright offered the first historical reconstruction of Autonomist Marxism, which focused on the concept “class composition” as the key to understanding their revolutionary politics (2002). Other works have emphasized the cultural and sociological nature of this period (Cunningham 2002; Lumley 1990). To date, no work has treated the critique of political economy as a theoretical tool for the radical politics that exploded during Italy’s “hot autumn.” This is the state of affairs, despite Negri’s insistence that the “social factory” as the “successive abstraction of work” was the fundamental thesis of *operaismo*.

¹ See, for example, the webpages for the “Affinity Project” and “Class Against Class.”

² In this chapter, I use the term Resistance to refer to both the anti-fascist resistance and the armed resistance. The former dates from the murder, in 1924, of Senator Giangiacomo

I do not want to omit the importance of Negri's work, particularly his collaboration with Michael Hardt. Yet, this work, like *Empire* and *Multitude*, are recent and differ considerably from the material that he penned in the 1960s and early 1970s. The same could be said for contemporary Italian theorists whose works are being translated into English—for example, Sergio Bologna and Paolo Virno [the same cannot be said of the more well known Italian feminists like Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Silvia Federici]: they are, for the most part, being read without an understanding of the foundational components of their thought that is intimately connected to the tradition of *operaismo* as developed in journals such as Quaderni Rossi (Red Notebooks), Classe Operaia (Working Class), and Potere Operaio (Workers' Power) and in the movements that this intellectual belonged to. That some of these authors are now being discussed in Anglophone countries [caveat: the United Kingdom has long engaged this material in a far greater extent than the United States, particularly through the work of Ed Emery] speaks to the potential for deepening the discussion to include the historical genesis and background that is Italian Autonomist Marxism.

There is a practical reason for undertaking this investigation of the “social factory” as well. Resistance, in the rich countries (and poor as well, though it began there well before the former) has been slowly building over the last twenty years, to the post-Bretton Woods, neo-liberal order: the defeat of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment in the mid-1990s, the late 1990s global justice movement; successive targeting of the G8, Davos, and other elite global capitalist conventions; the recent Occupy movement; and the “disobedient” and “indignant” movements attest to the practical implications of this idea. Most of the organizational work in these movements is based on something like the

libertarian tradition of “affinity groups”—the immediate history for this is, *inter alia*, the autonomous movement in the 1970s in Italy. Moreover, the general thrust of the contemporary activist scene is decidedly trying to overturn what is perceived as the dominating control that capital has on our social order.

This dissertation seeks to build on previous academic work by placing the critique of political economy as the core component of the theoretical tradition that is *operaismo*, or “Autonomist Marxism.” That tradition, as Wright correctly emphasizes, survived the Cold War and what some sanguinely identified as the “failure” of communist and socialist ideologies (2002). This is, at best, an oversight. Italian workerism developed as a critique of the traditional left institutions and tried to construct organizational forms that are on par with some of the best of the libertarian tradition of the working class (i.e., the IWW). This tradition survived the horrors of the Russian example, as recent history within the class movement demonstrates that need the libertarian element needs to become prominent in working class culture. That said, the “social factory,” in its best formulations, was utilized as a theoretical tool for interconnecting vast sections of society under the rubric of class struggle. In its worst moments, it remained imprisoned behind factory walls, unable to conceive of advanced capitalism outside of the figure of the salaried worker, with little discovery of the happenings within the household and community. In order to develop, and assess the merits of, the “social factory” this dissertation locates the tradition of Autonomous Marxism within the historical period within which it emerged and developed; it is located within the broader context of postwar Italian Marxism, working class political culture, economic development, generational changes, and, to a lesser extent, international politics.

Chapter one begins at the end of WWII and the “long nightmare” of Italian fascism and Nazi occupation. This baseline is utilized to situate the parameters of postwar working class history and political thought. Through the writings of Rodolfo Morandi (Socialist Party) and Palmiro Togliatti (Communist Party), steeped within the historical context of their time, the framework for a discussion of *operaismo* is established. While the former held a councilist position and the latter adhered to a statist variation, their positions are useful to interrogate the problem of constructing a postwar working class politics. In no small measure the early development of *operaismo* was a direct response to the unfolding of these two viewpoints. Chapter one spans the course of a decade, a crucial period of postwar reconstruction, economic planning, constitutionalism, and social upheaval. The purpose of the chapter is to demonstrate the waning of working class power within the social relations of postwar capitalism, the general difficulties that the institutions of the left had in responding to the developments of the period, the transformative nature of the early stages of the “economic miracle,” and the state of the working class in *gli anni duri* (the hard years) of the 1950s—all determinant factors in the rise of *operaismo*.

Chapter two develops and examines the contribution of Raniero Panzieri as the founder of *Quaderni Rossi*, the original journal that gave rise to the tradition of *operaismo*. As member of the PSI, his work is situated in continuum with Morandi’s class politics. Panzieri’s emphasis on a free workers’ culture is emphasized in the historical context of the events of 1956. Particularly, Panzieri advocates, through the use of “workers’ inquiry,” the need for the development of Marxism as a “science of revolution” that originates from within the class movement, and understands the working

class as analytically distinct from capital. In short, Panzieri puts forth a democratic alternative that permeates the workplace, community, and culture. Last, in this chapter we see the beginnings of the critique of neo-capitalism and the initial steps of the “social factory” concept. The birth of Quaderni Rossi is highlighted along with the initial composition of the group in order to shed light on the heterogeneous make-up of early workerist thought.

Chapter three is the theoretical centerpiece of the dissertation in that it establishes the two original formulations of the “social factory” as constructed by both Raniero Panzieri and Mario Tronti. Their respective understandings of the “social factory” are situated in the “return to Marx” that consisted of a re-reading of *Capital*—with attention on large industry and technology—and the Introduction to the *Grundrisse*. I argue that both Tronti and Panzieri understand the “social factory” in terms of control by capital on the working class, despite their different understandings of how and why capital is capable of such effects. In short, the “social factory” was the unifying theme behind the Autonomist Marxist understanding of neo-capitalism as a social order where factory relations became generalized to the entire society. This chapter approaches both Panzieri and Tronti’s understandings from their historical context and their immediate intellectual influences. The “social factory” critique is then utilized as a heuristic to understand the background for the renewal of workers’ struggles and the emergence of a decade-long development of revolutionary working class struggle. This is understood through the development of complementary concepts such as the antagonistic and radical articulation of the workers’ “refusal of work. The chapter concludes with the first split in *Quaderni*

Rossi, which occurred partly as a result of the different configurations of the “social factory” but also from the different understanding of the class’s behavior.

Chapter four analyzes the experience of the journal *Classe Operaia* (Working Class) as an organ of “the workers in struggle” leading to an understanding of class composition—of a fluid working class subjectivity that was constantly composed, decomposed, and recomposed in the process of class struggle. Mario Tronti’s writings are the focal point of this chapter with particular attention on his conceptualization of the social factory, organization, theory of the party, and role of working class refusal in capitalist planning and development. He was the leading figure of CO, yet it is within this milieu that the writings of Toni Negri gained importance, as well as the continued view of Alquati. Undoubtedly CO was centrally concerned with organization, a question that subsequent movements also grappled with as a primary concern. Yet, the main point in this chapter is Tronti’s “Copernican revolution”—that attributed the primacy of the working class as the leading, dynamic subject of capitalist development—and its overwhelming importance within the trajectory of *operaismo*, primarily, I argue, as constructing a theory of revolution that contained decisive “passages” that was so abstract it lent itself to the control of an external “party-guide,” in Panzieri’s use of the phrase. This discussion is situated within the context of Italy’s first Center-Left government—with the inclusion of the PSI—of the postwar period. In this context, the strategic importance of the wage became a central point of workerist theory and practice—leading to major wage gains during the “hot autumn” of 1969-1973.

Chapter five focuses on the “student movement” and its conceptualization of the “social factory” as a means to enlarge the conception of working class composition to

include the student as part of the working class. Importantly, the student movement was not so much a theoretical movement as it was a social movement, with practice informing its politics to a greater extent than theoretical formulations. In particular, the students' appropriation of sociological inquiry ("sociology of the base"), class composition, the social factory, and aspects of revolutionary theory (i.e., organizational questions such as the critique of centralized authority, the need for revolutionary party to emerge from the movement and live in the movement, and the rejection of external vanguards) provide a framework for examining the trajectory of *operaismo* as it found space in the student movement. The chapter begins by discussing particular, generational features of the student movement—children of the "economic miracle." It is argued that the students' conception of the "social factory" emerged as a totalizing system based on despotism and control—the core power features of social capital. Within this configuration, the role of the university, the role of the student, and the political obligation or commitment for revolutionary struggle developed. The students appropriated the conception of the "social factory" in order to critique the university within a particular phase of neo-capitalism and to situate their struggle within a class analysis. Their connection to *operaismo* is made explicit, both theoretically and historically in the continuity of idea—particularly Panzieri's influence in Pisa and Turin (the future nexus of *Lotta Continua* [Continuous Struggle]). The universities of Trento, Turin, and Pisa are examined by utilizing a loose understanding of the "social factory" to include such terms as "the Plan," "despotism," "social capital," et cetera. Differences or variations in usage are explained in terms of the university movement's own particular focus and theoretical expression.

Chapter six develops the intellectual work that primarily took place within the group *Potere Operaio*, with emphasis on the role of Antonio Negri's writings. His contributions to *operaismo* are many, but emphasis here is given on theory of the State as a "Planner-State," his formulation of the Marxian concept of "crisis," and his insistence on the connections between production and domination as the premise of a political praxis of working class revolution. The centerpiece of Negri's contribution resides in his understanding of the "social factory" as capitalist command over "social labor" in the post-Bretton Woods era, with what he identified as the subsequent demise of the theory of value. Importantly, this chapter explains the historical trajectory of *operaismo* in terms of how their critique of political economy began to entail both the production and reproduction of capital. The culmination of this social transformation resulted in the displacement of "worker centrality" towards a broader configuration of working class subjectivity.

Chapter seven centers on the question of "worker centrality," of the position of the paid worker within the composition of the working class that derives from the "social factory" analysis that, to this point, has been broadened to include both the production and reproduction of capital. The chapter begins with the women's movement, the rise of a feminist critique of housework, of capitalist despotism in the home and, particularly, in the lives of housewives and in the community. Important here is the "wages for housework" campaign and Mariarosa Dalla Costa's contribution to *operaismo*. The second part of this chapter elaborates on the "end of the parliamentary groups" and the birth of *autonomia* as a direct response to the organizational failures of the *mass worker* and worker centrality. That is, *autonomia* emerged as the organizational expression of an

acceptance of the “social factory” as the proper critique of political economy. The last part of the chapter is concerned with Negri’s conceptualization of the “social worker” as an expression of class composition within the “social factory” that sought to introduce, within a class politics, the theoretical and practical possibility of unity within diversity. What is of interest here is understanding the practical culmination of the “social factory” as a critique of political economy that is open and fluid, allowing for the incorporation of diverse segments of the working class into its ambit of antagonism to capitalist command and working class revolution.

This dissertation reconstructs the “social factory” as a critique of political economy within Autonomist Marxism in postwar Italy. In general, it contributes to our understanding of the Italian radical theory and working class politics. More narrowly, it examines the changes within Marxism as a theory of working class liberation. Others have made notable contributions to our understanding of Autonomist Marxism. Such contributions have focused on the role of workers’ inquiry (Borio et al 2002), the conceptualization of class composition (Wright 2002), and the “refusal of work” as the strategic aspect of the autonomous movement (Cunningham 2002). This dissertation seeks to broaden our understanding of Autonomist Marxism by focusing on their conceptualization of the postwar neo-capitalist social order as a “social factory.” At a minimum, the analysis should be of interest to those concerned with the effect of capital on our daily activity and as a determinant of social cooperation. On the other hand, this dissertation speaks to those who seek to understand capitalist social relations and replace this order with something more humane and decent.

Last, a note regarding texts and language. Throughout the dissertation, I have relied on the original Italian texts and have included English translations, when available, for convenience. These references are sparse as much of the material is unavailable in English. The translations are the author's own, unless otherwise indicated.

CHAPTER 1
WORKING CLASS POLITICS FROM THE RESISTANCE
TO THE ECONOMIC MIRACLE

...[it is] the principle of authority which must perforce be respected... Now the concept of workers' control threatens that principle of authority; it is the superior who must control the inferior, never the inferior who controls the superior.—Angelo Costa, *Confindustria*

The committees of liberation are the authority of the people, the only legitimate and the only guardians of the interests and liberty of the people: they are as such the true foundation and the incoercible force of the new democracy.—Rodolfo Morandi, *Italian Socialist Party*

...when we speak of the new party we intend, before everything else, a party which is capable of translating in its politics, in its organization, and in its daily activity, those profound changes that have occurred in the position of the working class with respect to the problems of the national life.—Palmiro Togliatti, *Italian Communist Party*

Introduction

This chapter examines the theory and politics of the working class from the Resistance to the onset of the so-called “economic miracle” in postwar Italy. I begin with the Resistance in order to locate the workers’ movement, as a political force, in the construction of the postwar order. In setting forth a general position of the workers’ movement, I demonstrate the nodal points of continuity and rupture that occurred with the rise of Autonomist Marxism. It is important to demonstrate how the crisis of the 1950s was rooted in the immediate postwar years in order to shed light on the cultural and theoretical shifts that gave rise to *operaismo*; it is not sufficient, as Negri has claimed, to locate the birth of *operaismo* in the crisis of the workers’ movement during the 1950s, as this was predicated by the failures of the left to be an effective political force during reconstruction and the renewal of Italian capitalism (2007, 36-7). Rather, we have to examine working class politics in the immediate postwar period in order to understand how the hopes spawned by the Resistance gave way to the bitter disappointment

characteristic of the “hard years” of the 1950s (Bermani 1997, 141). This chapter begins with the workers’ role in the Resistance in order to highlight their determinant role in the liberation of Italy. These contributions are then examined in the theoretical positions of Rodolfo Morandi and Palmiro Togliatti, two prominent figures in working class politics of the postwar era. I focus on the latter’s new party (*nuovo partito*) and the former’s councilist position to highlight their views on the role of the working class in the postwar order. These two position help situate the theoretical and political questions that emerged later in *operaismo*. This chapter concludes with the onset of the economic miracle as providing the contextual framework for self-reflection and criticism within Italian Marxism. While many have correctly pointed out that 1956 was a critical point of departure for *operaismo*, this chapter argues that the success of postwar capitalism, and the failure of the left to understand the dynamism of the postwar capitalist order, posed a far greater burden for postwar Marxism (Crainz 2005, 48-54; Ginsborg 1990, 204-209).

The Resistance

The Italian Resistance² was composed of a politically diverse group united around the common goal of ridding Italy from Nazi-Fascist domination and occupation, and restoring Italy’s reputation and dignity in world politics (Ginsborg 1990, 71; Cooke 1997,

² In this chapter, I use the term Resistance to refer to both the anti-fascist resistance and the armed resistance. The former dates from the murder, in 1924, of Senator Giangiaco­mo Matteotti for his denunciation of fascist brutality. The anti-fascist resistance was a relatively small, well-organized faction whose political views were shaped by the Bolshevik Revolution and the *biennio rosso* (red two years) of 1919-1920. During fascist rule, they experienced exile, internal confinement, imprisonment, assassination, and the Spanish Civil War. The armed resistance refers to the “spontaneous” formation of direct action groups, partisan brigades who took to the mountains, and other anti-fascists who formed after the implosion of the Royalist-Badoglio government on September 8, 1943. It is reasonable to uphold the claim that they derived their anti-fascism from the “undisguised exuberance” they felt with the fall of Mussolini on July 25, 1943, the horror of Nazi occupation, and the forced enlistment in Mussolini’s puppet regime in Salo (Quazza 1972, 11; Delzell 1961, 233; Monelli 1943, 131-6; Horowitz 1963, 181-4). This “exuberance” is well captured in Giuseppe Tornatore’s film *Maléna* (2000) when the protagonist, Renato, overturns *Il Duce*’s bust, which tumbles down the stairs, cracking upon its final descent.

4; Delzell 1961, 285-88). The former was a clear-cut goal, the elimination of the fascist regime and defeating the Nazi occupation. However, restoring Italy's reputation and dignity in world politics required a politics within the Resistance that was palatable to the allies' goals³ for the postwar order. The political importance of the working class within the Resistance was a point of tension. Indeed, workers assumed the lead in the Resistance by forming agitation committees, workers' councils, and internal commissions, and in direct action through strikes, work stoppages, and sabotage. As workers assumed this lead role—beginning with the strikes of March 1943—the allies expressed concerns about workers' power and its possible affect on reconstruction and the postwar order. Below, I discuss three key events of working class militancy during the Resistance in order to shed light on the discussions of the working class in the postwar order.

In early 1943 workers took the lead in striking against the fascist regime. Local workers' cells had previously engaged in strikes, but in March and April of 1943 strikes erupted throughout Italy, with the majority of strike action occurring in Piedmont and Lombardy⁴ (Massola 1973, 167). This mass strike was the first sign of worker protest since the beginning of fascism, and pointed the way to a clear rejection of fascist politics and Italy's position in the war (Vaccarino 1966, 164-5; Foa 1975, 26-7; Polo 2003, 1).

³ Ginsborg characterizes the Allied position towards the Resistance as one of needing to “minimize its role as far as possible, and on no account to allow partisan action to lead to unpredictable political consequences” (1990, 42). For a general account of the relationship between the Resistance and the Allies, see the excerpts in part VI of Cooke's *The Italian Resistance: an anthology* (1997, 144-62). James Miller's *The United States and Italy, 1940-1950* offers an excellent account as well (1986).

⁴ Located in the central and western areas of the North, Piedmont and Lombardy comprise the two regions of the “industrial triangle,” a term used to denote the mass industrial expansion in Turin, Milan, and Genoa, that began in the early twentieth century under the liberal government of Giovanni Giolitti government (he was prime minister five times between 1892 and 1921).

However, this strike not only facilitated the demise of fascism, but it also effected a change in workplace regulation and a renewal of workers' power in the workplace. After the fall of Mussolini's regime (July 25, 1943), fascist unions were replaced by Internal Commissions—representative bodies of all the workers in a factory, elected by the workers (Foa 1975, 27). In September, worker “agitation committees” began to emerge as more democratic or representative bodies, as the Internal Commissions had direct connections to political factions within the Committees for National Liberation⁵ (Delzell 1961, 304-306; Woolf 1972, 227). By September, workers had organized themselves around these two focal points for further anti-fascist activity. The fruits of their work culminated in the political strikes of March 1944 and the general insurrection of April 1945.

The general strikes of March 1944 continued, and were the effect of, clandestine agitation that demonstrated the capacity of the Resistance to shutdown industrial production and shift the balance of forces within Italian society. The success of the strike varied by region, but it established the principle that workers had the freedom to strike. This is not to deny that reprisals by neo-Fascists and German occupying forces took place. They did, and Liberals and Conservatives used such reprisals to express their displeasure with the Communist and Socialist factions in the Resistance who had leading roles in the strikes. However, one could point to the shifting political power of the workers and the Resistance by noting that industrialists declined to take punitive action against their employees, and often paid striking workers (Delzell 1961, 371-2). The

⁵ The Internal Committees quickly became the scene of political intrigue from neo-fascist forces as well as the diverse parties who formed the Committees for National Liberation. The latter comprised six anti-fascist parties: the Actionists, Christian Democrats, Liberals, Socialists, Communists, and Republicans.

strikes of 1944 successfully led to the declaration of trade-union unity under the aegis of the *Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro* (General Confederation of Italian Labor, CGIL). On June 3rd, 1944 the three dominant factions within the labor movement—Communist, Socialist, and Christian Democrat—established the CGIL as a “union of all workers without distinction of political opinion or religious faith” in order to defend the “economic and moral interests of the workers” and to “guarantee their more efficient contribution to the immanent work of reconstruction” (Foa 1975, 50-52). This body lasted until 1947 when the Cold War and postwar political divisions put an end to the unity politics of the Resistance era. It is important to note that by 1944 workers had constructed an institutional presence in the Resistance in order to ensure their participation in the overarching call of the postwar order, “reform and reconstruction” (Ginsborg 1990, 82).

With the end of the war in sight, the Committees for National Liberation (CLN) organized a general insurrection in April 1945. From the beginning the insurrection was hampered by political divisions between the more conservative elements—primarily the Liberals and the Christian Democrats—who feared the consequences of radical social change advocated by the Socialists, Communists, and Actionists. The conservative position became aligned with a policy of *attesimo*⁶ (wait and see what the allies do), which left the military obligation to the allies and gave the partisans a secondary, or defensive, role in protecting industry and infrastructure from retreating Nazi sabotage (Delzell 1961, 475). Countering this position, the more radical components of the Resistance, led by the Communists, were insistent on liberating the North *before* the

⁶ Roberto Rossellini’s film *Roma Città Aperta* (1945) depicts the futility of this “wait and see” policy during the period from September 9, 1943 to September 23, 1943 in which Rome was declared an “open city” by terms of an armistice with Germany.

allies arrived. It must be noted, however, that even the more radical elements did not seek a social revolution, as the Greek experience, stated allied concerns, and the prevailing political balance of forces, sobered even the most ardent revolutionary (Ginsborg 1990, 82). Rather, the radicals were concerned with ensuring that the CLNs were recognized as the legitimate governing body of Italy and would have the lead in any postwar settlement with the allies (Bocca 1995, 516).

In early April, the Communist Party (PCI) issued Directive No. 16 that expressed the purpose of the general insurrection. The document called for a general strike against fascism combined with an attack on Nazi-Fascist headquarters and the occupation of public offices. It laid out a “surrender or die” edict to Nazi-Fascist forces. Last, it called for a complete struggle against *attesismo* and preparations of what to do in the face of allied withholding of arms and support (Secchia 1973, 486-9). The character of the insurrection varied according to the capacities of the Resistance in their respective localities. However, in general, there was widespread success in the North as public buildings were occupied, utilities and industrial infrastructure was taken over and maintained by workers’ councils (*consigli di gestione*), and the CLNs began administering their respective region’s affairs. The insurrection can be understood, in performative terms, as the embryonic expression of the postwar order based in the regional CLN bodies and workers’ management of industry, as expressed in the Socialist Party by Pietro Nenni and Rodolfo Morandi, and by some Communist cadres. In this sense, the Resistance was an affair of the Center and North of Italy (Woolf 1972, 213).

But the insurrection also played a symbolic role in marking the last phases of Nazi-fascism, and in this sense, it can be said to have attained a national scope.⁷

The final event of the Resistance, and the symbolic end of fascism, occurred in the late days of April when Resistance forces captured Mussolini as he attempted to flee with retreating Nazis. Upon a sentence of death proclaimed by the Milan CLN, partisans shot Mussolini, his mistress Claretta Petacci, and a Fascist Party secretary. The three cadavers were then hung upside down in Piazza Loreto⁸ for the public to witness the fall of fascism. Rather than evoking fear and terror, the *piazza* presented a macabre display to all that the “long nightmare” of fascism was over (Bocca 1995, 523). Mussolini’s execution and the public theater that followed might have been the “ceremonial end of fascism,” but, as in the end of Bertolucci’s film *Novecento*, the *padroni* [bosses] remained, and they still had power (1976; Chessa 2005, 121).⁹

As the Resistance to fascism morphed into the politics of reconstruction, with the need to ease the suffering and misery that fascism, war, and occupation had wrought, what role would workers play? How did the working class emerge as a political force in postwar reconstruction? To answer these questions it is useful to examine the theoretical

⁷ A dualism that marks Italy’s history is the separation, geographic as well as culturally, between the North and the South. The process of liberation reaffirmed this duality as the South was “liberated” by the Allies while the North experienced German occupation. On this matter, Cooke writes, “[e]ffectively, the country was divided into two, a fact that was to have a great influence, not only on the military campaign of 1943-1945, but on the entire development of post-war Italy” (1997, 3).

⁸ The location was the scene of a Nazi execution of partisans the previous August, and thus had particular symbolic importance as a political statement.

⁹ For two accounts of the daily struggles and resistance to Nazi-fascism that highlight the role of much less dramatic events than the workers’ affairs discussed above, see Origo’s *War in Val D’orcica* (1947) and Roberto Rossellini’s *Roma Città Aperta* (1945).

and strategic visions of the working class by Rodolfo Morandi and Palmiro Togliatti, two dominant political figures in the Socialist Party and Communist Party, respectively.

Morandi's "class politics" and Togliatti's "nuovo partito"

As the war ended the Resistance gave way to the needs of "reform and reconstruction." The overall societal need was for reform of the political, social, and economic structures suited towards a form of constitutional democracy, and both moral and economic reconstruction of Italy and the Italian people from the twenty-year experience of fascism, war, and occupation. The story of this period has been amply documented, so the purpose here is not to provide a rich historical reconstruction of the inter-party and intra-party positions, or of the numerous changes of governments (Amyot 1981; Di Scala 1988; Spriano 1975). Rather, in this section I examine how the two dominant "left-wing" parties (the Psiup/PSI¹⁰ and PCI) envisioned the role of the working class in the postwar order. In particular, the councilist position of Rodolfo Morandi (Socialist Party) is juxtaposed to Palmiro Togliatti's (Communist Party) articulation of the "new party." These positions are useful to interrogate the problems of constructing a postwar working class politics, and how both these positions provided the historical context for the emergence of *operaismo* and Autonomist Marxism. That is, Morandi and Togliatti envisioned a postwar order based on the centrality of the working class as a political subject, but the defeat of this position and the consequent decimation of the working class as a political force provided the impetus for a vibrant rethinking of working class politics in the late 1950s.

¹⁰ The Italian Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity existed from 1943-1947. During the 25th Congress in January 1947 Giuseppe Saragat led a "right-wing" or social democratic faction that split the Psiup between his newly created Italian Socialist Workers' Party (PSLI) and the "left-wing" worker-centered politics of Nenni, Morandi, and Lelio Basso which formed the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) [Di Scala 1988, 47-65].

Both the Communist Party and the Socialist Party found themselves in a new situation by the end of the war. As CLNs assumed governing power with the formation of the Parri government in May 1945, the Communist and Socialist parties had to shed their historically oppositional posture and create an agenda for reconstruction. Togliatti had anticipated this, when, in March 1944, he returned to Italy after 18 years of exile and inserted himself into national politics by recognizing the Badoglio government, and persuaded the other anti-Fascist parties to put institutional questions on hold until after the defeat of Nazi-fascism. After his infamous “*svolta di Salerno*”¹¹ [change of tack at Salerno], Togliatti gave a series of addresses in order to establish the nature and roll of what he called the “nuovo partito” [new party]. Togliatti informed his communist cadres that the basis of the new party would no longer be that of an oppositional party as prescribed by the Third International, and that it was no longer possible, or necessary, to struggle for a “dictatorship of the proletariat” in Italy. Rather, Togliatti, in line with the Popular Front strategy of the 7th Congress of the Comintern (or Third International), advocated a policy based on the class alliances that had formed during the Resistance with its objective of, first, defeating fascism, and then ensuring the PCI as a legitimate participant in national politics (Togliatti 1945, 95-6, 331; De Grand 1989, 97; Harper 1986, 19).

The “new party” rested on the assumption that progressive forces needed to unite in order to defeat fascism and establish a “progressive democracy” as a transition to socialism. To this end, the Socialists and Communists maintained a unity of action agreement, and with the formation of the CLNs, the so-called progressive forces united to

¹¹ For discussions of the importance of Togliatti’s *svolta*, see (Quazza 1972, 24-7; Spriano 1975, 314-337).

defeat their common foe. This need for a unitary politics based on the CLN model would be a defining feature of the PCI's political strategy until their expulsion, along with the PSI, from government in May 1947. In an address to communist cadres in Naples on April 11, 1944, Togliatti outlined the basic elements of the new party. Addressing the question of the party's postwar program, Togliatti offered a program for instituting a republican constitution with guaranteed liberal rights based on respect for multiple parties that would effect a "rapid reconstruction in the interests of the people" (1945, 45-6). The priority was set forth that the Communist Party would put its energies into the construction of a "progressive and democratic regime" (Ibid, 46). This position did not abandon the long-term goal of achieving a socialist and then communist Italy. Rather, Togliatti's "new party" sought to institutionalize the transition to socialism by constructing a political regime that was democratic and progressive, while using those same political tools to eliminate the structural base of fascism and change the power dynamics of the economic structure (Amyot 1981, 34-44; Sassoon 1981, 20-25).

In the same address, Togliatti called for the need to protect small and medium sized economic groups against the "avid and egotistic groups of the plutocracy," or "grand monopolistic capitalism." The latter must be uprooted since therein resided the "birth of fascism" (1945, 46). The immediate objective was to reform the institutional structures in order to prevent the return of fascism, which was seen as a necessary safeguard to ensure the PCI's legitimacy and existence. However, Togliatti remained opaque about the connection between a transition to socialism or communism from this defense of small proprietors.

In his address at a PCI convention on economics in Rome, dated August 23, 1945, Togliatti offered broad outlines of the communist's position for the postwar period that focused on avoiding inflation, a renewal of production, and the support of private initiative in both production and exchange (331-334). These positions rested on a conception of the State in liberal-democratic terms; Togliatti expressed his preference for the model offered by England and the United States. Rather than engaging in factory-level struggles or advocating for any type of workers' control (which was viewed as utopian given the "actual state of affairs"), the need was to "conduct a struggle for the conquest of the State apparatus, in order to improve it." Togliatti continued, "[w]e need to request a form of intervention, of surveillance, of absolute limitation on the speculative liberty of private enterprises" behind a "line of national solidarity" (Ibid). In dealing with the economic problems of reconstruction, Togliatti preferred to transform the economic question into a question of State politics (1945, 335). In this construction, the foreseeable contradiction of capitalism would occur in some indeterminate future, not by an internal flaw of capitalist production, but between capitalism and democracy (De Grand 1989, 88). Togliatti sought an extension of democracy through the institutional structures of postwar Italy as the means for making the transition to socialism and communism (Spriano 1975, 386-419). But Togliatti's understanding of democracy rested on a Statist vision of politics, with a rather narrow approach to the institutions of capitalist society.

To achieve the goals of democratizing the institutions of the postwar order, the party was to play the central role in representing and guiding workers' interests. In the address cited above, Togliatti maintained the role of the party as providing "a guide for the people...of which they need" (1945, 48). It was not that the workers had needed

guides to organize in the factory to resist fascism, but they needed the party as a guide to build a unitary politics that would include workers, peasants, white-collar workers, and vanguard intellectuals (Ibid, 131). The role of the party was to serve as a guide in realizing the political line of unity. To this end, the party would build its organizational apparatus in order to spread propaganda that would channel workers' power and interests into the PCI's goal of political unity (Ibid, 132). Thus, the worker militancy displayed throughout the Resistance was to be guided into the predetermined goals of the party. The working class, as a political agent, was viewed as responsible solely for preserving the discipline of production, order, and social peace.

Trade unions were given the explicit function of ensuring industrial harmony by channeling the party's political goals into the workplace to ensure a rapid economic reconstruction. The possibility of harnessing worker militancy toward realizing a democratic change of workplace organization was absent from Togliatti's formula. Indeed, the "new party" envisioned a sharp demarcation between political and economic struggles, preferring, as Vittorio Foa writes, to propose all issues concerning the party in the manner of an "electoral function" (1973, 449). By directing working class militancy toward the national unity goals of the party, and thus toward an electoral strategy, the PCI left the "transformation of the balance of class forces...to the future parliament," which effectively sapped the revolutionary potential of the workers' movement (Foa 1974, xix). In other words, as a party *for* the class, all militancy was, at best, verbalized in propaganda as a means for increasing the Communist's electoral strength in national politics.

Throughout the immediate postwar period the Communist Party maintained, as its primary goal, the politics of national unity and collaboration of the anti-fascist alliance as a means to ensure its legitimacy in national politics. To this end the PCI popularized a myth of the Resistance as a “second Risorgimento,”¹² a more democratic and representative process of national unification than that which had occurred 90 years prior during the initial unification of Italy. The working class played a central role in this myth as the heroic liberators of Italy from the vicissitudes of fascism that would reconstruct Italy as a republic that respected “honest labor.”¹³ The Pact of Rome that established trade union unity was envisioned as a model of the type of unity that the PCI based its hopes upon for a broader national political unity. But, as we will see below, this process of collaboration accepted a naive view of the Christian Democrats as a progressive force in national politics, and, consequently, served to restrain the workers’ political momentum. Moreover, the PCI’s focus on national politics failed to mobilize the workers as an effective power bloc against the capitalist push, led by the industrial group, Confindustria, to take sole control over the politics of economic reconstruction. By locating workers’ demands as secondary to political goals, the PCI set the table for a series of compromises that gave control over reconstruction to the capitalist class, which led to a decimation of workers’ power in the 1950s. But before turning to the capitalist restoration and the postwar order, I want to discuss the work of Rodolfo Morandi, as a theorist of workers’ councils, who laid out a schema for a more bottom-up, democratic transition from the Resistance to postwar reconstruction.

¹² For example, see (Battaglia 1957, 127, 268).

¹³ See Pier Paolo Pasolini’s depiction of those who perform “honest labor” against the petty thieves (or “scroungers”) in Rome’s shanty towns during the 1950s in his premier film *Accattone* (1955).

The most significant attempt to build on the workers' movement of the Resistance came from Rodolfo Morandi, who was a member of the Socialist Party, President of the National Liberation Committee for High Italy¹⁴ (CLNAI), and later Minister of Industry and Commerce from July 1946 to May 1947. Morandi shared with Togliatti the need for unitary politics, but until 1948 he openly differed from the PCI's approach as based on abstractions devoid of any understanding of working class subjectivity. In particular, Morandi objected to nature of the Communist Party as a party *for* the class, and sought instead to establish a party *of* the class. He argued that, in the immediate postwar period, the workers' councils were the proper democratic organisms, along with the CLNs, that were capable of establishing a decentralized form of economic planning to meet the interests and the needs of the class and the people. It was these organisms, with their political experience in the Resistance, Morandi argued, that should have formed the basis of the postwar order.

Upon his return from exile in Switzerland, Morandi began editing the clandestine journal Politica di Classe (Class Politics). In the journal's first number, Morandi laid out his critique of the Communist's conception of the masses and the role of the party. While his position had formed during the 1930s in his work at the *Centro socialista* (Socialist Center), the anticipated demise of fascism and role of the left in the Resistance provided a unique opportunity for his critique. In "An open letter to the communist comrades," Morandi criticized the party's decision-making procedures as separate from the practical experience of the masses; in short, the PCI lacked any respect for democratic procedures.

¹⁴ The National Liberation Committee for Northern Italy (CLNAI, *Comitati di Liberazione Nazionale per l'Alta Italia*), was the central body of the CLN for the German occupied North dating from November 1943 until the end of the war. In January 1944 the CLNAI attained formidable governing powers in the Northern regions and was responsible for coordinating the Northern Resistance.

Rather, in confronting the masses, the party was viewed as an “instrument to maneuver” the masses behind a political line that was determined within the party (quoted in Merli 1958, 567). As a result of this top-down approach, Morandi charged that the communists failed to take account of “certain necessities” felt by the workers. In the same edition, Socialist Lelio Basso, wrote an article based on an inquiry of workers’ concerns in the summer of 1944 in several Milan factories. Basso, supporting Morandi’s critique, found that workers were “hostile towards the introduction of political organisms (in this case, the CLN of the factory)” as these groups failed to respect the “autonomous initiative of the workers” (Merli 1958, 569). The Communists, Morandi argued, did not claim their power as a class party, but as a party *for* the class. In this self-proclaimed role of being *for* the class, Agosti notes that Morandi viewed the Communists position as “supported by a concept of power separate from the masses”: for them the party was seen as “an instrument ... for the conquest of power with support from the masses, more than for the exercise of power by the masses” (1971, 453-4). By locating power in the ability of the party to direct the masses, the PCI acted more like commanders of an army, where the role of the masses was to follow orders.

This relationship between power and the party was central to Morandi’s vision of how the Socialist Party should have conducted itself in the postwar period. The role of the party, he wrote in the same letter noted above, should have been that of an organism in which the “masses express their political interests and the means by which the party should lead” (Merli 1958, 567). Power had to be located in the masses with the party serving as an instrument of their will. Thus, for Morandi, the party must be a place for debate, discussion, and proposals for political action (D’Agostino 1988, 57-80). This

understanding and respect for the will of the people did not rest on an abstract or nonexistent situation. Rather, Morandi saw in the Resistance the affirmation of these democratic principles and the organizational potential upon which to establish a postwar order based on a democratic renewal of economic and political life.

Taking his cue from the political experience of the Resistance, Morandi saw the possibility for a democratic renewal derived from the popular energy that was so emphatically displayed during the April 1945 insurrection and liberation of the North and the organizational apparatuses central to those affairs. During the insurrection, workers established management councils for the preservation of industry and production against Nazi sabotage and destruction, as managers and bosses fled in fear of reprisals. These councils were given juridical recognition by the CLNAI, and brought with them into the postwar period a commitment by the anti-Fascist parties to employee participation in the workplace. The establishment of the management councils added a further lever to workers' power and representation in the workplace, building off the committees for agitation and internal committees that had already been established in previous years. Morandi interpreted the institutions of the Resistance—the management councils, the committees of agitation, the committees of national liberation, et cetera—as not only the nascent forms of self-governance, but as embodying the only legitimate and “thus the true foundation and incoercible force of the new democracy” (1958, 141). It must be noted that he did not view these organisms as indelible institutions, but as the organizational response to a “fleeting situation” (Ibid, 74). Further, they were not seen as model organizations, but as entities capable of evolving into instruments of political action directed by mass participation in the postwar order. The push towards a democratic

renewal in the postwar had to derive from the energy and organizational work of the Resistance. In short, the workers' organizations that derived from the Resistance provided the political space for the *potential* of workers' control and a decentralized, councilist form of economic planning.

Morandi's position was embedded within the generally accepted position of political unity between the antifascist parties of the CLNs and in the proposed Constituent Assembly, held in April 1946. Morandi stated his preference for autonomy of the political parties' conduct without breaking unity, but this position, much like the position of the PCI during the period, represented an unrealistic assessment of the political forces at hand. The clearest example of this was in the widespread acceptance of the central State, by the majority of the parties, with its residues of the fascist prefect system intact, as the proper political arena for the new democratic order. The PCI's prospect of "progressive democracy" did not see the restoration of the bourgeois state as an obstacle, but as a foregone conclusion. The Christian Democrats, along with the Liberals, wanted a return to the pre-1918 liberal state.¹⁵ Only the Actionists supported Morandi's vision, but they lacked the necessary political weight to have a significant effect. His position was further hampered when, in the autumn of 1945, as the first postwar government (the Parri government) hobbled along, the CLNs were dissolved. The Liberals (with support from the DC) effected a change in government, as they withdrew support for Parri, leading to the first De Gasperi government in December 1945. During the autumn, Agosti writes, "the theme of the CLNs as organs of popular initiative, matrices for the creation of new revolutionary institutions, was abandoned by

¹⁵ Philosopher and prominent Senator of the Liberal Party, Benedetto Croce interpreted fascism as a twenty year "parenthesis" that interrupted the historical march of liberty as embodied in the Giolittian era (Duggan 1995, 6).

all” (1971, 417). While the anti-fascist alliance slowly eroded the hopes for Morandi’s vision of a postwar democratic order, he focused his efforts on the newly formed management councils as organs of democracy within the economic order.

Morandi viewed the management councils, legally established by an order of the CLNAI at the end of the Resistance, as the basis for developing a rationally managed socialist society. They were essential in the transitional period as organs to maintain production which, given the bosses failure to do such, was seen in itself as a radical expression of workers’ power (Foa 1973, 446). But, as the bosses regained control over the production process, Morandi was left to defend these councils as “instruments of democratization” within the restoration of capitalist control over reconstruction (1958, 126). Yet, as workers began to lose political clout, Morandi increasingly insisted on the need to legalize the councils as necessary guarantees for workers’ liberty within the national economy. Increasingly, Morandi’s vision was more and more untenable as power relations between the capitalist class and the worker and popular classes shifted in favor of the former. Importantly, as Vittorio Foa highlights, the councils began to assume an increasingly collaborationist line, with workers’ representatives not only chosen by management, but they also served as a disciplinary force to control the workforce within the factory (1973, 455). Whether the councils could have served a different purpose is a question that was overcome by contingent historical factors, which we turn to next. But their main importance here is in demonstrating how they served, within Morandi’s formulation of a democratic renewal of Italian economic and political life, as an example of a possible alternative to Statist capitalist reconstruction.

For both Morandi and Togliatti, the central difficulty of the period resided in the tension between constructing a socialist society without rupturing the Resistance coalition. The empirical record of each demonstrates this as they held important ministerial positions in the immediate postwar period, but had little effect or control over reconstruction. In fact, at each crucial turn, both the Socialist Party and the Communist Party sacrificed economic control over reconstruction, and compromised major components of their political goals in order to maintain political unity. Moreover, when they were expelled from government in May 1947, they were not only dismayed, but they put most of their energy in trying to regain a united politics. That is, the shifting balance of power in economic and political terms effectively put the PCI and the PSI on the defensive. As a result, both parties rescinded or watered down key aspects of their political positions in order to retain their political space and power within the government. This strategic decision had fateful consequences for the nature of reconstruction and, particularly, the ability of the workers to exercise any control over the formulation of development policy.

The “fourth party” and the end of political unity

The unity politics that characterized the first phase of reconstruction (1945-1947) stumbled through a series of questions that concerned the nature of reconstruction. With the restoration of capitalist power in the workplace, and subsequent bosses’ attack on workers’ power, and the failure of the left to link worker militancy to a concrete political program, the balance of forces within the government shifted toward a respect and deference to the needs of what De Gasperi called the “fourth party,” the captains of industry. In addressing the myriad problems of reconstruction—unemployment, monetary

stability, industrial production, and control over the economy—the resounding defeat of the working class took place in the crucial years of 1947-8 with the expulsion of the left from government and the formation of a DC-business alliance that assured a postwar social order controlled and led by the needs of private enterprise and the state. This postwar order was based on a law and order governing philosophy that coincided with massive workplace repression. The main import of this period is that the political and economic affairs developed into the governing pattern that dominated the 1950s.

As we saw above, political concerns were expressed in the name of unity and focused primarily on national problems. The Resistance had put off the institutional question of the monarchy and the structure of government until after the defeat of Nazi-fascism. This position was solidified with the Palmiro Togliatti's "svolta di Salerno," which gave recognition to Badoglio's military-Monarchist government in April 1943. All questions were set aside until after the war, when the CLNs held a national election to determine the composition of a Constituent Assembly, which deliberated on the course of the postwar political order. But the recognition and participation by the CLN parties in national government signified that by the end of the war the political structure would remain centralized in Rome, rather than follow a position along the lines of Pietro Nenni's (and Morandi's) call for a federated structure of power based on the CLN model. This option was virtually nullified by the "Protocols of Rome" agreement between the CLNAI and the Supreme Allied Command, which stipulated, *inter alia*, that the CLNAI relinquish all authority and powers of local governance upon liberation (Ginsborg 1990, 57). And, in fact, as noted above, the CLNs were stripped of power by fall of 1945, with politics centralized in the first postwar government, a provisional National Council led by

the Actionist, and well-liked resistance leader, Ferruccio Parri. In this manner, the structure of governance was centralized in the National Council at Rome, with any further considerations to be taken up by the Constituent Assembly.

Political developments in the fall and winter of 1945 produced major setbacks for the left's hopes of realizing their political agenda in the postwar order. In December 1945, the Parri government fell as the Liberal Party withdrew from government. The agreed replacement, DC leader, and Foreign Affairs Minister, Alcide De Gasperi, proceeded to water down the function and purpose of the upcoming assembly. Reversing a previous agreement signed by the CLN leaders in June 1944 that stipulated the functions of the Constituent Assembly as a legislative body, De Gasperi limited the functions of the assembly to the drafting of a constitution. Further, the question of the monarchy was to be settled by a referendum in the national election rather than by the assembly. Last, the date for the national election was put off until April 1946. Each of these decisions went against the left's position. In particular, the latter was directly aimed at weakening their electoral support, and possible control over the assembly, by, in the words of the Allied Command, letting the "molten lava of 1945" cool off (quoted in Ginsborg 1990, 45). The left acceded to these changes lest they risked a governing crisis, which could have possibly led to an Allied intervention or Monarchist and Fascist provocation.

The general election of April 1946, and the subsequent drafting of the Constitution, established the working class and the PSI and PCI as central forces in the postwar order. The referendum, however, while favoring the republic by a measure of 54 to 46, demonstrated regional differences between the North and the South with the latter

overwhelmingly favoring the monarchy. This outcome can be explained not only by historic differences between the two regions, but also by the difference experiences of liberation and occupation. That the Resistance failed to exert a salient affect in the South did not, however, prevent the left from gaining a majority of the national vote. In determining seats to the Constituent Assembly the PSIUP and PCI, respectively, gained 20.7% and 19% of the votes, while the DC received 35.2%. The former parties were bound together by a unity of action pact, and, as such, had the capacity to control the majority vote in the assembly. The result of the left's power can be seen in the Constitution, which enumerates a few pro-worker provisions. For example, Article 4 claims the "right to work" and to promote the means necessary to ensure this right. Article 39 guarantees trade-union liberty and the juridical recognition of unions. Article 46 guarantees the right of workers to participate in factory management. Article 45 favors the artisan class against speculators. And article 42 stipulates the legality and juridical recognition of private property, but allows for its expropriation. Thus, the Constitution, while not a socialist document, gave formal recognition to the centrality of work and the worker in the postwar order.

These worker protections, however, when put to the test by the difficulties of economic reconstruction, were not sufficient to prevent the shifting balance of power in favor of the bosses and political control by the Democratic Christians. As a matter of principle, the leading industrial trade group, Confindustria, sought to reestablish absolute freedom in the workplace. The group took aim at the CLN laws establishing the management councils and a statute that prohibited firings. Regarding the former, Angel Costa, President of Confindustria, proclaimed that, in the workplace, "[it is the] principle

of authority which must perforce be respected.... Now the concept of workers' control threatens that principle of authority; it is the superior who must control the inferior, never the inferior who controls the superior" (in Ginsborg 1990, 74).

Following Costa's lead, industrialists waged three years of class war against the principle of workers' participation that changed the councils from organs whose primary function was to ensure a well-disciplined workforce and efficient production, to mere consultative bodies, until they were dissolved in the late 1940s. For Confindustria, the councils were, in principle, a threat to their control in the workplace, and had to be rejected on these grounds, regardless of their economic or productive merits. The councils were composed of four representatives from the workers and four from representatives of capital, with final authority residing with the company president. By 1947 there were approximately 500 management councils, but they lacked juridical recognition and they lacked guidelines for proceeding. In late 1946, Morandi introduced legislation to establish the councils in law and to regulate the functioning of the management councils, to ensure the participation of workers, as a political force, in reconstruction.¹⁶ But Confindustria retained a hostile attitude towards the legislation that included the intimidation of businesses that supported the councils (Morandi 1958, 239-240). In the end, the automobile company Fiat took the initiative by imposing a consultative role on the councils. The De Gasperi government approved Fiat's position, effectively breaking the CLN agreement to ensure worker participation in the workplace (Harper 1986, 150; Ginsborg 1990, 97). Morandi's bill failed to pass through the

¹⁶ Despite their collaborative role in capitalist reconstruction, Morandi defended legalizing the councils in order to "affirm a new conception of industry as a social phenomenon and collective force of work" (1958, 125).

conservative legislature, and, by 1947, with the expulsion of the left from government, the councils were, for all intents, finished.

The capitalist class also targeted the April 1945 statute pronounced by the CLNAI that prohibited firings. The prohibition was seen as a necessary safeguard of workers political gains against massive postwar unemployment (Foa 1973, 438). But the industrialists used this safeguard to attack worker protection as a hindrance to the renewal of productivity and, by extension, as an obstacle to job creation. The bosses directed their energies to working out an agreement with the trade unions. In September 1945 the CGIL conferred a partial agreement that became formalized in January 1946, which progressively relaxed the prohibition on worker firings. This reversal was of significant political value for the capitalist class; “the unblocking of firings,” Foa writes,

was much more than a problem of costs for the companies involved, it was a general political problem ... of not making a minimal concession on the bosses full control over labor power ... it treats the right to fire as a preliminary condition for the capitalist reconstruction (1973, 439).¹⁷

Thus, while the Constitution guaranteed the right to employment and committed itself towards those ends, these imprecise “fundamental principles”¹⁸ of the new republic foundered against the more powerful “right to fire,” a central feature of the “fourth party’s” exclusive right to the “principle of authority.”

¹⁷ One consequence of bosses’ power was that in October 1946 workers were forced to accept a temporary (a six-month, renewable) wage freeze, despite a 50% inflation rate. There were waves of spontaneous strike actions against unemployment and inflation, but there were no organized work stoppages at a national level, never mind any action that was directed towards political goals of the working class. Indeed, the left did not want to be identified impeding reconstruction efforts, nor did it want to upset the governing coalition.

¹⁸ The “right to work,” stipulated in Article four of the Constitution was part of the “fundamental principles” of the republic. In January 1948 the Court of Cassation effectively eliminated the importance of these principles, as they interpreted the “fundamental principles” as long-term goals that could be superseded to meet the immediate economic needs of the country.

The problem of unemployment and the ban on firings was only one subset of problems confronting Italy's postwar economic recovery. The industrialists' bid to retain the right to fire was a political result that was peripherally connected to the more fundamental problem of industrial production.¹⁹ In the 1940s Italian industry was characterized by technological backwardness and a lack of dynamism. From the end of the war to 1948 production went from less than one-third to 80 percent of its 1938 level.²⁰ The key difficulty resided in the lack of natural resources necessary for industrial production. Thus, monetary policy became a determining feature of reconstruction, as Italy needed to achieve monetary stability in order to be able to acquire the necessary imports that would allow industry to increase production and become competitive in international markets.

The decision to establish an open economy was agreed upon by the leading orthodox economists. But the question of whether Italy would integrate into the budding European market was not decided until 1947-8 when the United States' Marshall Plan, and expulsion of the left parties from the government, ensured Italy's participation in the pro-West, Cold War bloc. Prior to those events, leading economists had continuously argued that the authoritarian and autarchic nature of government control experienced during the rule of fascism was a significant enough argument in favor of open trade (aside from the need for natural resources that made the "self-sufficiency" aims of Mussolini utterly absurd). The remarkable feature for the working class, in terms of trade policy, was the complete lack of influence by the left in affecting policy in a desirable

¹⁹ Much of this discussion draws from the introduction in Augusto Graziani's *L'economia italiana* (1972).

²⁰ For the problem of industrial recovery and production and its connection with monetary policy, see Bruno Foa's *Monetary Reconstruction in Italy* (1949).

manner. The left consistently failed to control industrial renewal and monetary policy, resulting in a greater control over the economy by business interests (Graziani 1972, 25). This was evident with respect to inflation and stabilization of the lira. The importance of these policy areas, Vittorio Foa notes, was that “behind the veil of monetary measures [were] hidden the decisive choices for the economic structure of the country” (1973, 435). In dealing with each question we will see how the bid for control over the determination of these policies established the essential premises for the expulsion of the left from government in May 1947.

Inflation plagued the Italian economy throughout postwar reconstruction. Both money and price inflation were central problems that led to difficulties in maintaining a favorable balance of payments for the necessary imports for industrialization that resulted in massive deficit spending by the government and disastrous devaluation of the lira in currency exchange markets. For example, the price index, taking 1938 as the basis, rose to 858 in 1944, but then exploded to 2060 in 1945 and 2884 in 1946 before almost doubling at 5159 in 1947 (Graziani 1972, 26-7). Initially the government responded by establishing rations of basic goods and supports for crucial necessities such as bread. But the question of how to solve the problem of inflation was mired in ideological battles over the role of the state in regulating the value of the lira in the National Council as the two important ministries, the Treasury and Finance, were in the hands of the Liberal Epicarmo Corbino and Communist Mauro Scoccimarro, respectively.

How to confront inflation was necessarily derived from an understanding of its causes. In the winter of 1945, Treasury Minister Scoccimarro proposed a plan aimed at eliminating, what he considered, an excessive amount of money in the economy. His plan

included a progressive government tax on monetary exchange in order to reduce the amount of money in circulation and give the government some control in redistributing money for reconstruction. The measure met opposition from the newly appointed Treasury Minister, the economist and Liberal Party member, Epicarmo Corbino. The latter was able to effect liberalization of currency exchange and served to prevent Scoccimarro's plan. The liberal economists saw the problem of inflation primarily in terms of government expenditure and thus were not apt to meddle with liquid currency (De Grand 1989, 103; Graziani 1972, 28-9).

The liberalization of the economy proceeded in another important direction, international exchange and the question of control over profits from exports. It will be recalled that most parties favored a form of free exchange; as Togliatti noted, Italy was not in an appropriate situation for control (1945, 331-4). But the left did want to control speculation, which was rampant after a boom in exports in 1945 (primarily in the textile sector). In March 1946, the assembly drafted a law on profits from exports that granted industry the free use of 50% of the foreign currency while the government would buy the other 50% at 125 lire per one dollar (Foa 1949, 48-54). As a result, the government ceded control of reconstruction to the private sector, vitiating the possibility for an effective use and distribution of funds for reconstruction (Ibid, 51). But inflation plagued the export sector throughout the fall of 1946 until September 1947 forcing a serious governing crisis that reached its zenith in May 1947.

The question of exchange rates and value of the lira were of particular concern in order to ensure economic reconstruction. As noted above, Italian industry was dependent on the importation of primary sources for industrialization. Under the Bretton Woods

system the Italian lira was pegged to the dollar. From the period of 1945 to 1949 the lira suffered serious devaluation as it went from a rate of 100 lire to the dollar to 625 lire to the dollar, reaching the outstanding low of 900 lire to the dollar in November 1947 (Sassoon 1986, 25). The continued weakening of the lira was part of a vicious cycle of deficit financing and inflation that threatened the economy in the early months of 1947, and that climaxed in the governing crisis of May 1947 and the deflationary policies led by Einaudi in September 1947.

In early 1947 both inflation and the exchange rate matters suffered rapid deterioration. Inflation throughout the first half of 1947 was at 50% and the value of the lira fell from 528 in January to 909 in June. The inability to resolve divisions between the Treasury and Finance Ministers was overcome in January when De Gasperi consolidated, as part of a reshuffling of the cabinet to reduce the influence of the PCI, the two ministries and appointed the position to DC member, Campilli. This was part of an increasing recognition by De Gasperi that he had to expel the left in order to enact the type of “tough internal measures” that the Americans demanded in turn for further aid. As an exclamation point on the utter failure of the parties of the left to control the process of reconstruction, De Gasperi, in a speech to the Council of Ministers on April 30, invoked the “fourth party” that needed to be part of the governing process. De Gasperi stated:

There is in Italy a fourth party other than the Christian Democrats, Communists and Socialists, which is capable of paralyzing and rendering vain every effort by organizing the sabotage of the national loan, the flight of capital, inflation and the diffusion of scandal campaigns. Experience has taught me that Italy cannot be governed today unless we bring into the government, in one form or the other, the representatives of this fourth party, which disposes of the nation’s wealth and economic power (in Sereni 1948, 27).

In order to confront economic problems, De Gasperi remained committed to leaving reconstruction in the hands of private initiative (which had been established throughout but was strengthened in March 1946 with the exchange control measures), he weakened the power of the left within the ministries, and began to promote a more intimate relationship with a technocratic apparatus capable of ensuring the interests of the “fourth party” in its attempt to control Italy’s run-away inflation and monetary problems.

Just weeks after his April 30th speech, De Gasperi resigned as President of the National Council; Italy’s economic problems had produced a veritable governing crisis. Perhaps the immediate cause of the crisis was the Communist’s refusal to go along with any new proposals put forth by De Gasperi. But a more likely scenario was that De Gasperi had been under pressure from the Vatican, the United States, and domestic industry and finance sectors to run the country without the PCI and the PSI (Harper 1986, 130-3).²¹ In any case, De Gasperi resigned on May 12 and the Constituent Assembly was unable to form a government until De Gasperi agreed to head a new government based on collaboration between the DC and a technocratic administration, with the exclusion of the PCI and PSI. On May 31, De Gasperi formed a new government that included two important appointments, Luigi Einaudi as Minister of the Budget (a newly created post) and Mario Scelba as Minister of Interior. The government passed a vote of confidence in June, establishing the parameters of governing power for the next 15 years.

Einaudi had previously been president of the Bank of Italy, and in the new government he assumed full control over the government’s expenditures. As head of the

²¹ The international climate and onset of the Cold War were important factors in these decisions, among which must be considered the coup in Czechoslovakia in February 1947, the enunciation of the Truman Doctrine in March, and the embryonic stages of the European Recovery Plan and the Marshall Plan.

newly created Budget Ministry, Einaudi confronted rampant inflation that approached a fifty percent rise in retail prices along with an increasingly devalued lira in the international exchange markets. His immediate duties were to stop and root out the inflationary problems in the economy, and to stabilize the lira, so that Italy could open the currency to free exchange as per its obligations as a member to the IMF (Italy joined the IMF in March 1947). Throughout the summer of 1947 the Budget, Finance, and Treasury Ministers, all seasoned economic liberals, formulated a plan of action that was fine-tuned with consultation by the commercial banks in August. The resulting agreement imposed credit controls targeted at reducing the amount of credit inflation in the economy with banks holding a dangerous amount of illiquid assets, backed by an increasingly “insolvent government” (Foa 1949, 120). The terms of the August 1947 agreement resulted in mandating banks to invest a determined (initially 15, leading to 25) percent of their total deposits in government securities.

Einaudi’s credit controls had far-reaching consequences: it was successful in halting inflation, it stabilized the dollar exchange, and put an end to widespread speculation in the stock market. But the credit controls also had a strong deflationary effect and produced an industry recession, cutting production by 20-25%, and damaged small business. But Einaudi’s intervention in the credit markets was a departure from his *laissez-faire* ideology and, as such, was at odds with the large industrial groups. The latter, represented by Confindustria, preferred to eliminate social spending as the appropriate policy to attack inflation. As we will see in more detail below, industrialists and big business were able to strike a series of measures to ensure their support for Einaudi’s deflationary policies, including the suppression of workers’ councils, the

freedom to fire workers, and full control over the workforce backed up with a “law and order” police force to suppress any protest by workers (Harper 1986, 138-9, 163).

The most telling consequence of Einaudi’s credit controls was to shift the responsibility for investment from the private sector to the government. As Bruno Foa wrote in his account of Italy’s postwar monetary policies, “an unexpected by-product of the policies of Governor Einaudi ... has been to increase the already large area of government power, and ultimate control, in the industrial field” (1949, 118). In order to finance large industry, the government was compelled to establish a special fund, the *Istituto Mobiliare Italiano*, to bolster heavy industry, particularly the ailing mechanical sector. In this way fascist industrial power was reinforced, as the IRI (*Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale*, Institute for Industrial Reconstruction), an industrial body created by Mussolini in 1933, became the principle base for industrial recovery and investment that served to revitalize Italian industry in the 1950s and 1960s. Thus, behind Einaudi’s credit controls we find the turn towards industrial reconstruction that favored large-scale corporate industry at the expense of small and medium businesses with the government assuming a central role in determining investment. This deflationary policy had the effect of producing a more general economic climate that crippled workers’ bargaining power, and when combined with the reassertion of the bosses’ demand for absolute freedom of control in the workplace, decimated the political power of the working class.

The weakening of workers’ power, from the high point of worker initiative at the end of the war, throughout the period of reconstruction was discussed above in terms of the failure of the PCI and PSI to utilize this militancy for real social and economic

reforms, favoring, instead, a strategy of electoral politics. This also marked the PCI's policy during the fall of 1947 leading to the election of April 1948. During the fall, Italian industry, as part of its general consent to Einaudi's credit deflation, launched an all-out campaign to eliminate workers' power in the workplace that coincided with De Gasperi's political attack on the organized working class and established an atmosphere that permitted the capitalist class to establish the basis for future capital accumulation. During the previous fall, the CGIL had agreed to a six-month wage truce, which was renewed in May 1947. With the onset of deflation in September, and industrial recession, unemployment rose to 1.6 million. Confindustria took advantage of this climate to launch an offensive and push for the right to fire workers, to eliminate the workers' councils (see above), and to co-opt the workers' Internal Commissions and turn them into instruments to regulate the workforce, in line with management's political goals (Morandi 1958, 232). Workers protested throughout the fall and winter, but they were put down by the Scelba's *carabinieri*²², and the working class was left to the electoral politics of the PCI.

The general election of April 1948 signified the defeat of the left and the installment of a Democratic Christian government that oversaw the transition from reconstruction to the economic development through the 1950s and early 1960s. In the build up to the election the DC initiated a split in the GCIL over worker protests, and communist influence in them, during the winter. The mass protests were widely viewed on the left as expressions of discontent that would transfer into an electoral victory for the PCI and PSI as they formed a Popular Front ticket on the ballot. But international

²² One of the more important features of Scelba's tenure as Interior Minister was his purging of former partisans from the *carabinieri* in the summer of 1947, which paved the way for the use of the police forces to suppress popular protest against the government's economic policies.

events—the February coup in Czechoslovakia, the announcement of the Marshall Plan, and the further intensification of the Cold War—did not augur well for the left-wing parties. The details of American influence in the campaign are well known, and it will suffice to note here that American intervention consisted of an extensive anti-communist propaganda campaign, timely injections of financial assistance to Italy’s ailing economy, continued threats to withdraw aid should the left win, weapons transfers to the *carabinieri*, contingent plans for military invasion, the denial of emigration to the US for communist members and supporters, and immense funding of the Christian Democrats (Harper 1986, 155). Internally the campaign by the right was marked by a Manichean battle between the forces of freedom against totalitarianism, but, crucially, support for the DC was linked to future aid from the United States. In essence, the election looked more like a referendum on Italy’s incorporation into the recently announced Marshall Plan and European Recovery Program. The left, for its part, was, in the words of Paride Rugafiori, “delusional” (1974, 93). Their campaign was dismissive of the Marshall Plan, and they grossly underestimated the support for it among those who were not politically active. Indeed, the “crucial factor,” as De Grand notes, was the lower-middle class vote in favor the DC and the prosperity associated with the United States and the Marshall Plan (1989, 114). The Christian Democrats won an outright majority with 48.5%, while the Popular Front won 31%, with the PCI earning the majority of the lefts’ votes (Ginsborg 1990, 118). The election confirmed Italy’s participation in Western European recovery and its alignment with the American-led capitalist bloc.

Italy’s inclusion in the European Recovery Program signaled the international context and course of its economic reconstruction. For the next five years Italian industry

underwent a process of restructuring in order to become internationally competitive, with the export sector designated as the engine of economic growth. This process was aided by the administrative competencies of a host of leaders from the fascist era, as well as an all out attack on workers' organization within the factory (Daneo 1975, 230). The bosses' counteroffensive was well underway in the immediate postwar period, as discussed above, but took on a renewed sense of purpose as De Gasperi advocated the inclusion of the "fourth party" while simultaneously pushing the left out of government. This appeared to be inevitable, as the PCI represented a basic obstacle to De Gasperi's vision of reconstruction, for which, "it was indispensable to have full confidence for the capability of free economic initiative at all levels, without discouraging efforts and investments" (Andreotti 1977, 82). This type of approach, while recognizable in the government's failure to affect any type of control over course of reconstruction before Einaudi's management of monetary policy, came into direct conflict with the hopes of social and economic reform maintained by the working class.

Through the unitary trade union, which operated on the basis of consent between the three main parties—DC, PCI, PSIUP/PSI, the working class was deprived of its political initiative as early as January 1945 when, at the CGIL's first national congress, it was agreed upon to have the power of contract centralized in the CGIL for all national categories of work. From this arrangement it was possible for the CGIL to not only connect the working class to the political problems of the national government, but also meant that the trade union negotiated all aspects of labor relations with trade groups, such as Confindustria, on a national basis, ultimately depriving local or provincial shops from the ability to effectively assert their particular demands (Foa 1975, 59-62). The

consequences of this arrangement became evident, as trade groups were able to rest considerable concessions from the union. We have seen above the overturning of the prohibition on firings, the negation of workers' participation through the watering down and ultimate removal of the management councils, and the wage-truce enacted during a time of rampant inflation (Fall 1946-Fall 1947). Moreover, trade groups were able to reinstall the system of piecework, and they established the *gabbie salariale*, which established wages scales according to industry, region, sex, skill, and age (Barkan 1984, 20-5).

After the defeat of the left in the April 18 elections, the situation for the working class was made increasingly tenuous. The unitary trade union fell apart in August 1948 as the Catholic factions left the CGIL in protest over the political nature of union activity by the Socialists and Communists. The DC had consistently held the view that the union should be concerned solely with the matters inside the workplace, in that they had rights in the workplace and that they could make statutory claims through contractual negotiations; in no manner should the union, according to the DC, make political strikes, or hinder the "free economic initiative" of capital. As political strikes mounted in the winter of 1947-8, the Catholic faction of the CGIL sought avenues for leaving the trade union, and, in August, after workers responded to the attempted assassination on Togliatti in July with massive protests and insurrections, the catholic faction split, putting an end to trade-union unity. The worker protests of July have been heralded as the last act of partisans in the factory (Foa 1973, 447). In the following years, working class militancy would be beaten asunder as industrialists began modernizing the production process by importing American technology under the guise of the Marshall Plan, and gearing

production needs toward the export markets of Europe, enhanced by the ongoing integration of European economies as part of the ERP. Now that the left had been removed from political power, it was time for the bosses to exercise the “principle of authority,” in Angel Costa’s words, and break any attempt at worker insubordination and impose its strategy for capital accumulation and market expansion.

The “hard years” and the politics of the “economic miracle”

The general elections of 1948 established the Christian Democrats as the governing body for the next 15 years. A series of factors interwove throughout this period that generated a climate conducive to the restoration of capitalist development and accumulation. We have seen above the control by liberal economists over the core governing ministries of the economy. Simultaneously, the Italian economy became positioned within an international setting that would give rise to the “golden age” of international trade, with Italy firmly entrenched in the budding stages of European economic integration that came out of the European Recovery Program (Marshall Plan). Moreover, the international economic climate was abetted by an increasingly polarized Cold War climate that provided an ideological cover for a domestic wave of anti-worker and anti-communist attacks. Thus, the Italian reconstruction and economic renewal of the 1950s was marked by an attack on workers and the left parties combined with state and private economic activity that generated a veritable revolution in Italian society over the course of the next generation.

It has been remarked that the period of the so-called “economic miracle” was premised on either “labor docility” or the relative low wages of Italian workers vis-à-vis other European nations (Wright 2002, 10; Barkan 1984, 37). But, as Sassoon argues,

these positions fail to account for the central role played by the State in investing in basic infrastructure that facilitated private sector expansion (1986).²³ To make things more clear, it is useful to distinguish between two phases: 1952-1958 as a preparatory phase marked by industrial restructuring and a “long and intense phase of capital accumulation and investment,” and the period of economic expansion—based on exportation, investment, and consumption—from 1958-1963 (Salvati 1984, 14).

The initial phase of industrial restructuring coincided with the beginning of the Marshall Plan and control over credit and investment funds by the IRI. The latter, by 1952, had vast control over the banking system, cast iron and iron mineral production, and armament production, along with significant holdings in engineering, electricity, and radio broadcasting sectors. But the primary role of IRI in this early phase was as a lender to private firms, and, to a lesser extent, as an investor in housing and public works programs (i.e., construction of the highway system, *autostrade*). The Marshall Plan was primarily responsible for providing Italian industry with advanced technology that began a sharp phase of modernization and investment in industrial plants. The upshot of the Marshall Plan was the intense application of Fordism to Italian industry. The construction of factories for the manufacturing of mass goods destined for mass consumer markets with workers performing a particular function within the overall product’s assembly, though widely applicable in industrial countries before WWII, was a new phenomenon to Italian industry (a consequence of this process, which will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter, was the mass deskilling of the work force, and the creation of structural mechanisms to incorporate the large mass of unemployed hand workers from

²³ For the role of the State in protecting the automotive sector, and Fiat’s monopoly, see Francesca Fauri’s “The Role of Fiat in the Development of the Italian Car Industry in the 1950’s” (1996).

the South). The restructuring of industries along Fordist lines was a widespread phenomenon for Italian industry, as they sought to reduce internal costs in the production process. However, the State played an essential role in the renewal of industrial production in this early phase by creating the bases for industrial production (Salvati 1984, 61).

The leading political parties, as noted above, were anathema to State planning and intervention in the economy. But, after the deflationary policies of Einaudi, state firms took a lead role in providing investment that, combined with Marshall Plan funds, led to the expansion of key economic sector.²⁴ In particular, the central growth areas of the 1950s were in the production of consumer durable goods and, later, luxury goods. The winners of this process were giant industrial firms that focused on the production of steel, automobiles, electricity, petrochemicals, oil refineries, and synthetic fibers. Within these sectors, the role of the State was evident, as noted above with the role played by the IRI. However, as Sassoon emphasizes, the key moment occurred, in February 1953, with the creation of Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi (ENI) as a State industry controlling newly discovered methane gas in the Po Valley. With the creation of the ENI, headed by Enrico Mattei, the State became an “authentic” participant in industrialization. In fact, ENI became a dominant actor in national investment accounting for as much as one-third of all investment by 1964. Through the establishment of state industries that could guarantee investment, the state-industrial sector, Sassoon writes, “succeeded in establishing those industrial infrastructures (cheap steel, cheap petrochemicals, a motorway system, cheap energy) which allowed rapid Italian economic growth” (1986, 41). Thus, economic

²⁴ Regarding the role of Marshall Plan funds and targeted industrial development, Joanne Barkan notes that “[b]etween 1948 and 1951, 70 percent of the plan’s loans went to the metallurgical, chemical, electrical, and mechanical industries” (1984, 37).

growth was directly influenced by large investments from the State sector and the introduction of additional funding and technological transfers by the Marshall Plan (Martinelli 1980).

However, low wages, combined with the structural underpinnings of high unemployment and a “decimated working class,” to use Morandi’s expression in 1947, were also factors in the economic development of the 1950s. Since the end of the war, Italy had been characterized by high rates of unemployment, hovering around nine percent throughout the early 1950s. The process of industrial restructuring only worsened the situation as firings exceeded the generation of new jobs. However, the introduction of Fordist production allowed for a significant influx of unskilled agricultural workers from the South into Northern industry, where industrial renewal was largely concentrated. But, this high unemployment had the predictable effect keeping workers’ wages relatively low. Indeed, wages were largely stagnant throughout the 1950s, with the exceptional year of 1955 (Salvati 1984, 48). The ability to suppress wages while production increased was affected not only by unemployment, but also by an all out attack on the working class by the Italian business class and their political allies (see below). But a more general policy of wage suppression had been the unwillingness of the governing parties to industrialize the South, thus leaving the persistent dualism that characterized the division between North and South. Rather, policy was crafted to utilize the poor and unemployed in the South as a reserve army of labor to break the political power of workers in the North (Sassoon 1981, 36; Partridge 1996; Ginsborg 1990, 217-33). Low wages, however, were not only the product of masses of unemployed, but of the general weakening of the working class throughout the 1950s.

The 1950s are known in Italian working class history as *gli anni duri* (the hard years), for the decimation of workers' power that took place in the factories. The previous sections have illustrated the broader class war in the immediate postwar period, but with the expulsion of the left from government, the onset of the Cold War, and the deflationary policies of Einaudi, business leaders found themselves in an advantageous position to wipe out the vestiges of worker gains from the Resistance and realize their control over the work force. Indeed, the basic premise of the bosses' vision of reconstruction was based on the idea of absolute liberty in the workplace. Further, with the rejection of fascist autarchy and integration into international markets, it was necessary to restructure Italian production in order to compete.

The immediate target, as alluded to above, of the bosses' attack was the ban on layoffs and the need to fire redundant workers. The fall of 1947 marked the beginnings of mass firings in northern industry (c. 50-60,000 in Milan and 30-40,000 in Genoa), and were met with worker protests, which were met by the heavy repression of Interior Minister Scelba's police as bloody encounters with law enforcement became a standard spectacle in the early 1950s. This police-state atmosphere led Camillo Daneo to remark that by the "winter of 1947-48, the Interior Minister and the police became instruments of political economy" (1975, 244). The trend was established, and during the next six years an estimated 75 protesters were killed and more than 5,000 wounded protesting economic conditions and government policy (Barkan 1984, 46). Thus, the bosses quickly established their right to fire, which was aided by the suppression of strike actions and public protests by the forces of law and order.

Within the workplace, bosses attacked workers' representative bodies, as well as launched an all out offensive against militant workers. Since strikes were being repressed, workers began occupying factories to prevent mass firings. The bosses' responded with a compromise—workers would be suspended or offered a voluntary leave package (with the likely occurrence that the workers would be fired at a later date.) But the process of occupation led to an identification of militants who were then the direct target of persecution. The case of Fiat is demonstrative of the established pattern to punish militants. Under the leadership of Vittorio Valletta, Fiat began transferring militant workers to isolated sections of the factories. More drastic measures were soon enacted which included a general attack on the workers' Internal Commissions. Militants on the commissions were targeted for firing, and in the early 1950s, thousands of CGIL members on the commissions were fired. The bosses were buttressed by the American position aimed at eliminating all communists from the commissions (Partridge 1986, 74). But the general activity of the Internal Commissions was also significantly curtailed: delegates were prevented from walking around the factory floor during work hours, they were prevented from posting any material about their activities, and management stopped consulting with the commissions. The climate was draconian. For example, all literature was banned from the factory (Accornero 1974, 28-36). Franco Platania, who worked at Fiat during the 1950s, captured the mood of the period:

[y]ou were forced to be an individualist in that period. As the days went by, you found that you were losing your workmates, the comrades who could have helped you out.... [There was] permanent control of your private life: they [the security guards] watched you if you were talking with a mate; they checked how much time you spent in the toilet; who you talked with; how you dressed, etc. Needless to say, there were a whole number of individual acts of rebellion... (Red Notes 1979, 174-5).

Indeed, with security forces patrolling the shop floor, and repression continuing apace, it appeared that, substantively, little had changed from the years of fascism.

The trade union movement did little to help the situation. In the late 1940s trade union unity gave way to the political factions of the Cold War. Aided by the United States and the Vatican, the Christian Democrats broke from the CGIL leading to the formation, on April 30, 1950, of the CISL. Their vision of trade unionism was based on a non-political role of putting forward basic wage claims (i.e., linking wages to productivity and profit) that could aid capital accumulation as a means for increasing domestic demand. Simultaneously, the Union of Italian Workers (UIL) was established (March 5, 1950) as a means of promoting a middle ground between the perceived government union (CISL) and communist faction (CGIL). For its part, the CGIL remained dominated by the PCI and also retained the largest following of workers. However, their political role continuously emphasized and reflected the international political situation of the communist movement as defined by the 1947 Cominform. Thus, throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s, the CGIL launched political strikes against the Marshall Plan, Nato, the Korean War, and the general struggle for “peaceful coexistence.”²⁵

The split in the trade union movement did not represent a genuine shift in ideological vision, but rather was a direct reflection of power politics among the leading political parties. Hence, all of the unions remained in agreement on the need for

²⁵ The exception to this characterization, of course, was the mass campaign launched by the CGIL against the so-called *legga truffa* (“swindle law”). The governing DC coalition, in anticipation of the 1953 general elections, introduced a law that would give two-thirds of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies to any coalition that won more than 50 percent plus one of the national election.

production as the basis of workers politics (particularly short-sighted was the Communist position that emphasized the transition to socialism through the expansion of productivity, neglecting any understanding of workers' control as central to the socialist project²⁶) [Partridge 1996, 77]. Rather, the main concern of the three unions was that of competing for the bosses' favor as workers' representatives, seeking to defend the workers' place within the hierarchical framework and disciplinary structure of capitalist control in the workplace. The bases of this defense, which would last well into the project of *operaismo* in the early 1960s, were the Constitutional provisions that stipulated the rights of labor. However, after the Court of Cassation ruling in January 1948, these provisions remained dead in practice as no formal labor relations system was established (Duggan 1995). The only mechanism for defending workers' rights was protest, which, as we have seen, was violently suppressed. The consequence of this situation for the trade unions resulted in electoral competition for control of the internal commissions as part of the supine role of acquiring representative legitimacy by the bosses.

In the climate of the Cold War, elections for the Internal Commissions took on epic proportions. The historic moment of the CGIL's loss of control over the internal commission at Fiat in 1955 offers a telling example. In months before the election, management began an intense propaganda campaign combined with overt threats to anyone who might support the CGIL. Company guards were widely known to have conducted surveillance in working class quarters and to have monitored activity at the local FIOM headquarters, the metal-mechanics union. Further, the established routine of worker transfers and so-called "exile departments" was intensified. Last, political firings

²⁶ Connected to the productivist ethic that underpinned the Communist position, was their view, held until the late 1950s, that the Italian economy would not recover or expand, thus leaving the working class as the "solution" to a degenerating economy (Daneo 1975, 320).

in the preceding year were unprecedented, with the CGIL reporting around 1,800 militants and Internal Commission members fired (Barkan 1984, 45). The election was devastating for the CGIL, as it lost its position in the commissions, and workers defected *en masse* from the union. But the campaign was only one cause, and certainly not the determining factor. A more comprehensive understanding of the CGIL loss was the fact that the union had become a *cinghia di trasmissione*, a “transmission belt,”²⁷ for PCI politics. The electoral defeat was a wake-up call for the CGIL as it confronted the stark realization that its neglect of worker concerns at the plant level had manifested itself in a loss of clout among the workers. In short, and as will be further developed in the next chapter, the 1955 loss of control in the Internal Commissions by the CGIL sparked a turn toward the factory within the trade union movement, which, after a few years of left-wing political tumult, would coincide with the sociological project of workers’ inquiry that would spark a new wave of worker militancy.

Thus, the combination of State industry, Marshall Plan aid, investment in technological restructuring of production and plants, and decimation of workers’ power, provided the essential foundations for the massive expansion of productive activity during the years 1958-1963. The so-called “economic miracle” radically changed Italian society, producing a rupture with past modes of being that set off a period of intellectual and cultural ferment unparalleled in the country’s history. Not only had Italy entered a Fordist-consumerist phase of economic production, which, with a doubling of the national income between 1954 and 1964, brought consumer durable goods into homes (i.e., televisions, automobiles, refrigerators). The immediate industrial context was that

²⁷ The phrase “transmission belt” was utilized to indicate the process by which decisions made within the hierarchy of the PCI would be put to the CGIL as the basis for its union activity.

the Italian economy became a leading exporter in key industrial sectors that were able to exploit the international market established by the European Common Market. The expansion of exports fed a doubling of investment (an average of 14% a years) in new machines and technology and the construction of industrial plants.

In his book, *Storia del miracolo italiano*, Guido Crainz writes: “in Italy more than in other European countries old aspirations and elementary existence began to realize itself at the same time an explosion of new consumption and needs began occurring” (1996, 88). In a concrete manner, this was represented by the massive internal migration of southerners to the industrial North. But there was a more fundamental shift at play in the psychological outlook of the country. The rampant pessimism and fear that shaped people’s views in the early 1950s gave way to optimism, a desperate and radical hope that sought the possibility to attain a better condition of life. For the working class, and the left in general, the cultural and intellectual ground took another dramatic shift with the events of 1956 giving way to an intense period of self-criticism and creative experimentation. In the next chapter we will see how the intellectual ferment of the Destalinization period gave rise to a renewed democratic push from the working class and how theoretical innovation sought to influence this movement with a critique of postwar capitalism that became conceptualized as the “social factory.” As the postwar years demonstrated a failure to realize the more democratic goals of the Resistance, the period that began with the “economic miracle” witnessed an attempt to revitalize those ideas in a new historic moment.

CHAPTER 2

THE CRISIS OF 1956 AND THE BIRTH OF AUTONOMOUS MARXISM: RANIERO

PANZIERI AND THE ORIGINS OF *QUADERNI ROSSI*

In these months, almost alone, we asked that the results of the XX Congress and the Khrushchev report be discussed together by the militants of the two parties, and in the meantime by the intellectuals of the two parties and by those intellectuals that will make a return to Marxism. Otherwise, we will have had, as we have had, silence.—Franco Fortini, “Letter to a communist”

We need to fully recognize the urgency and necessity of a critical presence, of a scientific work, of a new stimulation and scientific equipping of the workers’ movement, in its politics and in its culture.... This means, substantially, a “return to Marx,” ... as a “critique of ideology,” as the demystification of every ideological, political, and sociological absolutism, as free research and free scientific development; his vigorous force of emancipation or of liberation needs to be recovered today.—Raniero Panzieri, “Politics and culture”

While the call to Marxism is becoming for the most part (from right to left) a cover for an ideological emptiness without precedent, and Leninism as an occasion to make citations, revolutionary theory needs to be constructed from the base, in praxis and in social analysis.—Danilo Montaldi, “Sociology of a Congress”

Introduction

The facts of 1956 fundamentally altered the course of the Italian left. The “hard years” of the 1950s were characterized by a defensive workers’ movement and a stale and bureaucratic left-wing politics, culminating in the events of 1956—the XX Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the Polish workers’ uprising in Poznan, and the Hungarian Revolution—which provided the conditions for a wave of self-criticism and a vibrant intellectual debate over the nature of socialism and communism in the postwar order. In this chapter, I examine the central tendency that emerges from this rupture within the theoretical and political activity of Raniero Panzieri, whose vision and energy focused on elaborating a way out of the cultural rigidity and moral and political degeneration that the left had become embroiled in during the course of postwar reconstruction. Panzieri focused his attention on generating an autonomous culture of the

left as an alternative to the bureaucratic and authoritarian politics of both Stalinism and revisionism (i.e., social democracy). In his alternative, the working class was the central political subject that could guarantee the generation of autonomous base institutions, which would expand in tandem with worker militancy and consciousness. This vision began to take full shape in the “workers’ control thesis” (1958), a small classic co-authored with Lucio Libertini, which is usually the starting point for discussions of Panzieri’s thought, thus his close association with the tradition of *operaismo*.²⁸ The purpose of this chapter, however, is to shed light on Panzieri’s *operaismo* as one component of a more elaborate explanation of working class culture and political action within that culture. This chapter demonstrates the rise of an autonomous left that emerged out of the events of 1956 and culminated in the experience and theoretical work of the journal Quaderni Rossi (Red Notebooks). And while this journal marks the beginning of a new tradition of *operaismo*, or of the “new left,” its real value resided in Panzieri’s original vision of it as a cultural “point of reference” dedicated to the renewal of the workers’ movement.

²⁸ With regards to the term *operaismo*: I leave it in Italian for the most part, at times substituting the lesser term “workerism”; for the most part the term is used interchangeably throughout the dissertation with “autonomous Marxism.” For the connection with Panzieri and the “new left,” see (Revelli 2005, 7-8; Balestrini and Moroni 1988). One of the purposes of the publication of Panzieri’s early writings in *L’alternativa socialista* and *Dopo Stalin* was to demonstrate the shortcomings of this view of Panzieri read only through the birth of the “New Left” (1982; 1986; Merli 1986, vii). Ironically, the term *operaismo* was attributed to Panzieri as a pejorative remark, that derived from the PCI in the postwar year to describe those members who wanted to work where workers were the dominant force, against his writings on workers’ control and autonomous cultural and political institutions (Ferrero 2005, 157). Nonetheless, Panzieri clearly distanced himself against the claim of being an *operaista* (Panzieri and Libertini 1958b, 160). From within the Autonomist Marxist movement, Massimo Cacciari claimed Panzieri was not an “operaista” because he did not theorize the priority of the political and historical movements of the working class (Mangano 1992, 101). See chapter 4 and Mario Tronti’s “Copernican revolution.”

1956: towards an autonomous working class culture?

Reflecting on the tumultuous events of 1956, Mario Tronti, a life-long member of the PCI, stated: “[they] allowed for a great mental opening” (2001, 1). At the nadir of left-wing power in postwar Italy, the process of Destalinization and the sobering experiences of Poland and Hungary broke the mold from which the PCI and PSI had shaped left-wing culture. In this period, the culture of the left focused on electoral politics, class alliances, a renewal of the South as necessary to completing bourgeois democracy, an intellectual apparatus subservient to the party’s strategic needs, and unconditional support for the Soviet Union in the Cold War. Togliatti’s caustic remark that culture should contain the “imprint of the party” captures the party’s suffocation of culture in the 1950s (Merli 1986 xxvii-xxviii). As we saw in the first chapter, Togliatti and the PCI defined the workers’ role in the “Italian Way to Socialism” in Third Internationalist terms: workers were to produce and be part of the advancement of productive forces, technologically and organizationally, and were, as such, the guarantors of economic development, which, at some point, would lead toward socialism. The chief enemies of the postwar PCI vision were the monopolists, who were posited as the backbone of the “long fascist nightmare,” and, by nature, incapable of effecting economic development. By the mid-to-late 1950s this interpretation was widely viewed as incorrect: monopolies, such as Fiat, proved to be the dynamic engines of economic growth and cultural transformation. This failure to understand the economic dynamics underway, along with a complete lack of understanding of the transformations taking place in the productive process and its effects

on the working class, came sharply into focus as the events of 1956 exposed the shortcomings of the PCI's party-dominated culture.

In his "secret speech" to the CPSU during the XX Congress, Khrushchev denounced Stalin's "cult of personality" and the crimes committed by Stalin against Communist Party comrades. In Italy, the Congress produced the usual discussions and analysis of Soviet affairs, but the secret report was virtually unknown (Nenni 1956; Panzieri 1956a). Throughout the spring, Togliatti and the PCI sought to avoid any discussion of the denunciation, preferring to focus on positive themes—the Italian Way to Socialism and the Gramscian heritage—in preparation for the elections that were held in late May. In fact, the only discussion of Stalin within the PCI took place in late March among the Party's leadership, and this discussion was highly censored and controlled by Togliatti. Meanwhile, the report was leaked to the Western press and seized by anti-communist propagandists to extol the citizenry about the evils of communism. The long silence of the PCI was breached when, in early June, the United States Government published a copy of the report, leaving little doubt about the fact of Khrushchev's denunciation. With the May elections behind and the "secret speech" published, Togliatti was obliged to offer his remarks and understanding of the significance of the XX Congress.

Togliatti's formal response was published in the June 17th issue of Nuovi Argomenti ("New Arguments") in an essay entitled, "9 domande sullo Stalinismo" (9 questions on Stalinism). In his assessment, Togliatti executed a political tract that defended the greatness of the Soviet Union as the home and leader of the international communist movement, as the leading democracy in the world (a theme widely held in the

left's postwar culture), and he also put forward his notion of "polycentrism" as the way forward for the national communist parties and the international movement. It is noteworthy that Togliatti chose to speak of Stalin's "errors" rather than crimes. The principal "errors" of Stalin consisted in the systematic "illegality" of the leadership. The resulting "negative errors" and their effects, Togliatti noted, did not displace the fundamental superiority of the Soviet model of democracy vis-à-vis the Western bourgeois democracies. In fact, he lauded Khrushchev's report as an exemplary feature of the Soviet leadership's commitment to expanding the already existing democratic features of their society (1956, 114, 116). Togliatti's chief criticism of the report, which set the PCI apart from its Western counterparts, was aimed at the misleading criticism of the "cult of personality" as responsible for the "errors" that had occurred. By focusing on the attributes of one individual man, Togliatti wrote, "they avoid the true problems, which reside in the ways that, and why, soviet society was able to reach a certain form of departure from the democratic and legal path that they were following." To amend this situation, and to ensure that these "errors" did not arise again, Togliatti called for the Soviets to study and understand how these "errors" arose through "the diverse stages of development of their society," and not rely on the spurious claims that attributed this "degeneration" to the acts of an individual man (Ibid, 126).

Despite this criticism of Khrushchev's report, Togliatti remained faithful to the role of the party as the capable arbiter of judgment and director of political action. This is evident from a variety of points, but this same article suffices. First, his prescriptions for the renewal of Soviet society depended on the emanation of a "critical energy from the top," in order to *instruct* the masses about how to live in a democratic society. Second,

the international communist movement needed to maintain an “unlimited trust in the Soviet Communist Party and their leaders.” Indeed, so depraved had the PCI become in its logic of party dominance and electoral politics, that this “trust” was the highest form of “revolutionary activity” that the working class could perform during this period (Ibid, 132). Thus, the nature of “democratic” renewal from Togliatti’s perspective resided, not in any new form of participation, or engagement by the base of the party, never mind from the workers, but was based on a top-down model with the initiative coming from the top, the leadership of the party. Within the international communist movement he articulated an unbound faith in the Soviet Union, but introduced a break with the prevailing Cominform politics. In the last section of the article, Togliatti introduced the concept of “polycentrism” as the correct path to follow, against the idea of Soviet leadership and guidance: “in the communist system one cannot speak of a unique guide, but of a progress that often works by following diverse paths” (Ibid, 139). The international communist movement, for Togliatti, needed to be autonomous from the USSR while retaining its essential faith in, and historic respect for, the soviet model. Through this interpretation of the XX Congress, Togliatti sought to maintain an historic continuity of the international communist movement based on the central role of the Russian Communist Party as a guide, albeit given a certain measure of autonomy to the national parties of the communist movement. However, the subsequent events in Poland and Hungary gave lie to this polycentric vision.

Togliatti’s conception of democratic renewal after 1956 is best described as a polycentric model based on party domination of the communist movements in their respective countries. In effect, he renounced the Soviet Union’s role as leader and guide

of the international communist movement, but supported and upheld the system of party rule in the diverse national communist movements. The type of “renewal” that Togliatti envisioned was aptly demonstrated in the PCI’s position with regard to the Polish workers’ uprising of June 1956 and the Hungarian Revolution of October-November 1956 and subsequent Soviet invasion. In both cases the PCI supported the official Soviet line: in the Poznan incident, Togliatti published his infamous article, “La presenza del nemico” (“The presence of the enemy”), in which he insidiously proclaimed the Polish workers were agents of the capitalist West; in the case of Hungary, the workers were judged as being “outside the ambit of socialism” (Togliatti 1956a; Ajello 1979, 389-90; Settembrini 1960, 1745). In Hungary, the PCI placed blame on the errors of the Hungarian leaders and the mistaken views of the Hungarian workers. Here, again, the principle that the party was the final arbiter of socialism was brazenly expressed to their Italian comrades: Togliatti warned his readers in an editorial in “L’Unità” that they should not be confused by the fact that it was the workers who were revolting because “the workers are not always right” (Settembrini 1960, 1745). In the end, Togliatti’s analysis of the XX Congress, and subsequent faith in the continuity of an authoritarian, party-dominated communist movement, demonstrated quite clearly how little had changed within the PCI.

Within the left there were other elements that saw in the XX Congress, and events of 1956, not a process of continuity, but the substance of a veritable rupture. A myriad of small reviews—*Ragionamenti* (Arguments), *Passato e presente* (Past and present), *Opinione* (Opinion), and *Mondo Nuovo* (New World)—became the center of lively exchanges that dealt with the left’s lack of democracy, and, in particular, the need for an

autonomous left-wing culture to effect a democratic shift away from what was widely perceived as a political movement dominated by an administrative bureaucracy that concentrated power within a small group of leaders and exercised control over cultural production in order to ensure that the political line was upheld (Mangano 1992). In this vein we find the poet, literary critique, and prose writer, Franco Fortini who, in his “Lettera a un comunista” (Letter to a communist), asked: where in the left is the “democratic spirit, the refusal of Stalinist teleology, the refusal of democratic centralism, and of the magical-ceremonial practice of communism” (1973, 292)? For Fortini, 1956 signified a “qualitative leap in the history of communism” that could only be positively realized if workers stopped deferring to the “prerogative of the party,” with all of its illusions and mystifications of reality (Ibid, 297). What was needed, according to Fortini, was an open dialogue and action from the base constituted as a process of “invention, by men and women, of reestablishing and recreating institutions” of the left. In contrast to the party dominated model, the left needed to redefine their communications, their production of knowledge, and the modes in which decisions were made (Ibid, 298). This process could only take place if the intellectual climate became disassociated with the customary practice of the left-wing parties. Yet, Fortini was unable to offer a vision that did not risk marginalization, which would have rendered the work of renewal as the project of a small isolated group of intellectuals (Mangano 1992, 25-30).

Panzieri’s exit from Stalinism

Perhaps more than any other actor of the period, Raniero Panzieri constructed a positive way forward for a left culture that was based on direct democracy, autonomous cultural institutions, and workers’ control. For Panzieri, 1956 marked a rupture with the politics

of the Third International where the working class movement was viewed as a subsidiary to party politics. His analysis sought to maintain a continuity of the international workers' movement based on a rereading of Marxism that highlighted the tradition of the Gramsci of "L'Ordine Nuovo," the Lenin of *State and Revolution*, Luxemburg on democracy within socialism, and Rodolfo Morandi's class politics (Merli 1986 xxxiv; Mancini 1977, ch.1). For Panzieri, the workers' council tradition represented an example of workers' direct democracy, organized and informed from the bottom-up through the practice of the workers' struggle. Moreover, he thought that this general position was the only plausible basis for continuity in the international workers' movement after 1956. That is, only the working class was capable of its own liberation and, given the historical moment under investigation, only the working class was capable of being the basis of a revolutionary transformation from capitalism to socialism.

Raniero Panzieri was born in Rome to Jewish parents in 1921. After the fall of Mussolini and the onset of the German occupation, he went into hiding with other youths. During this period, 1943, he had his first encounter with reading Marx, which prompted him to join the PSIUP (Italian Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity) and, by 1946, upon the request of Rodolfo Morandi, he became the secretary at the *Istituto di Studi Socialisti* (Institute of Socialist Studies), as well as copy editor of the journal Socialismo (Socialism).²⁹ He continued to work at the ISS editing journals—Bolletino dell'Istituto di studi socialisti (the Bulletin of the Institute of Socialist Studies), Studi Socialista (Socialist Studies)—until 1948 when the Institute was dissolved, following the Saragat

²⁹ During this period Panzieri was introduced to reading Marx, Marxism, and the workers' movement outside of the orbit of Stalinism. It was this experience that led to the translation of several of Marx's works, primarily during the 1950s, by Panzieri and his wife, Giuseppina, who was a prolific translator of German works into Italian (Merli 1987, IX).

split of the previous year. At the bequest of Marxist intellectual Galvano Della Volpe³⁰, Panzieri and his wife, Giuseppina “Pucci” Saija, moved to Messina, Sicily where he began a teaching position that lasted three years. His years in Sicily marked the beginning of his active engagement in politics, as he often took part in peasant’s struggles and occupations of land. From this activity, Panzieri assumed the role of political militant and activist. But his work was not the kind of detached intellectual who goes to the workers to rouse them to action³¹; rather, he viewed himself as an active participant within an already existing political struggle. It was also in the South that he met Danilo Montaldi, who figured important for, among other things, his emphasis on sociological investigations of the base as the “place where the political problems are seen in terms of daily struggle” (Montaldi 1956, 31).³² But Panzieri, unlike Montaldi, who remained committed to the margins of the workers’ movement and the political struggle, soon rose in the PSI, as he was nominated to the Central Committee in 1953 for the Committee on the Press and Propaganda. During the next couple of years he focused on the question of how to develop a free cultural within the Italian left.

Panzieri’s nomination to the Central Committee of the PSI as head of Press and Propaganda allowed him to attain a forum through which to articulate his ideas on culture and its relation to politics. It was in this relationship between culture and politics that the

³⁰ See below for discussion of Della Volpe and his influence on Quaderni Rossi and their readings of Marx.

³¹ For example, see Mario Monicelli’s *i compagni* (“The Organizer” US title), which portrays the role of Professor Sinigaglia (played by Marcello Mastroianni) as an “external” intellectual rousing and exhorting the workers to strike and take control in the workplace (1963).

³² Romano Alquati, sociologist and self-described “accidental Marxist,” and a major figure in the Quaderni Rossi group and others, praised Montaldi’s work for resolutely developing the methodological tool appropriate for the renewal of the left (Alquati 2002, 2; Merli 1977, 48).

scholarship on Panzieri as an *operaista* (“workerist”) misses the central point that, for Panzieri, a free culture was essential to the realization of a democratic socialism. By a free culture, Panzieri was concerned with the development of institutions within the left that carried forward the tradition of Marxism as a theory of “permanent critique,” that, by the mid-1950s, simply did not exist in the culture of the Italian left (Panzieri 1957a, 47).

Before considering Panzieri’s position, I want to briefly describe the official left culture that was the target of his critique. The left, Panzieri argued, was dominated by party politics. One of the effects of party domination (what he called the “party-guide”) was the abandonment, in the workers’ movement, of the class struggle. But not only had the left abandoned class struggle (i.e., under the guise of “peaceful coexistence”), they had also dominated the entire workers’ culture, including the trade unions, who were largely “transmission belts” for party politics. Moreover, given the focus on party politics and a top-down culture, neither the political parties nor the trade unions possessed any understanding of the workers’ daily conditions and political problems (Accornero 1974, 39). Rather, the trade unions had become politicized by the politicians’ ideological Cold War battles, with the result that the more “moderate” CISL and UIL had become competitors for the bosses’ favor and recognition, thereby achieving the highest form of collaboration, akin to the Fascist monopoly on trade unions that resulted from the “Pact of Palazzo Vidoni” which solidified Fascist-Confindustria control over the direction of the economy (Bonaccini 1974, 47). Thus, with the entrance of the Cold War climate into the trade union movement, a logic of party politics subsumed any conception of “class struggle” or a “class politics” beyond that of what Fortini called the “magical ceremonial” display. But, as chapter one sought to establish, the dominant sectors in the

PCI and, to a lesser extent, in the PSI were more than content to render class struggle subservient to the needs of electoral politics. When the rupture of 1956 occurred there existed the very real threat that this tendency within the postwar left would fall into the politics of social democracy and reformism, or a defense of the tired and condemned Stalinist line.

For Panzieri, the events of 1956 produced a qualitative rupture. His fear on the morrow of these revelations was that the left would become fractured between those who, being afraid to move forward, pushed toward Social Democracy and those who remained wedded to the “allure of the formal coherence of the old system” (Panzieri 1956, 62-4). Neither of these positions was desirable to Panzieri. The Stalinist vision condemned man to the logic of history, which, given the “science” of the Party and its revealed teleological view of mankind’s “historic role,” established a system of “forced production,” that, contrary to liberating man, had enslaved him to the so-called historical forces of production. The XX Congress and events in Poland and Hungary clearly demonstrated, for Panzieri, the “dogmatic and oppressive ideology,” of Stalinism and its residues, what Panzieri would describe as the “Party-guide” in subsequent years. On the other hand, the turn toward social democracy, largely influenced by the ideas of writings on technocratic management derived from intellectuals in the United States and “New Deal” politics, which was being executed within the leadership of the PSI, signified the abandonment of the traditional values of the working class movement. Indeed, one of the basic propositions of what was described as “neo-capitalism” propagated the rejection of class conflict as necessary to capitalism. The alternative that Panzieri constructed combined the class politics of Morandi that emphasized the working class as the

constructive agent of socialism, with emphasis on direct democracy in the workplace and community, a critical renewal of Marxist theory and practice, and a “free culture.”

Panzieri’s way out of Stalinism, and for a renewal of democratic socialism, resided in the crucially important relationship between culture and politics. In two early pieces Panzieri explained how an “autonomous culture” related to the renewal of a working class politics—an article “una discussione redazionale sui problemi attuali della cultura marxista in Italia” (An editorial discussion on the current problems of Marxist culture in Italy), and in an unedited contribution to a debate within the PSI on the themes of political action and culture (1956b; 1957a). The question of culture, Panzieri premised, was fundamentally concerned with practical matters; as such, he was not concerned with the formation of cultural organizations as appendages of a political party executing propaganda to regulate or direct the masses. Rather, the proper role of culture was in the establishment of a critical presence within the political practice of the class. In order to realize this, Panzieri emphasized, drawing on his experience in Sicily, the need for cultural work that took place within, and derived from, the class movement (1956b, 38, 40). Only in this manner could the working class develop itself as a leading national power. Anticipating oral history, and workerist historiography of the 1970s, in Italy, Panzieri exalted the need to “critically reconstruct the history of the workers’ movement in these years, in a way to correct, objectively and internally, the errors and to propose and realize the new problems posed to the movement” (1956b, 40).

The “errors” Panzieri was referring to derived from the domination of culture by the political parties. Through the use of the class as a “tactical instrument” the left-wing parties had reduced the cultural significance of the workers’ movement to abstract

ideological slogans that served the “bureaucratic direction” of left-wing politics. One effect of this “dogmatic closure” of culture, Panzieri wrote, was the utter weakness and backwardness of the workers’ movement in relation to the economic and social transformations in postwar Italian capitalism (a critique shared by the leadership in the CGIL in the aftermath of their loss at Fiat) [Panzieri 1957a, 43-5; Accornero 1974, 32]. Drawing on the legacy of Gramsci, Panzieri offered a proposition for cultural production that was strikingly similar to Fortini’s call for new institutions. The framework for this cultural production was based on the shared desire of effecting a revolutionary transformation of democratic society—as distinct from the tradition of revolutionary “rupture,” or what we might call “apocalyptic Marxism,” which views violence and dictatorship as necessary for socialism—developed by the cultural and scientific dominance of society by the working class and carried out within the existing structures of capitalist society (Panzieri 1957a, 46). Through this recapturing of the “thought of Gramsci in his originality,” Panzieri sought to elaborate a way out of Stalinism, from the left, that could realize the revolutionary potential inherent in the tradition of the Italian workers’ movement (1956, 64). The central node of Panzieri’s claim resided in his advocacy of the capturing of scientific knowledge as the key to avoiding bureaucratic control and a turn towards “old reformism.” He wrote: “only if the action of the class in itself is permeated by this concrete capacity of scientific and practical dominion, in its instruments, in its institutions, in its daily action, and in its struggle” could the working class avoid reformism (1957a, 46). But as long as party politics dominated the left culture, the capacity for the working class itself to become the active subject of a political knowledge and practice remained limited.

Not only did Panzieri's "autonomous culture" reject the "party-guide", but he generalized the separation between strategy and culture by making clear that the production of culture within the left should not parallel in any concrete manner the various political alignments within the left. Rather, cultural production should assume a collective character bound by the core value and desire of promoting the "unity of Marxist culture" (Ibid, 50). Moreover, the collective culture could not be bound by the old culture, but needed to strike up new themes of inquiry (i.e., research in psychology and sociology), construct a renewal of the structures of culture, and obtain an "authentic presence" in the workers' movement (see below). This cultural schema marked an important turn toward the placement of cultural solutions in parallel with the "solution of economic problems." In short, economic problems could only be solved by concurrently dealing with the problems of culture as an essential component of the "material structures" of society (Ibid, 54). Anticipating the "social factory" analysis, and its appropriation in the student and university struggles later on, Panzieri placed attention on the educational institutions as crucial elements of cultural development. But while he laid out a framework for an autonomous culture as necessary to the democratic renewal of the left and expanded this conception to the "material structures" of the schools he focused his political energies within the working class movement. We turn to this focus, now, in order to highlight the ways in which Panzieri sought to renew the workers' movement and affirm its historic continuity against the decay of Stalinism and party-domination and, in particular, to demonstrate the connection between workers' autonomy as political practice and cultural research, which was key to Panzieri's work, and to see how this

nexus was understood within the particular “material structures” of the productive apparatus.

In his reflections on the rise of *operaismo* Antonio Negri explained its genesis out of the crisis of the workers’ movement of the 1950s (2007, 36). Much of my discussion thus far agrees with this interpretation. However, in failing to clarify what the actual “crisis” was, Negri missed the decay, or better, the betrayal, of the workers’ movement in the process of capitalist reconstruction throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s, among other things. We have noted that part of the crisis was the distance of the parties from the actual conditions and needs of the working class. But from Panzieri’s perspective, which was shared by some on the left of the PSI, the actual crisis was far more endemic than the gap that existed between the parties and the trade unions and the class. The fundamental problem was culture, of which the working class’s political estrangement was the effect of the party’s strategies and practice. To repeat, the left culture, for Panzieri, was based on the “mystification and repetition of Marxist and Leninist texts,” that, in Togliatti’s words, provided “a guide for the people” (Togliatti 1945, 48; Panzieri 1957, 71; Merli 1977, xxv-xxvii). The PCI and the left culture had vitiated the working class of its political agency, of its character as a political subject. Panzieri, influenced from the more libertarian elements of Morandi’s thought in the 1940s, rejected what he called the “party-guide” since it contained within its formation the usurpation of working class culture for the prescribed strategy of the party, that inevitably resulted in the “dogmatic crystallization” of left politics (1957, 65). It was this stale and closed culture that became identified with Stalinism and party domination.

The question of renewal began with the question of culture, but the culture that concerned Panzieri was a specifically left culture that existed within the workers' movement. Thus, an examination of the workers' movement became a necessary component to the renewal of democratic socialism, and in this early article, Panzieri alluded to the type of "workers' inquiry" as the correlative to a new "sociology of the base" that was developing in the Italian left (Merli 1977). In his January 1957 article in "Mondo Operaio" (Workers' World), "Appunti per un esame della situazione del Movimento Operaio" (Notes for an exam of the situation of the Workers' Movement), Panzieri began his more specific focus on the working class (1957). This article sets out for a renewal of the workers' movement against the obstacles presented by, and inherited from, Stalinism. His concern was to sustain the historic continuity of the movement within an understanding of workers' history in relation to the new developments of capitalism, and the problems this generated for the working class. These two realms, the workers' movement and what was termed "neo-capitalism", each had the effect of alienating the working class from its potential as a political and economic force (1957c, 102). The chief culprit of the postwar failures was the disjuncture between a "professed ideology" of socialism and the reality of which was "profoundly invalidated by dogmatism" (i.e., the party-guide, Cold War political strikes, et cetera). What was needed was a shift in the values within the workers' movement. Particularly noteworthy was Panzieri's focus on the large mass of new workers, most of whom were either young, immigrants from the South, or both, who went unrepresented by the unions (a point which would later influence the focus and allure of Italian Marxists to the experience of the IWW in the early 20th century in the United States), a sentiment expressed also by

Fortini in his *Lettera* when he criticized the communist worker who remained indifferent to the other workers (1957, 297). Within this unrepresented sector, Panzieri found the need to cultivate a “radical refusal of all guides, authority of direction from outside, and from the top of the workers’ movement” (1957, 35). The organizational expression of this “radical refusal” was to be found in the need for direct democracy in the workplace, or, anticipating the *Comitati Unitari di Base* (United Base Committees) of the late 1960s, in the need to advocate for and construct “new base organisms ... by which to control the work cycle and productive relationships” within a workplace, and to generalize these relationships throughout the productive life of the society. The proper term for this was workers’ councils, understood, not in the abstraction of constitutional guarantees, “but as new instruments of conquering power, at the real structural level, by the working class” (1957c, 101).

In the spring of 1957 Panzieri was nominated to co-director, with Pietro Nenni, of Mondo Operaio. Ironically, under his keep the journal became a lively reference point for the left wing of the PSI—and for a revival of interest in left wing communism, which, among others, highlighted Trotskyism, Lukacs, and Luxemburg—at the same time when the party leadership was aggressively pushing its program toward a social democratic formation and seeking alliances with Saragat’s PSDI and parts of the DC. Within this debate it was Panzieri’s insistence on the primacy of the working class, as the central political agent of socialism, which remained a dominant theme, albeit still under the trope of the “Italian Way to Socialism,” as a “democratic and peaceful” construction of socialism. For Panzieri, however, the latter did not mean parliamentary action in itself, but, as we saw above, it mandated a focus on the working class and its institutions. The

necessary element for the working class was subsequently developed between Panzieri and Lucio Libertini, a dissident leftist within the PSI, around the theme of workers' control in their seminal article "Sette tesi sulla questione del controllo operaio" (Seven theses on the question of workers' control) in the February 1958 issue of Mondo Operaio.

The workers' control thesis generated considerable discussion within the left. Its basic premise was that the workers' movement needed to be reexamined beginning from the assumption that it is the working class itself that was the "leading force of democratic development in Italy" and that any politics of the working class must derive from the class itself. While not rejecting parliamentary institutions, or the need for a party (thus avoiding the critique of anarcho-syndicalism, or economic centered, or any of the paltry epithets that the PCI bureaucracy derisively used to dismiss its critics and avoid genuine debate), these institutions needed to be transformed by pressure exerted from the base through the development and renewal of workers' initiative. Parliamentary action, in itself, was insufficient. Any type of parliamentary activity, moreover, needed to be based on "substantive rights," on the basis of economic and political power expressed jointly. For Panzieri and Libertini, this could only have occurred from a development of new worker institutions, as cultural organisms that existed by and for the workers.

In order to execute a peaceful and democratic transition to socialism, Panzieri and Libertini posited autonomous workers' institutions as the basis for building and affirming workers' political and economic power. These institutions were envisioned as a bulwark against any external "guide" of the class, whether that "guide" took the form of the State, the Party, the intellectuals (understood here in Gramsci's concept of the "traditional" intellectual), or the bosses (1958, 111-3). It was in this sense that Panzieri critiqued

Giorgio Amendola (PCI) on the relationship between intellectuals and the working class. Against Amendola's functional distinction between the "concrete positions" each assumed in the struggle, Panzieri asked how this fit within the party's formula of centralism and discipline (1957b, 97-8). From this perspective, Panzieri remarked that any type of "workers' autonomy" that discarded the question of power, in terms of "worker control" would remain "a completely external and sterile request" (Ibid, 98). Rather than adapting the newly introduced bourgeois sociological methods to study the working class and theorize it from afar, research and analysis could only take place "through participation in struggles" (1973, 254). Anticipating his later development of workers' inquiry, Panzieri grounded the intellectuals in the experience of the working class as the basis for the articulation of an "authentic" culture and "presence."

The workers' control thesis did not reject party politics in itself, but defined the party in purely instrumental terms. Seeking to renew the dialectic relationship between the party and the base, Panzieri defined the party as the "educator that needs to be educated" (1958d, 202). The education of the party derived from the developmental process of the class, whereby the working class, through its struggles and the establishment of new institutions and organisms of the base, educated itself. The contents of the workers' self-education were seen as being learned in the course of political action and practice, in the economic sphere, and in terms of economic and political power. In anticipation of those who argued that the working class needed to be "prepared," Panzieri and Libertini wistfully asked: "who would play the role of the educator"? For them, the role of an external enlightening force was absurd: "the only way to learn to swim is to jump in the water" (1958, 111). They assumed, as we will see in more detail below, a

rational order within the capitalist mode of production in which the workers were “thrown” into the productive process. And while we may agree with the axiomatic expression “the history of man is ... a continual process in which each day they affirm new values,” there is no guarantee that the workers will want to learn how to swim or swim well, or that the values that are developed will reaffirm socialism (Panzieri and Libertini 1958a, 149). Many workers, in fact, allowed for and consented to the guiding hand of the party, which is evident from the genuine sadness and sense of overwhelming loss that workers felt upon the deaths of Stalin and, later, Togliatti (Ginsborg 1990, 198-9).³³ However, Panzieri was concerned, not with those workers who were directed by external guides and leaders, or who did not care to engage at all, but with those workers whose struggle stemmed from their real situations and had the “democratic spirit” to affirm their participation and power (and as we see below, it is this hypothesis that he seeks to verify in his investigations of the working class). It was through their struggle that workers, it was assumed, would gain an understanding of their “adversary” and thus generate the seeds of an ideological apparatus, as the expression of the class’s overall unifying claims to political and economic power, which formed the backbone of Panzieri’s conception of the party. In this manner, the dialectic between the class and party was established on the basis of workers’ struggle as expressed in a general ideological understanding about the nature of class struggle (i.e., against who, for what, how, et cetera). In this same relationship the workers also would educate themselves through their political practice in their autonomous cultural and workplace institutions. It

³³ For images of workers at Togliatti’s funeral procession, see the final scene of Pier Paolo Pasolini’s comical rendition of the Manichean morality of Italian politics in *Uccellacci e Uccellini* (The Hawks and the Sparrows, 1966).

was this dialectical practice that Panzieri sought to reestablish in the working class movement on the dawn of the post-Stalinist era.

Within Panzieri's theoretical framework there remained an unitary conception of class politics. The "unity of class," a concept strikingly similar to his appeal for a cultural unity of the left, was founded on the rejection of the "rigid party conception" and the "closed dogmatism" attributed to Stalinism. However, this did not imply a rejection of the maintenance of the "unity of action" pact that defined the relationship between the PCI and PSI from the Popular Front period until the PSI replaced it with a "consultation pact" in October 1956. Panzieri affirmed this unity not out of a desire to construct party unity, but based on the desire of the Marxist left to work together in the class struggle. He feared, in short, the type of sectarian politics that marked the decay of working class movements in the 1920s and 1930s—a fear that he would carry with him when organizing the group around Quaderni Rossi. Indeed, he read the famous split at the Livorno Congress in 1921, which, after the socialist faction refused to expel the reformists (which was the policy handed down from the Comintern), prompted the birth of the PCI, as the moment that "consecrate[d] the defeat of the class movement" in Italy (1958d, 198). After this moment, and aside from the "long nightmare of fascism," the politics of the workers' movement was tied to party politics. Thus, Panzieri looked to the workers' movement of the Resistance as the genesis of workers' autonomous struggle that served the proper baseline for his theoretical delineation of class unity. This "unity of the class" was not the expression of any particular political alignment; rather, it was realized in political struggle, in the mass struggle, and he assumed that one could identify its unity in class terms insofar as it attacked and broke the capitalist structure, or, in

Panzieri's words: "the force of the class movement [could be] measured in the amount and capacity of exercising a leading function inside the productive structure (1958, 111).

The "unity of class" was, for Panzieri, the struggle for control over production based on the conscious understanding of the workers' "function in the system of production." Workers' control was linked with the workers' understanding of his role as a producer within the relations of production. Moreover, it was the consciousness of this particular relationship that formed the basis of the way forward: only in this conscious struggle for control could the working class "become the subject of a new political economy" (1958, 114-5). In this struggle for control the working class would learn and develop new values, replacing the capitalist profit motive with new, ostensibly, socialist values. Thus, class unity was a necessary ingredient established in the class struggle, which, when successful, demonstrated its ability to exert a leading role in the productive process, and generated a working class political economy. This rendered a politics of development that could have only taken place and been elaborated from within the workers' struggle, from which it would continue to grow and develop in parallel to the existing institutions until they became the dominant force for the direction of the economy. Panzieri anticipated the objection about "partial claims" and "general claims." Against this separation of general claims from particular claims, and against the imposition of abstract, state-led development, he emphasized that values change through practice and experience. Particular claims did not exist unto themselves, he wrote, as if workers' struggles were "supported by the idea of a king socialism that appears on the day as a miraculous dawn to coronate the dream of man" (Ibid, 114). Rather, the "ideal of socialism moves day by day, conquering now for now in the struggle; this develops the

more in which struggles mature and advance institutions born from the base, the nature of which already is the affirmation of socialism” (Ibid). The political economy of socialism, for Panzieri, could only have emerged out of the workers’ struggles; the ideal was not an absolute dogma to which the left could have aspired to and never have reached, but the ideal was born, and developed, in the experience and understanding of struggle.

Panzieri’s early thoughts on neo-capitalism

There remains hidden, up to this point in the discussion of Panzieri’s thought, the object of workers’ antagonism. Though Panzieri had committed himself to writing about the crisis of the workers’ movement, he had only begun to theorize the actual state of economic transformation underway in the Italian economy, and, more critically, he had a very limited understanding of what was actually occurring within the productive process, that is, what workers’ lives were like inside the factory. But within these initial writings in “Mondo Operaio”—particularly in the workers’ control thesis and later articles—we can decipher some early signs of his critique of neo-capitalism that, centering on the power of monopolies and the theme of control, would later develop into the “social factory” critique of political economy.

The early Panzierian critique of postwar Italian capitalism came out of a political culture that widely held a critique of monopoly capitalism as incapable of meeting the needs of the Italian people. Rather than monopolists, the working class was understood as the only force capable of leading a truly national project for development and production. Against this critique from the left, the restoration of capitalist control had produced an ideological tale about the wonders of “neo-capitalism” as capable of solving Italy’s problems. Largely influenced from the technocratic and managerial politics of the New

Deal in the United States and, in particular their affirmation of corporate control and its implications for class politics, neo-capitalism was propagated as the solution to the national problems of unemployment, to the achievement of workers' and labor's integration into capitalist production, and to the overcoming of the so-called "Southern question," the historic disjuncture between the developed North and the undeveloped South. Against this view, and its manifestations within the social-democratic formation, Panzieri asserted the view that, in Italy, the bourgeois class could never be a "national" class (1958, 106; 1958d, 156). Moreover, given the complexity of the national economy in the 1950s, it was inconceivable that the bourgeois were capable of administering a plan to overcome the national problems. Rather than constructing a national plan, monopolies, Panzieri wrote, "plan ... in certain ambits"; in pursuing the "law of concentration of capital and production," they create "little islands" from which they exert their control and decision making on the national economy. Thus, monopoly production evinced a geographically fixed locus of control and production (i.e., the "Northern triangle").

A second feature of Panzieri's critique, which can be deduced from the power dynamics of monopoly control, was that, in order to have their needs met, monopolies sought to extend their relation with, and direct control over, the State. The automobile industry of the 1950s and 1960s provided an instructive example as Fiat, the leading automobile producer in the postwar Italy, was effectively rendered control over state policy on tariffs, import barriers, and highway development for its particular business (Fauri 1996). In this new role of the State as a "hospital to private industry," Panzieri viewed monopolies using their "economic power" to control the "political function" of the State (1958d, 157; 1958, 112). The concentration of power within the monopoly, and

its complete liberty of power to control and determine its internal matters, bred the establishment of a nexus between monopolies' economic power and the State's political power.

For Panzieri, this power function of monopoly capitalism posed the danger of neo-capitalism as a “totalitarian” system with its functions based in the factory. The modern factory, he wrote, was characterized by the complete “enslavement of the worker's body and mind” to the control of the boss and his “planning.” Outside of the factory, in the “material structures” of society, the “totalitarianism of monopoly capitalism” took shape in the requisite arenas responsible for the formation of public opinion: the new human relations industry, the printing press, television, mass culture, cinema, and the schools (anticipating the “social factory” analysis, while also rendering his debt to Pollock and Adorno) [Fondo Panzieri 15; Meriggi 1978, 104-111]. In his pre-*Quaderni Rossi* writings this totalitarian phenomenon of monopoly capitalism was only described as a tendency within the system toward more total control over the economic, social, and political spheres (1958c, 170; 1958d, 205; 1959, 248). Panzieri's solution for overcoming workers' “enslavement” resided, still, in the workers' control thesis, and the fusion of workers and technicians within the productive process, old themes of the workers' council tradition. However, anticipating his later critique of technology as developed under capitalism (see chapter 3), Panzieri considered the working class as guarantors of technological development, but in order to assume this role, workers needed to strike at the heart of monopoly capitalism. That is, the workers' struggle needed to begin, not on the margins of economic power, but within the most technologically advanced and powerful centers of the economy. For this reason, after

Panzieri arrived at Turin, Fiat became the central testing ground for Autonomous Marxism.

Much of this analysis derived, at least within Italy and for Panzieri, from the Morandian focus on the working class as a political subject, albeit applied to a new situation and analysis (Merli 1977, 10). However, this focus on the working class, and workers' control, as the "substance and form" of socialist democracy estranged Panzieri from the internal politics of the PSI. If the distinction for the left in the post-Stalin era was between bureaucratic socialism and a democratic conception of socialism, then the leadership of the PSI wanted neither of these options, as Nenni pursued integration with the social-democrats and placed entry into the government as the leading priorities of the party. At the PSI's national convention at Naples in January 1959, the left of the PSI lost the majority giving way to, in Panzieri's words, a "resurgent adoration of bourgeois democracy" (1958, 134). As a result of the unfavorable turn in the direction of the PSI, in April 1959, Panzieri took a position with the Einaudi Publishing House in Turin, leading him to the center of Italian neo-capitalism. Upon his arrival in Turin, he furnished new political contacts and continued to develop his theoretical work and embarked on sociological inquiry into the workers' condition in the modern factory. The culmination of this transfer to Turin gave birth to Quaderni Rossi, widely understood as the central review that influenced the course of workers' politics and struggles over the next two decades. Thus, as Panzieri's work within the PSI had begun to exhaust itself, and after a nervous year of anxiety mixed with depression that, he mused, went so well with the aesthetic climate of Turin, he constructed a cultural organization that would promote and engage in the type of autonomous culture of the left working with the workers'

movement that had been the consistent focus of Panzieri's political work since, at least, 1953.

Quaderni Rossi: its initial development and composition.

"I see all the streets blocked, the 'return to private' chills me, the possibility of a small sect terrorizes me," Panzieri confessed in a letter to Maria Adelaide Salvaco (1973, 271). His estrangement from the PSI forced him to look for new channels through which to conduct his work. Two important factors determined the course of Panzieri's political work and the development of *Quaderni Rossi*, the disillusionment among those who sought a "left" solution in the post-Stalin workers' movement, and the renewal of worker and student militancy, or the new "anti-fascism" that erupted from July through December 1960 (Bermani 1997, 148-226). When Quaderni Rossi emerged with its first issue in the fall of 1961, the workers' movement and struggle became the central focus of the review. Indeed, only through the workers' movement could a democratic renewal of socialism have taken place.

Throughout 1960, Panzieri maintained contacts with the union movement and participated in numerous reunions around the theme of the renewal of the workers' struggle. He also circulated the idea of a review with like-minded comrades in Rome, Milan, and Turin, and organized exploratory meetings for such a possibility throughout 1959 and 1960. In constructing a review, Panzieri intended to form a group that would not be the "mouthpiece of a line already elaborated, but as a base of information and of analysis on the crucial political problems for the formation of a class consciousness" (Fondo Raniero Panzieri 45.) Confirming his earlier respect for direct democracy and for

establishing an “authentic presence” in the workers’ movement, Panzieri, in a letter to Albert Asor Rosa (Dec. 17, 1959), wrote:

if the crisis of the organizations—party and union—is in the increasing divide between them and the real class movement ... the problem can only be confronted by beginning from the conditions, structures, and movement of the base, where the analysis is conducted only by participating in the struggle (1973, 254).

The problem was to find the key to the problem of the “northern question” and develop this problematic into a revolutionary movement from the base (Panzieri 1956b, 41).

Panzieri had entertained the idea of constructing an organization that would promote collective research since, at least, the beginning of 1957 (Fondo Raniero Panzieri 23). By 1959-60, with his role in the PSI completely marginalized, and his former collaborator, Lucio Libertini, “completely assimilated” to the party line, he put forth a sustained effort to form a review that could serve as a new cultural institution for the workers’ movement (Panzieri 1973, 251). The Quaderni Rossi group formed as a diverse group of dissident socialist, communist, and trade unionists that, while not sharing a homogenous ideological view, shared the same perspective about the problems of the workers’ movement and a common desire to inaugurate action that could renew the class struggle (Ibid, 272, 282-4).

Since the group was ideologically heterogeneous, and was sustained and determined by a range of views, even if these views were shaped by “strong personalities,” it is necessary to first consider the background and influences of the leading personalities in the review (Di Leo 2000, 1).³⁴ We can begin by distinguishing the composition of QR from three distinct groups, that for sake of utility can be indicated by region: Roman, Turin, and Milan group. The Roman group, primarily Albert Asor Rosa

³⁴ This material draws mostly (aside from Panzieri) from interviews in the cd-rom accompaniment to Borio et al (2002).

and Mario Tronti, came out of the Communist Party's youth federation at the University of Rome, of which Tronti was head until 1956. As members of the PCI, they were, however, closer to the analysis of Marxism adumbrated by philosopher Galvano Della Volpe and his student Lucio Colletti. Against the idealist and historicist tradition that derived from Antonio Gramsci and Benedetto Croce and became appropriated in Togliatti's "Italian Way," Della Volpe sought to demonstrate a "materialist logic" that was the key to Marx's critique of political economy (1980). Colletti took this analysis a step further by arguing that not only was Marx's analysis not idealist, its historicism was limited to a critique of "this society" from which Marx generalized about the capitalist economic and social formation of modern capitalist society (1972, 140). Colletti also used Della Volpe's conception of "unity of heterogeneity" to demonstrate the fundamental logic that united economics and sociology, and within this unity, Marx, Colletti argued, produced an historical subject, the species or the social classes (Ibid, 146). Colletti's contribution was to demonstrate the sociological nature of Marx's analysis: "all of his [Marx's] concepts ... are economic and sociological together" (Ibid, 144). Thus, the Roman group was influenced by a reading of Marx that focused on the "materialist logic" of Marxism as sociology. This reading drew them to the working class as the dominant character in this Marxian sociology. It was this background that attracted them to Panzieri, which largely came to fruition as a result of the worker's control thesis (Asor Rosa 2001, 2; Tronti 2000, 1; Mangano 1992, 82). The group from Milan, particularly Pierluigi Gasparotto and Gairo Daghini derived from institutions of the Socialist Party (cultural centers, the Turati club, the Lelio Basso library, et cetera) with formative political experience in making interventions and inquiries in the workers'

movement of the 1960s, and, in general, sought a multifaceted approach to the workers' movement. Romano Alquati, who became politically important upon his arrival in Milan (from Cremona, south-east of Milan), began making factory inquiries with Gasporotto in 1960. Alquati had previously worked with Danilo Montaldi—"a decisive encounter," according to Alquati—from which he learned to place emphasis on the need to "do something effective," from the perspective of "economics and sociology," rather than history and philosophy (Alquati 2000). Montaldi, who had inaugurated a "base politics" that brought together a method of political work from the base with a Marxism based on research or inquiry into the base, most forcefully developed the need for an "internal presence" in conducting research (Merli 1977, 17-28; Montaldi 1956). Last, the Turin group consisted of adherents to the left wing of the PSI—Romolo Gobbi, Claudio Greppi, and Vittorio Rieser— and focused on the sociological method of inquiry, which had derived from their participation in student manifestations in the late 1950s in support of workers' contractual struggles. Upon his arrival in Turin, Panzieri became the dominant influence that shaped their reading of Marx (Rieser 2001).

The two intellectual tendencies that emerged from the individuals that composed Quaderni Rossi were: a reading of Marx that stressed "materialist logic" against an historical or idealistic reading that postulated the relationship between capital and class as the key social relations of capitalist production, and the sociological method of *inchiesta* (inquiry) as a tool of research on the actual workers' condition. These positions derived out of the unified focus on the factory as the necessary locus for understanding the conditions, attitudes, and behaviors of the working class. The choice of methodology, as alluded to above, had deeper roots in the culture of the left throughout the 1950s, of

which many of the original actors in QR had, in some way or another, familiarity and experience (Apergi 1978, 113-25; Wright 2002, 22-30). I have alluded to this somewhat diverse group of individuals in order to establish the point that they derived from diverse backgrounds that did not necessarily lend itself to a working ideology. Thus, the conceptual apparatus that was deployed in subsequent years often contained tensions and contradictions that inevitably emerge in any attempt at collective work.

Between *conricerca* and “workers’ inquiry”

Through an understanding of Marxism as sociology, the *Quaderni Rossi* group began their point of entry into the workers’ movement based on Marx’s “workers’ inquiry” (1880). In this piece, Marx emphasized that it was the workers “alone [who] can describe with full knowledge the misfortunes from which they suffer and that only they, and not saviors sent by providence, can energetically apply the healing remedies for the social ills which they are prey” (Ibid). This general agreement of “workers’ inquiry” contained within it the tension of two different themes that developed in the group, the need for the sociological use of “inquiry” and the more radical practice of *conricerca* (co-research). This tension, which produced the rupture between the Turin group and the Roman group in 1963, centered around the role of the researcher and the connection between the research and the generation of political activity by the workers. Following Vittorio Rieser’s description, *inchiesta* (inquiry) was understood as the initial tool for capturing an understanding of the facts that one is trying to investigate. Thus, in the seminal phases of QR, the traditional use of questionnaires and interviews was the central focus by which they could understand what was happening in the modern factory. The idea of co-research implied a more advanced relationship, where an “organized force” existed

between those conducting research and the subject of research. Montaldi understood the latter to signify the point at which the intellectual becomes “organic” to the class movement (Merli 1977, 17). Rieser noted that *conricerca* was more properly the “fundamental method ... available to an organized force, that you make with the workers that are being organized or that are organized and thus tied strictly to a practice of struggle” (2001). We can see from an early example of Quaderni Rossi’s use of interviews that their method of inquiry was consistent with Panzieri’s early desire of the review to be a “point of reference” or a “place of information” rather than a “direct instrument of ‘political propaganda’” consumed by the work of constructing an ideological program from above (Lanzardo 1965, 128). Despite this desire, there existed within QR the need to generate a radical politics from the workers’ base. And, as Alquati rightly emphasized, the purpose of both workers’ inquiry and co-research, aside from the abstract theoretical distinction above, was that they emphasized the value of being a “method of political action from the base” that, ultimately, sought to create a “self transformation of the objective force into subjective force, politically conscious, to a prospect of overcoming the actual system” (Alquati 1961, 199).

Panzieri’s “socialist use of workers’ inquiry”

Panzieri was quite aware of the tension that existed between generating political action and conducting workers’ inquiry. Since it was, essentially, within his thought that the rise of *Quaderni Rossi* took place, and in the context of the determinant place that workers’ inquiry had in his theoretical architecture, I end with a discussion of his understanding of workers’ inquiry and its role as an instrument within Marxism as a theory of workers’ revolution. For Panzieri, Marxism was a theory of the “science of revolution.” He made

the crucial distinction that the latter could only be determined by “social facts” and not in the fancies of metaphysics, which he equated with the construction of grand narratives that offered ideological reassurance to the faithful masses. Those who based their analyses from “metaphysics,” Panzieri argued, obscured the reality of the working class behind a veil of its “historic mission” and other mystical notions (Panzieri 1964, 69).

The fundamental component of Marx’s analysis resided in defining capitalist society as a society divided into classes. From this, Panzieri highlighted two operative categories to examine: capital and class. Analysis, as we saw above, must take place at both levels in order to capture the dialectical relationship between these two groups. The emphasis on the reality of the working class as a starting point was essential to Panzieri’s rejection of the external force of the “party guide” that he identified as the heredity of Stalinism. The Togliattian view, that relegated the class’s action inside the trade union sphere, but not capable of producing a political understanding of the class in this action, relied on the assumption that workers’ consciousness needed to arise from an external element. According to Panzieri, Togliatti’s view of the working class located workers’ consciousness in the realm of capital and the particular claims made within the factory struggle; that is, workers’ “consciousness” was generated through an understanding or agreement with the party line which would include its political strategy and determined role of the trade union in support of that strategy. It followed from this view that workers were incapable of generating and expressing a political subjectivity outside of the party. It was in polemic with this view that Panzieri and those in *Quaderni Rossi* emphasized that an essential point of the *inchiesta* resided in its capacity to generate worker

consciousness as a political subject, as the only actor capable of arriving at a socialist transformation of capitalist society.

A basic feature that gave importance to the use of workers' inquiry, and the key to examining the potentiality and existence of working class subjectivity, for Panzieri, resided in the capacity to analyze the working class as an analytical category separate from capital. By studying the working class as a separate category of analysis, Panzieri argued that workers' inquiry could shed light on working class subjectivity and capture an understanding of the "concrete form" in which the contradiction between capital and class was present. This contradiction could only be demonstrated by studying capital as well as class. The inquiry was used to gather or collect information about the attitudes and behavior of the working class, but this analysis could only be verified by an analysis of capital. It did not suffice to merely study the politics or potential for struggle of the working class. The two essential categories, capital and class, Panzieri emphasized, could not be studied apart from each other; rather, when studying the workers' movement, there was always the need to "look at the adversary" to see how it responds to the level of the workers' struggle (Panzieri 1973, 248). His particular concern was raised against those who focused solely on the workings of capital, whether by ignoring the realities of the working class or reflexively ascribing to working class subjectivity the determinants of capital (a position attributed to Colletti) [Apergi 1978, 108-110]. In his "Socialist use of workers' inquiry" Panzieri wrote:

the fact of treating labor-power only as an element of capital, according to Marx, from the theoretical viewpoint, provokes a limitation and also a deformation internal to the system that it constructs.... [By] refusing the identification of the working class as beginning from the movement of capital, [he] affirms that it is not possible to go automatically from the movement of capital to the study of the working class: the working class ... exists as a scientific observation absolutely separate (1965, 70).

In this regard, Ferrero correctly notes the analysis of the relationship between capital and class that Panzieri established: “the class lives inside a dialectic of object-subject that is present in the diverse phenomenon but which is never fully overcome” while capitalist social relations exist (2005, 28). Thus, as a necessary part of understanding the possibility of revolution within neo-capitalism, workers’ inquiry performed the essential role of collecting information about worker subjectivity and determining or forming an understanding about the potentiality of the working class to assume an antagonistic position in its relationship with capital. Whether inquiry alone was capable of generating antagonism became the focus of contention after the strikes of 1962 provoked different interpretations about the “potentiality” of the working class which, in part, would lead to the rupture of the Roman and Turin groups over the role of co-research and the promotion of a revolutionary organization to propel the formation of an autonomous workers’ party (see below, ch. 3). But in this latter contention, Panzieri remained tied to the more traditional use of inquiry to identify and determine the behavior of the class, and to sustain the use of Quaderni Rossi as a point of reference and information for the working class.

We saw above, in the early delineations of Panzieri’s class politics and revolutionary transformation of capitalism to socialism, the manner in which workers’ control and direct democracy from the base served an educational function in expanding the workers’ struggle. The use of inquiry represented the intervention in the workers’ movement of an external force of socialist intellectuals and militants who were interested in renewing the workers’ struggle. Yet, there still remained the contradiction, in Panzieri’s formulation, between the intellectuals who sustained the analysis of capital—

the so-called “objective” aspect of society—and the workers’ expression and understanding as captured in the processes of workers’ inquiry. In Panzieri’s work, and in his personality, there existed the type of sentiment and value-commitment that left the development of workers’ consciousness to the workers. The role of inquiry, in this view, was seen as generating discussion about questions that would provoke workers to think about their place and role in the productive process that would, hopefully, lead to further advancement through struggle. On the question of the analysis of capital, Panzieri maintained that *Quaderni Rossi*, and the historical moment in which it existed, was not the proper organ for the elaboration of a socialist ideology, but, rather, it was the appropriate forum to generalize the political themes relevant to the workers’ struggle, as a reference for the movement. The questions that determined which political themes to focus on, ostensibly, were driven by the inquiry conducted. But what would guarantee this outcome? As Liliana Lanzardo pointed out in her article “Rapporto tra scopi e strumenti dell’inchiesta” (Relation between the scope and instrument of inquiry), the key difficulty in conducting inquiry resided in the transformation of workers’ consciousness from an understanding of the factory relations into the more general understanding of what to do, or what to construct out of those relations (1965, 118). Thus, while the problem for Panzieri was resolved by allowing for the workers to determine new values in struggle, the immediate problem was that of understanding not only how this could take place, but of sustaining the relations and conditions that could produce this change in workers’ understanding of the productive relations within neo-capitalism in such a way that could generate or bear the fruit of an alternative vision generated from below.

The limits of inquiry and co-research resided in the relationship between the level of understanding of the objective elements of neo-capitalism along with the development of workers' political subjectivity. The practitioner of inquiry and co-research had to possess a certain amount of respect, and patience, for the workers' capacity to develop their own political consciousness. In line with Fortini, Panzieri sustained an ambiguous position enveloped in the uncertain role of the intellectual that moved within the dialectical relationship between class and capital. Panzieri's response resided in the formation of an autonomous culture that would be part of the renewal of workers' institutions as part of a renewed militancy of the workers' movement and self-development of institutions that could sustain and expand workers' power. Ideally, the type of inquiry conducted by external intellectuals would generate a situation where it would be possible to engage in co-research, or the joint production of social knowledge from below. However, it remained too easy to proclaim that this situation had already occurred within the workers' movement, that the workers movement had matured over the course of a couple of years' struggles, virtually without the appearance of their own base institutions from which to build. As we will see in the next chapter, the project of collective research that constituted QR was destined to fall apart, as the old intoxicating fumes of workers' revolution blinded some of the group to the more important goal of sustaining a long educative period of workers' struggles that could lead to a socialist transformation of the existing institutions. But before we get to this, we need to develop and understand the key themes of *Quaderni Rossi*. Remembering that workers' inquiry was only one component of the "return to Marx" made by *Quaderni Rossi*, we now turn

to the critique of political economy and the generation of the “social factory” analysis of neo-capitalism.

CHAPTER 3

THE “SOCIAL FACTORY” AND SOCIALIST REVOLUTION IN THE THEORETICAL AND POLITICAL WORK OF QUADERNI ROSSI

With generalized planning capital directly extends the fundamentally mystified form of the law of surplus value from the factory to the entire society, now each trace of the origins and roots of the capitalist process seem to disappear. Industry reintegrates ... at the social level the form that specifically in it assumes the extortion of surplus-value: as the “neutral” development of the productive forces, as rationality, as planning –Raniero Panzieri, “Surplus-value and planning,” 286

The expanding progress of capitalist socialization carries itself to a point in which the production of capital needs to give itself the work of constructing a specific type of social organization. When capitalist production is generalized to the entire society – the entire social production becomes the production of capital – only now, on this base, a true and proper capitalist society arises as a historically determinant fact—Mario Tronti, “The plan of capital,” 52

The fabric of “social life” as the “piazza” is the occasion for circulation and comparison of methods and organized forms, for the construction of a strategy of insubordination that overturns the structures that combine to orchestrate international capital. With the development of worker insubordination ... it will be possible to carry the analysis outside from the immediate and begin the true “analysis of the factory” in the scientific sense of political analysis of the class, of the social relations of production... Romano Alquati, “Composition of capital and labor-power at Olivetti,” 185.

Introduction

In the previous chapter we saw how Quaderni Rossi derived from a diverse collection of individuals who came together around the common goal of developing a revolutionary theory relevant to the historically determinant situation of neo-capitalist relations in postwar Italy. This chapter investigates the group’s “return to Marx” as a tool of research in “workers’ inquiry” as well as the appropriate body of theoretical work from which they derived their critique of political economy. The idea of workers’ inquiry and co-research developed, in part, out of their commitment to realizing a new revolutionary practice from the “base,” from an understanding of workers’ experience and struggles in the factory, or, from the “workers’ point of view.” This chapter begins by examining the

theoretical formulation of capitalist relations of production as derived from Marx's *Capital* and 1857 Introduction to the *Grundrisse*. From this rereading of Marx's critique of political economy Quaderni Rossi—in particular the theoretical work of Raniero Panzieri, Mario Tronti, and Romano Alquati—introduced their conceptualization of the factory-society relationship, what Harry Cleaver coined as the “social factory,” as well as the idea of the “class composition” to explain the subjectivity of the working class (2000, 70-1; Wright 2002). The “social factory” analysis identified neo-capitalism as an attempt to control and dominate society in the interests of capital accumulation, and it was informed by a series of articles on capital's ability to plan—the planning function of capital. This was particularly evident in the first three issues of Quaderni Rossi, which demonstrated not only a theoretically rich discussion, but also constituted the issues that preceded the group's eventual rupture.

In the summer of 1963 the group split, in part, over their interpretation of the renewal of workers' struggles. But the split also derived from theoretical differences that had emerged from their reading of Marx. The dispute stemmed from Mario Tronti's theoretical elaboration of workers' “strategy of refusal” in contrast to Panzieri's “workers' control” position. Yet, in the development of this theoretical work, there remained the central themes of neo-capitalism as a control society along with an agreement on the revolutionary potential of workers' antagonism to capitalist domination. This framework, which emerged from the collective work of Quaderni Rossi, provided the theoretical background for a generation of revolutionary working class struggle during the course of the subsequent decade (c. 1963-1973). This chapter examines the beginnings of this theoretical development through the political thought of the principle

actors in Quaderni Rossi, including the renewal of the workers' struggle (1960-62), and the implications that this had on the rupture in the initial group of Quaderni Rossi.

The “social factory” as a critique of capitalist control

After their expulsion from government, and up through the period of the “economic miracle,” the left in general considered monopoly capital to be a hindrance to national and economic development. The facts of the “economic miracle” demonstrated that this interpretation was incorrect; partly based on technological and organizational changes within large industry throughout the 1950s, the Italian economy proved to be one of the most dynamic economic world powers by 1960. The *Quaderni Rossi* group returned to the discussions of large industry and technology in Marx's *Capital I* in order to develop an understanding of neo-capitalism and to generate the theoretical tools appropriate for a science of workers' revolution. Their critique produced two key turns that were decisive in demarcating the trajectory of *operaismo* as a distinct theoretical movement within the Italian left. The first derived from Panzieri's seminal article that introduced the theory of “technological rationality” from the Frankfurt School in an attempt to dispel what he considered to be the myth of technological neutrality and progress in capitalist development. The second point, which partly developed out of the first, focused on the planning capacity of capital, and achieved its mature expression in Tronti's formulation of “social capital” (1963, 44-73). These two moments were fundamental to the theoretical development of the “social factory,” which was the unifying theme behind the Autonomist Marxist understanding of neo-capitalism as a social order where the social relations of the factory became generalized to the entire society. But while the “social factory” analysis was shared within this movement, the analysis conducted by Panzieri

and Tronti differed in their phenomenological understanding of the factory-society relation. In short, Panzieri's understanding focused on the expansionary effects of capitalist concentration; Tronti's analysis examined the increasingly tertiary nature of capitalist expansion that increased the proletarian character of society (Turchetto 2001, 4).

In his seminal article "Sull'uso capitalistico delle macchine nel neocapitalismo" (The capitalist use of machines in neo-capitalism), in the first number of *Quaderni Rossi*, Panzieri attacked the position of those in the "historic left" who viewed technology from an "objectivist" lens that depicted it in a "pure" or "idealized" form (1961, 53-72).³⁵ Consistent with his previous rejection of theoretical approaches that did not originate from concrete material conditions, he contrasted the "objectivist" approach by locating technology within the "general and determinant elements of power" (Ibid, 57).³⁶ While Panzieri's article was a directed critique of the position established within the CGIL by Silvio Leonardi, the broader attack was against the Nennian faction of the PSI, which was pushing for a Center-Left government (Ibid).³⁷ This faction of the PSI had adopted a view of technology that stressed its role as an integrating force between capital and labor, a position that, Panzieri maintained, was central to the ideological framework of neo-capitalism. Given the integrating function of technology, and the end to class conflict as

³⁵ Originally published in the first number of *Quaderni Rossi*, "The capitalist use of machinery" was later published in English in Slater's *Outlines of a Critique of Technology* (1980).

³⁶ The idea of "concrete" is understood here in the sense that Marx used it when he wrote in the 1857 Introduction to the *Grundrisse*: "the concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations" (1973, 101).

³⁷ Leonardi was a representative example of the "turn" by unions on the question of technological progress and workers that was debated during a Convention at the Antonio Gramsci Institute from June 29 through July 1, 1956.

an inherent characteristic of capitalism, the “objectivist” approach effected three moves: technological rationalization of the production process was a “painful but necessary” passage where the orthodox “stages of development” was supplanted by “objective rationality”; the flowering and harmonizing of “moral relations” between the entrepreneur and workers through the new industrial sociology of “human relations”; trade union intervention in the “human relations” system to break capitalist use of this system. This position, strikingly similar to the Marxist position that focused on the property relation, accepted the “technological rationality” of the new order, but sought to put this rationality under the direction of a new authority, the Party and the State.

Panzieri countered the “objectivist” position with theoretical and empirical arguments. He began with a simple recounting of Marx’s discussion of the work process—cooperation and division of labor—from *Capital I* in order to establish that within the factory the capitalist assumed a role of “absolute control” and “authority.” From this relationship of authority, he found that “strictly connected to the development of the capitalist use of the machine was the development of capitalist planning. To the development of cooperation, of the social process of work, corresponds, in the capitalist leadership, the development of the plan as *despotism*” (Ibid, 56 italics in original). In this plan, technology or machinery was viewed as instrumental to the bosses’ exercise of control and authority in the production process. But this was only one component of their control: Panzieri argued that it was “not only the machines, but also the ‘methods’, the technical organization ... as a foreign rationality” imposed through “information” and “manipulation of workers’ attitudes,” that formed a more comprehensive picture of capital’s despotism in the factory.

Given these techniques, Panzieri noted that it would be possible to find more “advanced” relations (i.e., workers’ participation), but he did not envision these as being capable of dealing substantively with the question of “alienation” (Ibid, 61-3). That is, the only genuine type of “advanced” relations had to be that of workers’ power vis-à-vis the capitalist. The question of “alienation” was not a philosophical question about the workers’ self or being, but focused exclusively on the question of power in capitalist social relations. For example, the worker was not further alienated from the productive process because he was even more remotely connected to his product. Rather, for Panzieri, alienation was an increasing problem because capitalism as a system was expanding its controlling function towards, what Alquati later called, the “micro-movements” of the worker.

Italian capital demonstrated its capacity for dynamic development and expansion in the mid 1950s, utilizing new forms of technology and organizational techniques. Panzieri found in this movement a general tendency toward capitalist planning that included the “use” of technology. This position went against the commonplace view of the left in the postwar period that monopolies and concentrations of capitalism were destined to collapse as stagnant deadweights on the economy. Moreover, it overturned the view that technological progress was at odds with capitalism and would, one day, lead to the necessary passage to socialism (Mancini 1977, xviii). Indeed, as the writer and intellectual Franco Fortini emphatically pointed out in the second issue of QR, socialism was not inevitable; capitalist relations of production were capable of development and also were capable of planning this development with technology used, not as a liberating force for the worker (i.e., freeing her or him from the drudgery of work), but as another

component in capital's despotic power (1962, 115-7). In this sense, Panzieri went against his own previous distinctions as well as a much longer historical identification that negated the connection between capitalism and development and found that not only was capital capable of development, but its development was "progressively extending itself from the planning of the factory to the market, to the external social area" (Ibid, 56). As technology was no longer considered to be at odds with capitalist development, Panzieri moved beyond his workers' control thesis in emphasizing that workers' revolt had to take place at the conceptual level of "living labor," and not necessarily through the development of labor as a productive force. The chief potential for socialist revolution had to come from "workers' insubordination" as capital was now seen as being capable, given capital's concentrated power in large industry, of planning development within the factory system to such an extent that it could also extend itself into society.

In his discussion of Panzieri's "dramatic about-face" from considering capitalism as incapable of development, to viewing it as capable of an indeterminate quantity and quality of development, Steve Wright highlighted the importance of Mario Tronti's essay "La fabbrica e la società" (the factory and society) on Panzieri's changed views. But this assertion seems, at a minimum, wide of the mark. Tronti's essay did not appear until the second number of Quaderni Rossi, which Wright mentions. But this aside, it would be more accurate to surmise that Panzieri's shift came from within group discussions of Marx on the role of large industry and technology, as the group focused on reading the fourth part of *Capital I* which reveals the central dynamics of Panzieri's analysis (Negri 2007, 52).³⁸ Moreover, there is nothing in Panzieri's correspondence or notes that

³⁸ Marx's focus on the power and despotism of the capitalist centered not only the domination of "dead labor" over "living labor" but also on the use of technology by the capitalist.

highlights Tronti's particular contribution on this point. Rather, what stands out, as is clear from the discussion of Panzieri's earlier theoretical work in the previous chapter, is Panzieri's reliance on the theoretical work of the Frankfurt School's discussion of "system" and the "totalitarian capitalist system" [in particular Adorno and Friedrich Pollock] (Meriggi 1978, 93). Indeed, from Pollock, Panzieri derived his understanding of "despotism" as a fundamental factor tied to the incorporation of techniques of automation in the productive process. From Adorno, Panzieri utilized the discussion of integration and the production and reproduction of the "inauthentic life." In his introduction to the Italian edition of Pollock's writings, Giacomo Marramao wrote of Panzieri that he was "the first to associate the analysis of automation by Pollock to the Adornian description of the phenomenology of the "authentic life" in advanced capitalism" (cited in Meriggi 1978, 106). Meriggi's and Marramao's points only touch upon one element of the theoretical formulation and synthesis that Panzieri executed. If we look at Panzieri's reading notes on the despotism and rationality of the factory we find his arrival at capitalist planning derived from a myriad of views: for example, the idea of human relations within Taylorism and Fordism was derived from the American industrial economist Seymour Melman (Fondo Raniero Panzieri, fasc. 15); the role of technology, management, ideology of alienation and consumption was derived from Adorno (Ibid, fasc. 15, 121, 186-7); Pollock's discussion of automation and specialization in relation to power within the workplace; the relation between despotism and rationality in Lukacs;

"Modern industry," as a more developed stage than simple co-operation and manufacture, Marx wrote, "makes science a productive force distinct from labour and presses it into the service of capital" (1967, 341). Capital, he wrote later on, uses science "with intelligence and will" and is "animated by the longing to reduce to a minimum the resistance offered by that repellent yet elastic natural barrier, man" (Ibid, 380). For more general observations in section four see (1967, 360, 364, the "economic paradox" of machinery 384-5, 399, 404-6).

and Baran and Sweezy's analysis of monopolies and neocapitalism (Ibdi, fasc. 15; Fondo Raniero Panzieri, fasc. 40, 99); and the role of Hobson's discussion of monopoly and the "planning of needs" (Fondo Raniero Panzieri, fasc. 40, 72). Therefore, it is incorrect to attribute Panzieri's shift on capitalist production as "determined by his encounter with Tronti's" analysis of "factory and the society" as Wright does (2002, 36). This is particularly evident, aside from the facts noted above, by examining the constructive component of Panzieri's article on "the capitalist use of machines" and reading this in conjunction with his later contribution to *Quaderni Rossi* in his "Plusvalore e pianificazione: Appunti di lettura del Capitale" (Surplus-value and planning: Notes from reading *Capital*), which came out in the fourth volume of *Quaderni Rossi* (1964, 257-288).

Unlike the Frankfurt School, Panzieri did not envision the capitalist use of technology as complete domination, or as performing a totalizing function over the modern condition with no hope for radical change. Rather, as Meriggi notes, "the Panzierian notion of the working class is determinant and materialistic and cannot thus intersect with that "philosophic" proletariat as the "negation of the negation" ... from Adorno's analysis" (1978, 107).³⁹ Panzieri, against Adorno's theorization of the "eclipse" of the working class, situated his thought in the belief of the power of the working class

³⁹ The critique from the Autonomist Marxist argument against a "philosophical" reading of Marx was based on the latter's "ideological reading" that derived "from capital's perspective" alone. The challenge for the Autonomist's, which was evinced in this potential contradiction in Panzieri's formulation, was in the tension between workers' strategic struggles and power and their ability to generalize a set of complementary understandings in these struggles that one could call "class consciousness" (Clever 2000, 31-77). For a discussion of a similar concern with workers' inquiry and co-research see the discussion of Alquati below.

to radically confront capitalist domination. “The fundamental factor of the workers’ struggle,” Panzieri wrote,

is the consciousness ... of the unity of the two moments, “technical” and “despotic” in the current productive organization. With respect to technological “rationality,” the relationship between it and revolutionary action is of comprehending it, but not to recognize and exalt it, rather to submit it to a new use: to the socialist use of the machine (1961, 63).

The possibility for overcoming capitalist “rationality” resided in the political action of the working class; that is, in the class’s capacity to break capital’s domination of “living labor” or “variable capital” by “constant capital.”⁴⁰ In order to submit technology to a “socialist use,” the class struggle needed to be capable of producing a “*political* rupture of the system,” by the augmentation not of incomes, or of satisfying predefined “consumer needs,” but by the demand of political power, which was premised on the rejection of the working class’s “political servitude” to capital (Ibid, 66). Consistent with Panzieri’s earlier formulation of the construction of new values in the daily class struggle, the workers’ struggle for political power, and thus for workers’ control, was capable of realizing a “radically new rationality” in the use of technology (Ibid, 54). The first goal of the workers’ struggle was, for Panzieri, to prepare itself for attaining political power within the productive process, as the development of a “dualism of power” until the class could conquer complete power over the productive process. From this situation the “socialist use” would construct a science and technology applicable to a new work activity that would overcome salaried work and capitalist social relations.

⁴⁰ In *Capital I*, chapter VIII Marx defined “constant capital” as “that part of capital then, which is represented in by the means of production, by the raw material, auxiliary material and instruments of labour, does not, in the process of production, undergo any quantitative alteration of value.” On the other hand, “variable capital” is “that part of capital, represented by labour-power, does, in the process of production, undergo an alteration of value. It both reproduces the equivalent of its own value, and also produces ... a surplus-value....” (1967, 202).

While Panzieri's thesis was not without problems and difficulties—the obscure nature of the abstract juxtaposition between “capitalist use” and “socialist use,” or the tendency to slip into the Frankfurt School's totalizing analysis (thus demonstrating contradictions between the *philosophical* analysis with the *political* objectives)—we can see in it the foundations of the “social factory” in the concentration of capital in large industry, in its rational application and use of technology (and other means), and an allusion to the role of surplus-value as the determinant factor of capitalist despotism (Wright 2002, 43-4).

With the analysis of technology and the role of “constant capital” as one of the techniques of capitalist despotism and planning, Panzieri, in his penultimate contribution to Quaderni Rossi, sought to explain capital's dynamism in terms of its ability to plan the production of surplus-value by controlling the processes of the circulation of capital and thus potentially ensuring an almost unlimited capacity for capital accumulation. “Plusvalore e pianificazione: Appunti di lettura del Capitale” (“Surplus-value and planning: Notes from reading *Capital*”) was published in the fourth number of the review and represented his last major theoretical work before his untimely death at the age of 43 in October 1964. The piece should not be considered exhaustive, but rather as the culmination of an intense intellectual period that included collective readings of *Capital* and Panzieri's attempt to grasp the ability of capital, in the stage of neo-capitalism, to collectively plan in order to ensure its continued survival.

Based on the advanced stage of large industrial capitalism, with its “law of concentration and centralization,” Panzieri asserted that collective capital was forced to develop a “generalized plan” that “extended the fundamentally mystified form of the law

of surplus-value directly from the factory to the entire society” (1964, 286). This conclusion derived from an understanding, as we have seen throughout the discussion of Panzieri, and is present in the works of Marx and Lenin, that capitalist planning manifests itself at the level of the factory within the direct process of production. The traditional Marxist-Leninist theme stressed the social relations of production, as cooperative, alongside the anarchic nature of circulation (Marx 1967, 337). However, Panzieri argued that there was a logic to capital that brought about this tendency of increasing expansion of its control over society that neither Marx nor Lenin had been able to discern. Critiquing Lenin, Panzieri wrote: “he did not see how the law of capitalist development (relative surplus-value, maximization of profit) that, in the age of competition, made the individual capitalist the spring of development for the total social capital.” In particular, the “capitalist appropriation of science and technical methods” was virtually absent in Lenin’s construction (1964, 260). Through its appropriation of these “intellectual powers” capital began exercising its plan (i.e., despotism) to better command labor—both living and “dead”—in order to extract more surplus value (Ibid, 267-70).

By highlighting the “general tendency” of capitalist development to plan its dominion over labor, Panzieri identified the logic of capitalist control to extend from the direct process of production through means of surveillance, leadership, and coordination, and with the appropriation of the “intellectual powers” of science and sociological methods, capital could extend this planning function in order to intensify its exploitation of labor. Panzieri, in laying out this logical plan of capital, offered a picture of a linear rationality of capital, embodied with almost extraordinary powers for coordination—albeit hidden in an unclear “spontaneous and natural system”—where the capitalist class

is portrayed as being able to extract surplus-value “without limit” (Ibid, 267; Mancini 1977, 95; Palano 1998).

Perhaps more damning was Panzieri’s methodological approach that was based in the abstract “tendency” of capitalist development, while leaving behind the actual, or empirical, state of factory-society relations in the early 1960s. This reliance on the “tendency” of capitalist development pervades the work of Autonomist Marxism, and stems from their Leninist definition of the concept “factory,” which, as Panzieri wrote, “is not a collection of empirical data ... [it is] the development of industry at a determinate stage of capitalist development” (1972, 41). This understanding of the factory allowed for a class perspective that could capture the “entire social development” of capital (Ibid). As we will see below, this generated a conception of working class revolt that, within *operaismo*, necessitated the class’s ability to foresee and anticipate the tendency of capitalist social development in order to pose itself as a general antagonist to this plan.

The idea of the “social factory” emerged from a broader ambit of Western Marxism in the work of Antonio Gramsci and Georg Lukacs, and was more fully developed in Mario Tronti’s writings in Quaderni Rossi (Bologna 1974; Palano 1998). Gramsci had established a framework for the “social factory” critique in his essay on “Americanism and Fordism.” In his analysis of the effect of Taylorism and Fordism, Gramsci noted that the American capitalist’s creation of a “rational demographic composition” of social forces with an “essential” productive function whose role in society was determined by the centrality of the factory and extended into society through “professional political and ideological intermediaries” (2000, 277-9). The development of

industry in the form of factory production along Fordist lines, Gramsci intuited, would “result in the imminent necessity of achieving a programmatic organization of the economy” (quoted in Palano 1998, 6). Gramsci analyzed this rudimentary outline of the social nature of industrial capitalism, primarily, in terms of the moral and psychological effect of Fordism—points that were almost completely lost on QR. That is, despite Panzieri’s early call (pre-QR) for studies in psychology as part of a renewed workers’ movement, within *Quaderni Rossi* this was virtually absent, at least outside of the direct production process, even if some of the intellectuals who frequented their conventions were themselves intimately interested in phenomenology and psychoanalysis (Rozzi 2001; Daghini 2000). Instead, as we saw in Panzieri, QR discussed the “social factory” in the materialist view of the reproduction of surplus-value and the sociological effect of command over labor, rather than from the Gramscian tradition of historic and philosophic idealism. The Gramscian idea of a “rational demographic composition” of the productive forces was interpreted in *Quaderni Rossi* out of a concern with workers’ political subjectivity that emerged from the practice of workers’ inquiry, also known as “class composition.” However, the rational logic of capital, and its affect on the composition of the working class derived, for the workerists, more closely from Lukacs’ formulation of society-factory relations, a theoretical position that had a “self-evident influence” on *Quaderni Rossi*’s configuration of the “social factory” (Palano 1998, 5).

In the Lukacsian depiction of capitalist organization, *Quaderni Rossi* highlighted the view that established the relations within the factory as the *logic* of the entire society. Lukacs expressed this in terms of the factory as a microcosm of the entire society where commodity production and the capitalist’s “rational mechanized production” became the

“principle” that “must embrace every aspect of life” (1971, 90-1). The logic of capital, for Lukacs, was centered on the factory as the “concentrated form” of society’s structure that becomes the general condition of society as the commodity relation extends over the entire social order. When the commodity form becomes universal, Lukacs wrote, “the *fate* of the worker becomes the *fate* of society as a whole.” Or to formulate the problem in a slightly different manner: “Only when the whole life of society is thus fragmented into the *isolated acts of commodity exchange* can the ‘free’ worker come into being; at the same time his *fate* becomes the typical *fate* of the whole society” (Ibid, italics mine).

Two important, and slightly divergent, themes emerged in QR from this analysis. First, as we have already seen in Panzieri’s discussion of the extension of capitalist concentration and its affect on society in terms of control and planning; second, the acceptance within QR of a rational logic inherent in capitalist development. Panzieri had only discussed this in terms of the capacity for the extraction of surplus-value and he did not capture the moments of the increasing proletarian character of capitalist society as a central feature of this development. Instead, Mario Tronti developed this thematic of the “social factory” as the expansion of the commodity form to the entire society, where the salaried worker became the central political subject in capitalist social relations. This formulation was fundamental to the continued development of *operaismo* and Autonomist Marxism, and remains elementary for any understanding of a political theory that locates its critique of capitalist political economy within the ambit of a “social factory” relation.

The second issue of Quaderni Rossi opened with Mario Tronti’s “La fabbrica e la società” (The factory and the society), which attempted to determine the “specific

character of capitalist social relations” within neo-capitalism (1962). Like Panzieri, Tronti was concerned with the circulation of capital and, how, in the process of capitalist social relations, relative surplus value became generalized in the form of “social capital.” Tronti’s argument derived, substantially, from Marx’s 1857 “Introduction” to the *Grundrisse*, where the circulation of capital was discussed in terms of the moments between the sphere of production and the sphere of circulation (Marx 1973). Tronti’s analysis set in opposition the labor process (production) from the process of valorization (1962). For methodological purposes, Tronti put under the general heading “circulation” the moments of distribution, exchange, and consumption. By doing this, he was able to put in opposition two general conditions, production and circulation. Following Marx, Tronti analyzed these two processes as “distinct in their unity, up to the point of counter-posing them the one to the other” (1962, 2; Marx 1973, 99). In separating these two processes, Tronti highlighted the work process as the central node that produced value through the creation of surplus-value and the value of labor-power. Tronti understood the sphere of circulation as a realm without any determinant class conflict where isolated individuals purchased commodities with money. Only in the direct production process was antagonism possible; the key to producing a rupture in neo-capitalist relations was located in salaried work, where the “price of the worker” was nothing more than the capitalist’s “subjective choice to hide the substance of the real relations” (Ibid, 4). In the 1857 “Introduction” to his *Grundrisse*, Marx argued that production dominated the other moments in the circulation of capital as the determinant function of the relationship (1973, 99). Likewise, Tronti privileged the direct labor process and the mystification of value in the workers’ salary as the key to understanding the capitalist production of

surplus-value. The understanding of value was seen as the point in which the distinction between necessary work and surplus work was hidden. The key was to establish the analysis where “living labor [the worker] is present only as variable capital (1962, 5).” At this point, Tronti concluded, began the true and proper development of capitalist exploitation and domination of labor power.

Beyond demonstrating the determinant relationships of capitalist domination, Tronti constructed a historical analysis of capitalist exploitation through the salary, because, in the salary, one could “follow the entire development of capitalist production” (Ibid). Throughout the history of capitalist development class struggle played the important role of conditioning the form of capitalist domination by forcing, through resistance, capital to alter its form of productive social relations. Importantly, the means of production did not develop along the lines of objective scientific progress; as Panzieri had concluded in his discussion on the capitalist use of technology, the means of production were determined and shaped by class conflict, by determinant social relations of production. Moreover, throughout its history, capital had learned how to “deepen and extend its dominion” on labor. Tronti demonstrated this historical process by analyzing the Factory Acts in England in the 19th century:

With the results of the various commissions of inquiry, with the violent intervention of the State, the collective capitalist first tries to convince and then begins to constrain the single capitalist to align itself to the general needs of capitalist social production.... It is only on this base that it becomes possible, at a certain point, a process of generalization of capitalist production and its development to a higher level (Ibid, 15).

The social nature of capital, in its planning function, was not constituted by an objective process, but was understood through this analysis as determined by class conflict within the productive process, from a simple cooperation model with the extraction of absolute surplus value (i.e., lengthening of the work day) to the arrival at the development of

processes for the expansion of extracting relative surplus value (i.e., intensification of work via technical implements, reduction of wages, et cetera). In this process the social character of capital emerged as the dominating force in society, compelling individual capital to follow suit. This process of capitalist development created the ability of social capital to augment relative surplus value. Tronti, differing from Panzieri's analysis, located capital's increasing function as the *subsumption* of society by and through transformations of capitalist development, to the point where the entire society existed as means for the ends of capitalist production. Thus, Tronti wrote,

[w]hen the factory possesses the entire society—the entire social production becomes industrial production—the specific traces of the factory are lost within the generic traces of the society. When all of the society becomes reduced to a factory, the factory—as such—seems to disappear.... The higher degree of development of capitalist production signals the more profound mystification of all bourgeois social relations. The real increasing process of *proletarianizzazione* is present as a formal process of *terziarizzazione* (Ibid, 21 italics in original).⁴¹

The “social factory” reflected, for Tronti, the expansion of salaried work as the basis of increasing the proletarian and tertiary characteristics of productive relations. When he was using the term “factory,” Tronti, like Panzieri and the rest of the Autonomists, was not envisioning that the actual, or empirical, view that implied a particular factory (i.e., Fiat's Mirafiori production plant) was going to control and dominate social relations. Rather, Tronti followed Lenin's “scientific concept” of the factory, which, as Lenin had argued in *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, was conceptually useful only insofar as it expressed the “highest degree” of capitalist development. Tronti utilized this understanding of the factory in order to identify the logical development of capitalism and to highlight the tendency of this development to turn all of society into a moment, or

⁴¹ I have left *proletarianizzazione* and *terziarizzazione* in Italian here. Elsewhere I have translated these terms as “proletarian character” and “tertiary character.”

a particular aspect, of the universal form of industrial production. The empirical content of Tronti's "social factory" found its particular hypothesis in the claim that capitalist development and dominion over society demonstrated the political aspect of control over the categories of labor and labor-power as determinant components of capital; that is, for capital, labor and labor-power only existed as particular subjects within capital. In this process capital sought to obfuscate the worker's individual relation to the collective worker by denying, ideologically, the categories of labor and labor-power as autonomous subjects. Thus, the historical process of capitalist development, in denying the workers' existence outside of its commodity form, Tronti believed, demonstrated capital's "expanding dependency on labor-power," and compelled it to "plan, on a long period, the capital-labor relationship as an index of stability of the social system" (Ibid, 27).

Parallel to this ideological form of workers' "integration" in capital, Tronti cautioned those in the left who took the "old maximalist"⁴² position that viewed labor as entirely outside of capital. Rather than approach capitalist social relations through this conceptual duality, Tronti's method required an investigation of each category through their particularity within an otherwise unitary relationship. Following this, labor had to be investigated as a part of capital, as it existed within capitalist production. Like Panzieri, this methodological point was not a matter for lauding labor's domination by capital, but of pointing to the possibilities for breaking this domination within the concrete, or historically determinant, material reality. The working class, Tronti wrote, "needs to

⁴² The epithet of being labeled a "maximalist" derived from the "revolutionary" wing of the Socialist Party in the 1910's who were against any "reformism" or parliamentary activity. The actual term was utilized to describe those who pushed for the party's maximum program, for the most revolutionary consequences of the party's theoretical elaboration. Tronti's appeal here was intended to be a friendly critique and a warning that the "old maximalists" viewed class struggle through a lens of "economic catastrophe" with the working class existing as completely separated from capital.

recognize itself as a *particular* of capital, if it wants to present itself as its general antagonist.” Further, the working class’ antagonism would emerge when “the collective worker counterposes itself not only to the machine as constant capital, but to labor-power, as variable capital. *Labor needs to see labor-power, as a commodity, as its proper nemesis*” (Ibid, 25-6 emphasis added).

This identification of worker antagonism between the concepts labor and labor-power pushed Tronti’s formulation of working class strategy beyond the possibility of workers’ control. In order to overcome capitalist social relations, Tronti’s analysis relied on the “subversive praxis” of the working class as an antagonistic subject that would assert a “political response” against capital’s attempt at the “economic integration” of labor and labor-power. The more capital was able to reproduce labor-power, the more it was also capable of reproducing itself. The workers’ movement, for its part, was seen as completely integrated into capital’s plan. That is, insofar as the workers’ movement concentrated on contractual struggles (i.e., economic struggles) alone, the union became a “typical *democratic* institute of capitalist *planning*” (1963, 61 emphasis in the original). In this sense, Tronti highlighted how the “ideology of neo-capitalism correspond[ed] to a capitalist organization of the workers’ movement” (Ibid, 64-5). Thus, the working class stood naked in its relationship with social capital, its struggle was now deprived of the proper possibility of mediation. From this rejection of mediation, Tronti declared his disagreement with the possibility of workers’ control. Instead of trying to get control over the work process, “the single worker needs to become *indifferent* to his work, so that the working class can come to hate it” (Ibid, 68 italics in original). This hatred of work was viewed as the “irrational” aspect of capital’s rational plan. The only anarchy that existed

for Tronti was the workers' hatred for work, as the only element that capital could not socially organize. The strategic consequences of this position seem clear: there was a need to organize a workers' movement capable of giving a political expression to the "refusal of labor" (Ibid, 70). But more immediately, this position portended the eventual rupture in *Quaderni Rossi*. Tronti now rejected the methods of social science, as they "only would serve to register the workers' movement, in a better way, within the development of capital" (Ibid, 73).

Within these two depictions of the "social factory"—the Panzierian and the Trontian—emerged a divergence of understanding on the proper strategic goals to be followed by revolutionaries. We saw above that Panzieri's analysis was concerned with capitalist concentration and the effect this had on the social relations of production in terms of control and development of the working class. From his analysis, Panzieri remained wedded to the idea of workers' control as the appropriate strategy for overcoming capitalism. Tronti, however, viewed the "social factory" and capitalist development in terms of its increasing transformation of society as a particular moment of industrial production where the wage relation, and thus the proletarian character of society, became the dominant fact of social relations. In order to overcome this state of things, he argued for the political expression of antagonism by the working class as a refusal of labor to become labor-power; that is, Tronti posited the rejection of commodification and salaried labor as the proper strategy of revolutionary activity. As we will see in subsequent chapters, this divergent understanding would influence the wave of upheavals around the issue of class antagonism and working class power during the "hot autumn" of the late 1960s and beyond. In anticipation of a later discussion, it is

worth noting that, on the one hand, Tronti's formulation of working class strategy as a rupture and antagonism by labor against labor-power rejected institutional mediations (i.e., workers' contractual struggles or positive claims to be made by workers, as labor-power, in particular factory struggles), whereas Panzieri's formulation required the rejection by the working class of the particular capitalist form of their relationships that, by themselves, did not reject, but in fact relied upon, workers taking over their workplaces and constructing sources of "workers' power" within the society's productive relations. To put this another way, Tronti's analysis, as we will see more fully in chapter four, was essentially a rejection of productivism as a strategy for revolution, whereas Panzieri relied upon the idea of working class production and development, albeit to a lesser degree than the "objectivists," as the basis for socialist revolution. This contradiction contributed to a fundamental rupture within *Quaderni Rossi* in 1963 (see below), as each, following the particular hypotheses that followed from their understanding of the "social factory," generated a different understanding of the collective worker and its potentiality for political opposition to neo-capitalism. We turn now to what some consider the key to Autonomist Marxism, their theorization of class composition and investigations into working class behavior and attitudes within the high point of capitalist development (Wright 2002). It was here that, methodologically, *Quaderni Rossi* sought to verify their theoretical hypotheses generated from their analysis of neo-capitalism as a "social factory."

The renewal of the workers' struggles and *Quaderni Rossi's* interpretation of the "new forces"

The theoretical genesis of Quaderni Rossi coincided with a renewal in workers' struggles and a new sense of collective protest that developed in the rise of the "New Resistance" with an antifascist and antiauthoritarian discourse that found similar tendencies in the workerist's emphasis on working class autonomy as a strategy for political struggle. Directly appropriating the language of the partisan Resistance, this new movement did not, however, limit its understanding of fascism to Mussolini's totalitarian regime.⁴³ Rather, there was widespread sentiment that understood fascism to be a "constant tendency of the bourgeois system" and, that, in the current phase of neo-capitalist social relations, it was the boss (*il padrone*) who was identified with fascism (Bermani 1997, 149, 192). This "New Resistance" came out of a younger generation whose political development differed fundamentally from the older militants. For example, in the early 1950s there existed within the workers' movement, and in the parties of the left, a sense of doom, a genuine feeling that the worst was yet to come. But the generation that became politically socialized in the latter half of the 1950s confronted a radically different world. In no small measure had the "economic miracle" of 1958-1963 changed the Italian landscape and basic mode of living. There was an attitudinal shift in the young that reflected the societal revolution that began with the introduction of mass consumer goods, television and music, cinema, refrigeration, and mass ownership of the

⁴³ While initially used by opponents of Mussolini, the fascist regime began using the term "totalitarian" to describe itself in the mid-1920s. Despite the Cold War connotations that the term assumed in Western societies, the Italians used the term during the 1960s to broadly express the political, social, and economic system—neo-capitalism—as Panzieri, appropriating the Frankfurt schools usage of the phrase, had introduced the term during the late 1950s. Christofferson's work on "anti-totalitarianism" as a tool for critiquing the left misses the Italian example. He wrote that the "extreme Left attacked the PCI for its supposed...betrayal of revolution" (2004, 15). This is accurate, but since he frames the discussion in terms of the legacy of the Resistance, he misses the Marxist left's critique of reformism and how the PCI, following the lead of the PSI, sought to enter into the government, which, as we will see in the discussion of Classe Operaia's analysis of the State, was a central component of the "social factory."

automobile; in short, modernization entailed the conviction that all could be changed, it was the opening of new horizons full of boundless possibilities that shattered the defeated mentality of the 1950s (Crainz 2005, 87-147).

Not only had the attitude of the young shifted as a result of domestic changes, but the role of Italy, internationally, became much more prominent as its national economic indicators placed the Italian economy as an economic leader, even earning monetary praise from the influential business weekly, The Economist. The left had consistently been international in its political and ideological positions, but this first generation of postwar youth found new sources of international solidarity. While the Soviet Union's action in Hungary and Poland had shown the repressive side of "existing socialism," the Cuban and Algerian Revolutions sparked the imagination of the young (Balestrini and Moroni 1988, 25-30). Moreover, there was an awareness among the more politicized youth about international currents that gave a fresh breath of air to the possibilities for resistance: the Japanese protest against Eisenhower's planned visit, which was cancelled as a result of opposition and workers' strikes and events in South Korea and Turkey against regimes perceived to be conservative or reactionary. While this sentiment was widely felt at a more general level in the Cold War's thawing of tension under the Kennedy-Khrushchev doctrine of "peaceful coexistence," its development took different turns within the left. Reflecting two divergent trajectories that would define the left's history in the 1960s and 1970s: one sector viewed this situation as an opening to parliamentary politics and the achievement of State power; the other elements saw in this rapport a "global plan" that exhibited strikingly similar relationships within the capital-class nexus.

This sense of international and domestic affairs centered on a general feeling among the young of an attitude that put itself in opposition to all systems of power. This rather loose understanding of anti-authoritarianism produced forms of political and social struggle that had all but disappeared from Italian society during the period of postwar reconstruction. As we saw in the first chapter, the party system, in the immediate postwar years, had mobilized popular forces into a system of electoral and parliamentary politics. During the course of the 1950s, this system was seen as disconnected from the popular masses, by Catholics, Socialists, and Communists alike (Negri 2007, 19-27; Crainz 2005, 152-62). When combined with the social changes that were apace in the late 1950s, this distance from party politics emerged in full force as students and workers began protesting the “new Italy,” the Italy of the so-called “affluent society”⁴⁴ of private consumption and mass production.

The postwar renewal of mass social movements began with the protests of July 1960. On March 25th, the ruling Christian Democrats formed a new government with a hard-line conservative, Fernando Tambroni, as the head of government. For the first time in the postwar period the DC had to rely upon the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement (MSI) to form a government. Tambroni evinced himself and his government as authoritarian by banning any protest of his government and violently suppressing any popular manifestations that denounced his regime. More provocatively, however, was the government’s decision to allow the MSI to hold its annual convention in Genoa, a city with strong roots in workers’ history and a stronghold of the Northern Resistance. Much like 1948 when workers took over the city after an attempted assassination of PCI leader

⁴⁴ John Kenneth Gailbraith, *The Affluent Society* (1958). In 1959 Federico Fellini’s *La Dolce Vita* was released, displaying the decadence and moral degeneration of the new bourgeois order based on affluence and private consumption.

Palmiro Togliatti, students and workers quickly organized protests that sought to prevent the convention and demonstrated stern opposition to any return of fascists to position of power. For many, the battle cry was “do as they did in Tokyo,”—a reference to the popular protests that prevented US President Dwight Eisenhower from making an unpopular visit to Japan. It is important to note that the Genoese youth were the children of laid-off workers, and, despite the propaganda that highlighted the economic success of the Italian economy, these same youth had witnessed the relative decline of Genoa’s economy (Bermani 1997, 169). From this declining situation the Genoese youth gave birth to the cultural icon of *le magliette a strisce* (torn t-shirts) as a symbol of antifascism and resistance (Crainz 2005, 180-88). The torn t-shirt became the symbol of the working class situation in the new Italy, as an exploited class without means for acquiring decent clothing, and as a self-identifying code for letting your peers know where you stood in, what would quickly become referred to as, “the struggle.”

The Genoese workers announced a general strike in Genoa and Savona for June 30th to protest and prevent the MSI convention scheduled for July 2nd. With the general strike proclaimed, an estimated hundred thousand workers, and sons of workers, marched through the city and established barricades, blocked roads in preparation for battle with the police. The situation quickly became a battlefield with police reinforcements arriving the next day and the Tambroni government permitting the police to shoot, if necessary. On the eve of the proposed convention the situation on the streets of Genoa had become “pre-insurrectionary”: old partisan formations were armed; people were busy preparing Molotov bombs; hundreds of thousands of workers were prepared to battle the neo-fascists and “forces of order,” as the lines separating the two began to blur. The

government, keen on avoiding more difficulties, revoked the MSI's permission to hold its convention in Genoa, on the condition that the left parties and unions would "guarantee the maintenance of order" (Bermani 1997, 178). But the experience of Genoa had spread, spontaneously, throughout Italy. Protests against the Tambroni government occurred in Licata, Sicily (July 4), in Reggio Emilia (July 7), and Rome at Porta San Paolo (July 6), culminating in a national general strike called by the GCIL for the 8th of July. In each case the government responded with violent repression, murdering and injuring protesters. The Tambroni government fell on July 19th, but the lessons for the "new Italy" were quite important: the young workers and students reintroduced mass struggles as an essential component of political engagement; it demonstrated a conflict between electoral politics and mass action, confirming the distance of the parties from the determinant problems of the working class; it was the first taste that "revolution was possible" for a new generation; and it reaffirmed the need, felt within some parts of the CGIL since 1955, for an understanding of the workers' situation and for new ways to construct a new workers' politics.

The three years from 1960-62 were a period of a postwar renewal in the labor struggle, and to a limited extent, in the general class struggle. Beginning from the more advanced sectors of economy, particularly the electrical, metal, and mechanical industries, workers' struggles became a potent force for the first time in the new Republic. The first signs of this workers' renewal was during April 1960 in Milan at Alfa Romeo with a 16-day strike against work rhythms. This initial appearance culminated, a little later, in a three-month strike with workers marching through the city squares that led to a Christmas Day manifestation in Piazza Duomo in the center of

Milan. Bermani captured the importance of this event: “You could not distinguish between the electrical and mechanical workers, the students, and the intellectuals. The uniformity of the economic miracle had abolished each element of them and restored a more clear expression of the societal class contradictions ... This connection [was] new” (1997, 239). This same year, 1960, witnessed the national contractual struggle of the metal mechanics. Backed by union support, the final agreement had important pay raises and reduction of work hours. More importantly, the new contract was an “integrative contract” that allowed for local negotiations to modify the national contract to meet the needs of workers in particular sectors and companies (Barkan 1984, 56; Foa 1975, 125-7). For the CGIL, this was part of a strategy for state intervention as a democratic force against the monopolies.⁴⁵ However, as we will see below, the unions failed to account for two factors, the State-capital relationship and the new composition of the working class and its attitudes and behaviors.

The emphasis on sector and company level struggles opened the way to new possibilities for worker protest. Throughout 1961 and 1962 there was a wave of local struggles (ranging in diverse industries and sectors) that culminated in the renewal of workers’ struggles at Fiat in the summer of 1962, marking a dramatic turning point in working class politics.⁴⁶ The key to these actions for *Quaderni Rossi* was the nature of the claims addressed and the new forms of workers’ communication that developed by the more “advanced” workers. The general claims went beyond the “political” claims of

⁴⁵ For analysis of the union’s position in the V Congress of the CGIL, see Vittorio Rieser, “Definizione del settore in una prospettiva politica,” *Quaderni Rossi*, no. 1, 1961: 73-90.

⁴⁶ For an outline that captures the extent of these affairs in Turin and highlights the role of the workers’ assemblies, see Giovanni Alasia, “Alcuni dati sulle lotte sindacali a torino 1960-1. Osservazioni preliminari,” *Quaderni Rossi*, no. 1, 1961: 149-86.

the left-wing parties and targeted the structure of power as the key to exploitation. These demands did not derive from “tactical” considerations, but from what QR identified as a general “antagonism” to the bosses power. There were, in short, “new forces” at play within the working class that were appearing for the first time, as political subjects, in this wave of struggles.

In this general background, *Quaderni Rossi* emerged as a potent force for “discovering” the new working class within the large factories of Turin. As Mario Tronti later recounted the importance of QR in the early 1960s, “the experience of Italian *operaismo* was fundamentally the meeting of a new Marxism and this new working class” (2001, 2-3). The earlier and more important interventions into factory working life were conducted by a group around Romano Alquati (Piero Gasparotto and Romolo Gobbi), whose political experience derived from the work of Danilo Montaldi and the “sociology from the base” that came out of the political circle in Cremona. Alquati’s singular contribution to *Quaderni Rossi* was in the field of producing an understanding of working class subjectivity as the expression of attitudes, behaviors, and the composition of, what Tronti identified as, the “collective worker.” Beginning from an understanding of “workers’ inquiry,” Alquati sought to develop the consciousness of the individual worker’s social relation in production as a phase of “preliminary consciousness” in preparation for a “second phase” which would be the point at which the “collective worker” would be the result of “a ‘workers’ research’ as self-research by the individual workers’ together” (1975, 13). For Alquati, the proper understanding of workers’ inquiry and co-research were preparatory sociological tools for workers to use in order to develop their own collective consciousness of themselves as a class.

Alquati's contribution to Quaderni Rossi, in the form of three published articles in the review, must be conditioned by his understanding of the review as a "traditional review" with limited potential. His works were submitted as pieces designed simply as a form of communication. The details of his investigations at Fiat were not subjected to large discussions within QR, despite their relevance for "proving" their theoretical hypotheses (Alquati 1975, 24; Alquati 2000, II, 9). Alquati viewed the journal as a traditional theoretical review characterized by "a self-enclosed elaboration." A bit skeptical about the review, he "used the *Quaderni* ... as much as possible as an instrument of intervention" (Ibid, 23). Thus, what we find in his contributions remained limited and somewhat rudimentary, with a more complete picturing emerging later in his experience with Classe Operaia. However, his work was essential to one of the key conceptual and theoretical contributions of the group, the early formulation of what became known as "class composition," a conceptual tool for understanding the process whereby the working class is composed, decomposed, and recomposed. This dynamic understanding of the working class contributed to the theorization of the "mass worker" as the identity of the "collective worker" brought into being by technological and organizational changes (e.g., Taylorism and Fordism). While this understanding of working class political subjectivity did not take full shape until the journal Classe Operaia was formed, Alquati began his research in QR by examining these trends that had been introduced in the postwar period, and built, primarily, on the massive migration of Southerners to Italy's "industrial triangle."

Alquati's first articles, *Documenti sulla lotta di classe alla Fiat* (Documents on the class struggle at Fiat) and *Relazione sulle "forze nuove"* (Report on the "new

forces”), were part of a contribution to a PSI Convention at Turin in January 1961. His key points, derived from discussions with members of the Internal Commission, with young employees, and some casual discussions, concerned the nature of work at Fiat and the characteristic of the new, mainly young immigrant workers, and their relationship with work and the union (1961, 198-215; 1961a, 215-240). Alquati focused on the new workers, who were predominantly young, and performed compartmentalized work with the introduction of automation and consequent deskilling of the older workforce. This new labor force, he found, were “deprived of every ideological or interpretive scheme or of any tied reference to the historic experience of the workers’ movement” (Ibid, 234). Moreover, and somewhat similar to Luchino Visconti’s depiction of the Southern experience in the North in *Rocco and his brothers*, timely released in 1960, they were uprooted from a peasant culture, with a bitter memory of the postwar defeats of the landless movements, and viewed work as tiresome, rather than as a means to their emancipation (Balestrini and Moroni 1988, 26; Partridge 1996, 85). Albeit abstractly expressed in these early years, this perspective on the role of work and the ends of life was akin to the young students and “sons of workers” who were wont to find the end of man encapsulated in history, a connection that here is only anticipatory and does not develop until the worker-student politics around the “hot autumn” (see chapters 5 and 6).

In his encounters, Alquati found that the younger workers were attracted by the “Fiat paradise” and the life it promised them. Once the reality of factory life demystified this “paradise,” they quickly developed attitudes that “criticized the logic of the factory entirely” (1961a, 235). Alquati interpreted the basic problems in terms of political consciousness and the relationship between the older workers and the new workers. The

former were largely tied to the union movement, while the younger workers “refused union work,” as they perceived the unions to be disinterested in work conditions and relations in the factory. Moreover, the new workers’ basic sentiment, as Alquati characterized it, revealed the crucial point that “the only way to guarantee the union conquest was to cut the power of the boss in the factory” as a “problem of political power, of the workers’ management of all society” (Ibid). This was far removed from the left-wing union’s cry for the “dignity of work” and “rights” of the workplace that had become a staple of the left’s push for entry into the government. Alquati, based off these preliminary observations, found that the general workers’ attitude provided ample evidence that the neo-capitalist ideological view of worker “integration,” a key polemical point in QR’s elaboration, was wrong. Thus, the preliminary findings of Alquati pointed to a new working class that understood the political nature of contestation and antagonism as the ends of class struggle in the factory, as part of a general rejection of the workplace. Following the deskilling of labor, these younger workers viewed the system of work qualification as more-or-less arbitrary, derived from the political rationality of the boss. While his discussions took place with a small portion of the workforce, and perhaps, represented a new “vanguard,” he identified within them a “revolutionary potential” that, he believed, was capable of being generalized to other large industrial factories.

In order for the renewal of the workers’ struggles to have a more consistent and revolutionary development, Alquati set out to sketch the outlines of a class movement, with its new composition of workers, by cultivating within them a certain level of political consciousness of themselves as a class, and the need for self-organization (1962,

64). This idea of developing the “embryo of an alternative consciousness” derived from Lenin’s analysis of spontaneous workers’ action in *What Is To Be Done?* For Lenin, it was the responsibility of the vanguard party, as an element external to the production process in the factory, to develop this spontaneity in a political direction. For Alquati and *Quaderni Rossi*, however, the problem was not that of developing external “guides,” but of aiding the workers in constructing organizations that they controlled. Rather than working from outside, Alquati, through the intervention of co-research, sought to “stabilize a continuous relationship to create stable ties on the problems that emerge in order to create a political organization of workers in the factory” (1962, 75). Thus, the key problems were matters of political consciousness and organization, intimately connected to the workers’ struggles that could be developed through communication and, potentially, the workers’ own investigation of their collective understanding of productive relations and development of an alternative arrangement (Ibid, 69).

In conducting his analysis, Alquati read a theoretical Marxism of the factory that drew heavily on Panzieri’s analysis of technology and capitalist despotism. In marked contrast to his writing on Fiat, Alquati interpreted the effect of technology on the work process in such a manner that pushed the question of organization away from the “workers’ control” thesis as a problem of “the workers’ management of all society,” including the liquidation of the “parasitic” classes, toward the political organization of workers’ antagonism that emerged from Tronti’s factory-society analysis. The problem for Alquati centered on the relationship between the worker and the machine as a particular facet of social relations at a certain point of technological development. While Marx had studied the effects of mechanization on the work process, it was the “true and

proper capitalist revolution (or counterrevolution),” developed and executed by Frederick Taylor, that marked capital’s “grand political victory; from this point on, capital developed its command through the machines themselves” as a “predetermination of living labor.” Moreover, this “revolution” was considered to be, much like the interpretation of fascism by the “New Resistance,” a permanent feature of capitalism; “Taylorism does not appear to us as a historic contingency, but as a tendency that reproduces itself in new forms in each phase of the creation and capitalist appropriation of relative surplus-value” (Ibid, 129, 160). This “predetermination” of the worker, by capital, could only be met by the working class’s political antagonism.

The introduction of mechanization and automation altered the nature of workplace hierarchy and command, as well as the jobs and functions of the workers. The new basis of organization and job tasks were determined by information and political control to determine the ends to which information was used. The hierarchy functioned in terms of managing the extraction of surplus-value. Technology was used to control this process by creating “new forms of atomization and reification of the working class” (Ibid, 120). Alquati examined these new formations in the division between time-management of the workforce, the “trainers” of labor, and the workers. In this process, the goal of management to integrate the new workforce to the productive process and the machine was demonstrated as a bureaucratic technique that included the ability to control the “micro-movements” of the workers. While time-management functioned as a direct tool of capital, the trainers of labor, in this relationship, came from within the union. Alquati described this phenomenon as “*ruffiani*,” as workers fending for themselves, which he viewed as the “result of the historic contrast of political atomization and socialization of

the worker composed dialectically” (Ibid). That is, the phenomenon of *ruffiani* was the direct consequence of an atomized workforce that had accepted its integration into capital.

The new tasks introduced by automation rendered the worker to a fragmentary existence where the assembly line, the machines, and the bosses that controlled the rhythm and structure of work, mediated the bonds of work. No longer was the worker the “executor” of a productive task, but, rather, his role, as an appendage to the machine, was to “fulfill” the productive plan set forth by management and thus “produce surplus value for capital” (Ibid, 123). In this new stage of capitalist development, production by the worker lost all meaning outside of its role in valorizing capital. The work process itself no longer held any positive value for the workers. The result of this was two-fold: management had to attempt to restore a sense of “value” to the work process, and the idea of workers’ control as “self-management” was superseded by the need for workers to resist the command of capital. Drawing on analogies to the Center-Left consensus for “democratic planning,” Alquati foresaw the capacity of more astute managers to introduce “free citizens” in the factory, an idea that captured the integration of the workforce in decision-making, albeit subordinated to the top leadership in a situation comparable to the integrative role performed by the worker-management councils in the immediate postwar years. In any case, the “boss would have to develop as much as possible the creative potential of the worker” in order to give some value to work, since it had been eviscerated in the direct process of production.

The new forces of the working class resisted this process of integration, and took a stance against the basic structure of power in the factory, including “the immediate

infrastructure” of work. The new working class, as it expressed its actions spontaneously and outside the framework of the trade unions and left political parties, no longer concerned itself with “controlling” the productive process, but, following Tronti’s argument for political antagonism against capital’s economic integration, needed to develop itself through a “process of revolutionary *rupture* of the planned capitalist system” (Ibid, 157 italics mine). Since the bureaucratic apparatus determined the machines and the “infrastructure” of work, and this, in turn, was a response to the needs of the collective capitalist, workers’ control over production could not be foreseen as a possibility for establishing, what Panzieri called, a “dualism of power.” For Alquati, workers’ control as a possibility for socialist revolution first had to rely upon, at a minimum, the working class’s rupture with capital’s control of information, embodied in technology as well as in the leading function of management. For Alquati, this was not possible within the existing institutions of capitalism, even if these came under the control of the factory workers. If for no other reason, workers would still have to build a new power based off capitalist technology. Panzieri had only approximated the discussion by talking about “capitalist use,” the problem, Alquati believed, was more profound: technology embodied a level of information that assumed the subordination and control of the work force.

The last important point in Alquati’s article was its emphasis on the global plan of capital as a means of introducing an international class perspective, in the system of the Soviet Union as well as that in the United States and capitalist West. Olivetti, the particular “case-study” of his article, produced machines and implements for other industries, and was a particularly useful example for demonstrating how smaller firms

were integrated into the global plan of capital. Alquati outlined a general schema for an understanding of an international division of work and the national expression of this, divided into particular geographic regions. In this global plan, there existed dominant factories, which were the “propulsive points” of the economy, from which one could then speak of divisions and sections. The function of workers, in this system, remained that of “fulfilling” the plan administered and determined by an array of bureaucratic and hierarchic functions. Importantly, this situation was not particular to the Western capitalist bloc, but could equally be found in the Soviet Union’s national planning and the role of workers in this plan (Ibid, 157). The particular feature of this relationship was evidenced in the manner in which the boss used the machine in order to hide the bureaucracy, by “eliminating it physically from the workers and transmitting the functions to the machine,” through the control of “single decisions of each worker” in fulfilling their tasks in the production process (Ibid, 157; 1962, 94). This connection with an international division of labor anticipated a much more developed analysis of the Soviet Union as a State-capitalist society along with an internationalist dimension of working class composition that would be more fully developed in successive years.

Piazza Statuto and ruptures within Quaderni Rossi

The central elements that emerged from Alquati’s analysis, along with Tronti’s discussion of the social factory, pointed to the need for organization of the working class’s “political antagonism” against capital. If the workers’ renewal of 1960-62, along with QR’s co-research in the factories, had demonstrated a revolutionary “potentiality” in the working class, the events of Piazza Statuto appeared to elevate the level of this worker antagonism. The revolt of Piazza Statuto had multiple effects, including, as the

secretary general of the Union of Italian Labor (UIL), Giorgio Benvenuto, recalled a decade later, a reunification of the unions away from the ideological division that pitted capitalist “democratic” unions against the “social-communist” unions (Foa 1975, 130). From the perspective of those in Quaderni Rossi, Piazza Statuto proved to be the “immediate catalyst” for the splintering of QR into a series of seemingly insuperable divisions (Wright 2002, 58).

1962 marked the definitive arrival of the class struggle in the postwar years, breaking a decade of worker defeats and trepidation. In the previous year the public sector engineering and mechanical workers had won impressive gains in contractual terms, and in 1962, beginning with workers at Lancia (auto) and Michelin (rubber/tires), this momentum spread through the private sector finally reaching Fiat, an island of capitalist-imposed quiescence that stood as an exemplary workplace in the neo-capitalist propaganda of the economic boom. The immediate events of the Piazza Statuto revolt occurred in early July (7-9) as part of a metal-mechanics strike at Fiat. The UIL, the more conservative of the three main unions, brokered a deal with Fiat and signed a separate contract without approval or support of its own workers, and against the strike in general. Upon hearing the news, picketing workers and students marched and assembled in Piazza Statuto in front of the UIL headquarters to protest what they perceived to be the unions’ betrayal. The scene quickly became a battleground as workers’ anger mounted and police arrived in a show of force. For over twenty-four hours clashes occurred between the protesters and the police, with stone throwing and other projectiles coming from one side that was met with reinforcements, teargas, detentions, and arrests by the forces of order. In Turin, the unique factory-city, dominated by the presence of Fiat, the conflicts that

began in 1960 at Genoa and Milan manifested in a collective action by a new generation of young workers, workers with new attitudes and behaviors that were outside the understanding of the union apparatus and political parties.

Not surprisingly, a movement that takes shape outside the framework of the existing norms and preferences of a particular social order draws the condemnation of the established leadership. Much like their contemporaries in Genoa and Milan, who the magistrate had characterized as a “mob, untouchables, without family, no school, perhaps no religion, without name or civil existence,” the “mob” at Piazza Statuto was berated by the labor press as fascists, or paid provocateurs in the service of Fiat (Bermani 1997, 224; Cronache 1962, 57-61). The liberal spectrum of the media, for its part, played the Cold War card by trying to place blame on the PCI and thus isolate the communists from the PSI and the push for a Center-Left government. *Quaderni Rossi* identified a different phenomenon in this upheaval, albeit with very little agreement about how to interpret, strategically, the importance of Piazza Statuto. While the media focused on the rioting and the clashes between the police and protesters, QR was quick to separate itself from identifying with the “squalid degeneration” of the manifestation (Ibid 1962). Panzieri offered the more grim assessment, describing the whole affair as a “grave blow to the worker left”; the inability of the workers to control the strike was evidence, for Panzieri, that the workers were relatively immature and left themselves open to provocation and repression (1973, 302). Despite this lack of organization, the group still found in the revolt the “first appearance” of the new working class as a political force in general antagonism to the capitalist organization of life (Daghini 2000, 4). As for the rioting and “degeneration,” QR attributed this to the general conditions of urban work life that was

isolating and deprived the workers from feeling “themselves as participants of a more vast class-consciousness” (Cronache 1962, 60).

Despite their attempt to distance themselves from the affair’s more desultory aspects, QR’s participation in the workers’ strike, and its interpretation of the role of the unions, marked the end of their collaboration with the local CGIL. The first divisions within QR were between the members of the group who were affiliated with the CGIL and the Turin *Camera di Lavoro*, who left the review after its first number as the result of a pamphlet circulated by Pierluigi Gasparotto and Romolo Gobbi. This pamphlet, circulated during a strike by maintenance workers in the transportation sector in the summer of 1961, called on the workers to organize themselves outside the union: “the class knows how to organize itself, without the need of the party and without the need of the syndicate” (Gobbi 2000, 4). The union element within QR, particularly Vittorio Foa, who was essential to the first volume and QR’s ties to the workers’ movement, stopped contributing to the group, but left their contacts open. The group intervened in the workers’ struggle at Fiat with the circulation of a pamphlet, “Agli operai della Fiat” (To the workers of Fiat), that was distributed throughout all the sections of Fiat on July 6-7 (Cronache 1962a, 89-92). While the pamphlet was similar in content to the previous one, there was, reflecting the push in QR by Tronti and Alquati, markedly more emphasis on workers’ “taking their destiny in their own hands” by constructing their own organizations within Fiat to continue their resistance (Ibid). This last pamphlet provoked the final rupture between the Turin socialists (Vittorio Foa, Giuseppe Muraro, Giovanni Alasia, and Sergio Garavini) and Quaderni Rossi. Panzieri’s fears of being reduced to a “sect” were realized. From this moment on, workers’ history and politics in Italy became

a study of two phenomenon, the *actual* workers' movement, from the base, autonomously organized against capital, and the institutional unions and parties of the "historic left," who, following these events, *Quaderni Rossi* viewed as "completely bureaucratized" and were not adequate "instruments" to use in building a generalized workers' struggle (Negri 2007, 51; Panzieri 1987, 359).

The question of relations between QR and the union movement was a permanent feature of the review's work. But as the workers' renewal developed in the early 1960s it proved to be a prelude to a much bigger dispute about the role of organization. Following Merli, we can identify three different positions that had been developing in the review that came to a bitter confrontation during Piazza Statuto: the line of the "Wildcat strike," the workers' control position, and the political line (1987, xlii). The "workers' journal" Gatto Selvaggi (Wildcat strike) was published by Romolo Gobbi to put forth the example of sabotage as the organizational expression of workers' power during the strikes at Fiat and Lancia (1963). The role of these struggles, Gobbi wrote, was in the importance attributed to the use of sabotage against capital. But the workers' needed to continue this sabotage as the basis for "realizing more advanced forms of struggle" (1963, 1). Similarly, *Potere Operaio di Veneto* began a "workers' journal" that called for the workers' need to "bring together and generalize" the "spontaneous acts of worker insubordination" (1963, 1; 1963a). The importance of these journals resided in their exaltation of sabotage as the precondition, or base, from which to develop workers' struggle from the base, without the use of inquiry or development of political consciousness through external groups.

Against this type of “anarcho-syndicalism,” Panzieri argued that sabotage was an impoverished foundation from which to build socialism. Given the “anarchic” nature of the struggle over the previous two years, Panzieri argued that there did not exist the level of organization within the workers’ movement that could begin to construct its own leadership of the struggle, capable of “elaborating a politics” and evaluating the significance of a particular struggle (1973, 296). Reflecting his general pessimism that followed from the rupture with the CGIL, Panzieri believed that the “immediate future” did not augur well for the “prospects of large successes.” That is, despite the display of working class autonomous struggle, Panzieri foresaw a long period of educational work to be conducted by the working class in terms of cultivating and forming a mass vanguard formation. Against the example of sabotage and the “wildcat strike,” he expressed a general warning about such over-zealous appreciations of the recent class struggles, noting that in organizing a revolutionary working class movement, “there are a series of stages, and if you do not see them you end in mystifying the defeats and successes, and, at least, you end up exchanging a form of vanguard political struggle [for sabotage], which for the last ten years the working class conducted in diverse situations, in diverse moments, and which is the permanent expression of its political defeat” (1973, 304). The basic problem for the working class, strategically, was that of

knowing how to identify, beginning from the factory, the *entire* process; of knowing how to *foresee* the successive stages, in a way that the workers struggle will not be the “response” (at times defensive) to the capitalist’s move, but it will *anticipate* that move, and lead on the point where the crucial problems of capitalist development arise, and impede that complex combination of “technocratic rationality” and of “democracy” developed in the assurance and stability of capitalist dominion (Ibid, 296, italics in original).

Consistent with his earlier theoretical elaboration of workers’ control, Panzieri, took a more conservative approach that appreciated the need to build, over the long-term,

workers' institutions. But if Panzieri was distressed by the exaltation of sabotage, he was equally concerned with the more serious fissures that emerged from Tronti's theoretical and strategic position.

Romano Alquati and Mario Tronti, to use the more prominent members of this position, viewed the recent renewal of class struggle in more positive terms, posing the question of intervention at a more direct relationship with the working class. Romano Alquati articulated this through his understanding of the "self-research" where workers' came to understand themselves as the "collective worker" or as a unitary political subject in a dialectical process between struggle and continuous investigation of their own condition in the class struggle. The problem of organization, in this interpretation, was put to the immediate context of the workers' struggle. In short, for Alquati, workers' had already expressed a general antagonism to capital that could be directed in terms of self-organization and expression of the class struggle without the need for elaboration or theoretical interpretation of the movement's significance. As Toni Negri commented years later, after Piazza Statuto the only theoretical question left was that of organization (2007, 72). For this group, which included Asor Rosa, Alquati, Gasparotto, Negri, and Tronti, the immediate problem was that of direct political action towards the construction of a revolutionary working class party, autonomously organized (ie, organized from the base), to put itself as a general antagonism to the capitalist class.

Mario Tronti's elaboration of the "refusal of labor" had already tapped into the connection between sabotage and "refusal" as a general revolt against that *particular commodity*, labor-power. For Tronti, the problem became that of constructing direct contacts with the workers' base to build a revolutionary organization of the class. We saw

above the theoretical distinction between Tronti's "refusal" and Panzieri's workers' control. "After Piazza Statuto," Merli wrote, there was "certainly a convergence... against Panzieri, by the "Wildcat" group [and the workers' self-organization of *Potere Operaio di Veneto*] with the Roman "political" group" (1987, xlv). This alignment was put in open debate in the summer of 1963, as Quaderni Rossi published its Cronache Operaie (Workers' Chronicle), with the Venetian group controlling the editorial body, as an attempt to give space to the diverging positions within the group.

The Workers' Chronicle only published one issue, but represented the diverse paths that had been developing in QR over the previous two years. In his contribution to the internal problems of their work, Panzieri reiterated the need for developing a worker cadre capable of generalizing the class struggle. The spontaneity of the recent workers' struggle, again, only represented that "embryo of consciousness" and lacked an understanding of the "fundamental objective, material elements external to the working class" (1973, 294). Those who wanted to exalt this spontaneous action, Panzieri wrote, "mystified" the actual process underway by focusing solely on the working class. And, for those who thought that they could construct a party out of this workers' spontaneity, without developing workers' understanding of the material conditions of capitalism, and without developing workers' organizations that went beyond particular factory struggles, the result could only end in an imposition of a party-form based on "blind voluntarism" or "consolatory prophecies" (Ibid, 294-300).

The renewal of the workers' struggle had forced QR to confront the relationship between their theoretical elaboration and organizational strategies. By the summer of 1963, it had become apparent that the review contained at least two diverse research

projects that translated into political lines. The basis for the diverging research programs stemmed from their evaluation of the workers' struggles. Vittorio Rieser represented, on the one hand, the more conservative outlook, that "there existed, in fact, a direction of the struggle ... on the level of the union and claims; there did not exist a political plan" (1962, 15). On the other hand, the position of Tronti had been elaborated that spring in an address to the "Lega Marxista" (Marxist League) in Milan that proposed the need for a working class party appropriate to the "law of development of the working class" (1964, 1).⁴⁷ Given these two different projects, Panzieri stated: "we can have two lines of research, that are contrasting and divergent, and make political action in this coexistence. If this is possible the divergences need to be open and clear: only in this way is it legitimate; but at this moment I do not see the advantages" (1975, 303). More damningly, he continued, "there probably is not any point on which our divergences agree. It is not possible to make a workers' journal in this way" (Ibid). Panzieri accused Tronti of going against the lessons of Della Volpe's own formulation of Marxism by introducing philosophical idealism into investigations of the workers' movement. Tronti's position had represented the type of "mystification" that Panzieri had steadfastly opposed throughout his life, and, as if in a final plea for rationality and commitment to the "truth," he cautioned those in the group against Tronti's formulation:

it is for me a fascinating resurrection of a complete series of errors that in this moment the workers' left could commit. It is fascinating because it is very Hegelian, in the original sense, as a new way of reliving a philosophy of history. But it is exactly a philosophy of history, a philosophy of the working class (Ibid, 302).

From either perspective, Panzieri was not capable of foreseeing a connection between the theoretical work and a genuine connection with the real movement. The situation for him

⁴⁷ Tronti's address was published as the lead article in the first issue of Classe Operaia, entitled "Lenin in England."

was too immature. At best, the recent workers' struggle could have given way to "a new space at the theoretical and historic level" by the development of workers' organizations, not tied to QR. But, the splits in the group proved insurmountable.

By August of 1963 the group split, with the Panzieri-Rieser faction from Turin, who remained in QR, and the factions from Rome, Veneto, and Milan who went on to form Classe Operaia. The political project of CO, as we will see in the next chapter, expanded the theoretical project of *operaismo* into a critique of the State, recovering the Leninist thematic of the State and workers' organization (i.e., Party) in ways that *Quaderni Rossi* only superficially discussed. As for the Turin group, they continued to focus on the workers' condition and conduct inquiries for another three years. However, after the untimely death of Panzieri in October 1964, their work became more academic and formalistic, and increasingly separated from the revolutionary class politics that had been central to its founding purpose. If Panzieri had been unable to foresee the potentialities and actual situation of militancy in the class movement, he perceived the difficulties that would afflict Classe Operaia in its attempt to propel the class struggle into a general class revolution, based on a theoretical and idealistic assumption of the working class's "refusal" and "antagonism" that could only introduce a form of party or organization by force. In turning to Classe Operaia, we will see how they developed a theory of "workers' refusal" as the antagonistic expression of the "collective worker" and sought to propel this unitary working class political subject into an organized Party-form to lead a revolutionary class struggle against the State and against capital.

CHAPTER 4

CLASSE OPERAIA: THE PRIMACY OF WORKING CLASS STRUGGLE AND THE ORGANIZATION OF REVOLUTION

We too have worked with a concept that puts capitalist development first, and workers second. This is a mistake. And now we have to turn the problem on its head, reverse the polarity, and start again from the beginning: and the beginning is the struggle of the working class. At the level of socially developed capital, capitalist development becomes subordinated to working class struggles; it follows behind them, and they set the pace to which the political mechanisms of capital's own reproduction must be tuned. —Mario Tronti, *Lenin in England*

The political work of the class consists today essentially in keeping alive in the practice of every workers' struggle the strategic proposal of the conquest of power through the revolution. The organization and the revolution coincide in the same strategic moment. The organization is the revolution. *To organize signifies tying together, in the struggle, the mass organizations internal to the factory, at a national and international level, unifying the struggle in time and in space—Padua Autonomia Operaia*

To realize an economically and politically stable society, with the active collaboration of the working class, is the legitimate dream of intelligent bourgeois politicians: if such a dream represents the highest plan of a communist party, more than a million workers strong, the conflict between a reformist strategy and revolutionary tactics becomes inevitable—Rita di Leo, *Operai e Pci*

Introduction

The advent of Classe Operaia (*Working Class*, CO) signified a movement within *operaismo* to integrate theoretical analyses and political proposals leading to the construction of a revolutionary workers' organization. In important ways the experience of CO differed from its predecessor. First, the journal conducted more extensive interventions in the class struggle by trying to “make politics” with the workers (Negri 2007, 79). This derived from a view of the journal as an “instrument of intervention,” rather than as a place of theoretical debate. In fact, the journal's contents revealed an extensive chronicling of workers' struggles, a feature that reflected its subtitle as a “political monthly of the workers in struggle.”

The group in *Classe Operaia* came together and was animated by an emphasis on intervention in the workers' struggle. This decisive shift stemmed from a reading of the recent wave of workers' struggles that evinced, they believed, a politically unified working class with decidedly antagonistic behaviors and attitudes in its confrontation with capitalist domination (Grandi 2003, 16-18). Moving away from the focus on sociology in Quaderni Rossi, CO constructed a reductive and deterministic method that located the working class as the central, dynamic agent of capitalist development. Their methodological approach centered on a materialistic conceptualization of capitalist social relations. Unlike the orthodox Marxism of the Italian left, which determined historical development through an understanding of the "objective" conditions of capitalism, Classe Operaia examined the development of working class political subjectivity within capitalist social relations that produced an understanding of "class composition" that was specific to a social system of production with its determinant technological and social relations (i.e., Taylorism). Against orthodox Marxism's focus on the private ownership of the means of production, which produced a static conception of the working class, CO understood working class subjectivity as a dynamic and fluid social subject that was constantly composed, decomposed, and recomposed in the process of class struggle. From these methodological premises, Classe Operaia introduced the "workers' point of view" as the appropriate level of analysis from which to construct new political proposals and to generate a political line in order to build a revolutionary class organization.

Aside from the theoretical innovations that CO introduced, there existed substantive differences between the work of CO and QR. While the articles in Classe Operaia were largely monographic, the content and substance of the work derived from a

more collective approach than the intellectual production in QR. However, despite this collective work, Mario Tronti has been generally recognized as the dominant intellectual influence within the group. Lapo Berti, a CO militant who was active in the Tuscan region, later remarked on Tronti's importance: "the discussions, the ideas, the orientation, the intellectual material on which we worked was in good part derived from Tronti's writings and discourses which were commented on and discussed each time that we came together for collective work" (2000, 1). It followed from Tronti's influence that CO put forth more unified theoretical analyses and political proposals than had QR. Indeed, Tronti's intellectual prowess had a durable influence on the successive development of *operaismo*, as he possessed an "intellectual allure," in Berti's words, that enveloped those around him in the hopes of founding a new theory of workers' revolution (Ibid).⁴⁸ With this general uniformity of method, political proposals, and organization, Classe Operaia developed the analysis of the "social factory" towards the question of territory as well as its international scope. While Wright is quite accurate in his remarks that Classe Operaia was not primarily concerned with capitalist circulation or its reproduction, there was, at a minimum, an analysis of territory and internationalism in CO that broadened the discussion of social capital beyond the work of QR (2002, 80-1). Last, CO had a much more national presence than QR; while the Roman branch dominated CO's theoretical production (much like its position in the second and third years of QR), the group maintained a broader regional composition than QR, with a significant presence initially in Milan, Genoa, Florence, Turin, and Padua-Veneto, that expanded over time. The

⁴⁸ Tronti's *Operai e capitale* (Workers and capital), a collection of his writings in Quaderni Rossi and Classe Operaia along with an important new contribution, was published in October 1966, and has been described as the "bible" of working class revolution for Potere Operaio and a dominant source of analysis for a generation of militants from 1968-1977 (Greppi 2000, 8).

groups from Rome and Padua-Veneto controlled the basic editorial and political tasks of the journal. Classe Operaia was a relatively short-lived journal, but its political culture shaped the trajectory of *operaismo* in terms of method and theoretical analyses, which also influenced working class revolutionary politics into the 1970s.

In this chapter, I analyze CO's treatment of political organization and Tronti's introduction of the party as an instrument of working class revolution. I begin with Tronti's method for developing a workers' revolution in the West, that, by locating the working class as the central social subject of capitalist development, focused on factory struggles as the basis for developing a workers' political organization capable of breaking the political power of capital in order to impose a revolutionary political process within capitalist economic development. This discussion is located within the birth of the first post-war Center-Left government and the economic conjuncture of 1964-1965. Next, I examine Tronti's introduction of Lenin and construction of the party as a central theme of *operaismo*. This discussion is located within the context of the debates around the PCI after the death of Togliatti in August 1964. Out of this debate, CO developed internal divisions between Tronti and the Roman group, who sought a workers' "use" of the PCI and those, particularly from Padua-Veneto, who looked toward the working class as the proper fount of class organization and a workers' party, a split that suggests a different understanding of the "workers' point of view," or, at a minimum, of how to discern the meaning of that important methodological tool. Implicitly, from this discussion, CO developed the early forms of its critique of the State, which, in later developments was formulated by Negri as the "Planner-State." This chapter ends with the closure of CO as a journal, as the group followed diverse ways to continue their political work. I critically

examine the experience of CO in light of its theoretical and political contributions as well as its limitations.

Tronti's "Copernican Revolution"⁵⁰

At the founding conference of Classe Operaia, Mario Tronti presented an argument for overturning generations of methodological analysis in order to establish a theoretical basis for workers' revolution in the advanced capitalist West. Tronti's so-called "Copernican Revolution" established the foundations for CO's theoretical perspective by attributing primacy of the working class as the leading, dynamic subject of capitalist development. In "Lenin in England," Tronti put forth his now widely cited inversion of Marxism:

We too have worked with a concept that puts capitalist development first, and workers second. This is a mistake. And now we have to turn the problem on its head, reverse the polarity, and start again from the beginning: and the beginning is the struggle of the working class. *At the level of socially developed capital*, capitalist development becomes subordinated to working class struggles; it follows behind them, and they set the pace to which the political mechanisms of capitals' own reproduction must be tuned (1964a, 1 emphasis added).

Sweeping away the history of Western Marxism that focused on capital as the "objective" expression of the social order, Tronti asserted that, under conditions of social capital, analytical focus must be placed on the working class as the politically determinant agent of capitalist development. Importantly, the working class was not expressed here as a category of capital (i.e., labor-power); for Tronti, the problem was not that of

⁵⁰ Tronti's "Rivoluzione copernicana" (Copernican Revolution) was presented and discussed at the founding conference of Classe Operaia on October 26-7, 1963 in Florence. The full text, with excerpts of the debate, is now reprinted in Trotta and Milana's *L'operaismo degli anni Sessanta* (2008, 290-301). This was the same text that Panzieri had previously criticized as "Hegelian" (see above, Ch. 3). The substance of this address and debate was published as the lead editorial in the first number of CO as "Lenin in Inghilterra" (Lenin in England) [1964a]. "Lenin in England" was later republished in Tronti's *Operai e capitale* (1966) and translated into English by "Red Notes" in *Working Class Autonomy and the Crisis* (1979). It is now available on-line: <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/it/tronti.htm>.

understanding workers as an economic category, as this necessarily limited theoretical investigation and comprehension of the working class as part of a “predetermined social category,” thus limiting class politics to capturing economic power and management, as exemplified by those who advocated “workers’ control” (Tronti 1963a, 292). Not only did Tronti’s thesis overturn the “objectivist’s” focus on capital, but it also sought to leave behind the broad traditions of anarchist communism, council communism, and revolutionary syndicalism. Against these “economic” approaches to the working class, Tronti asserted that the class must be investigated as an autonomous political and social subject with its own distinct characteristics and historical development. Working class subjectivity was more than that particular commodity of capitalism, labor-power, and it was the task of a revolutionary method to understand and develop a conception of the working class unto itself, as a political subject within historically determinant conditions.

If the key point of analysis resided in examining the working class as a political force within capitalist social relations, then, for Tronti, it followed that it was necessary to identify and discern the historical growth and development of the class. Against the focus on the “laws of capitalist development,” Tronti proposed the need to comprehend the “laws of development of the working class” (Ibid, 292-3). Only in this way was it possible to develop a revolutionary theory adequate to the historic conditions of social capital and its particular relations of production expressed in the “social factory.” For Tronti, the revolution was political, and its agent was the working class. Its concern was political power, the political growth and intensification of workers’ power over capitalist society. “The specific revolutionary movement,” Tronti wrote, “of the working class consists in the fact of capturing power, the revolutionary rupture, hence the expansion of

the working class within the economic system of capital is immediately put as political growth” (Ibid, 292). Thus, Tronti’s so-called “Copernican Revolution” unfolded a political project that methodologically prioritized the investigation of the working class as a political subject, analytically distinct from its economic categorization in capital as labor-power, with the purpose of discerning the class’s “laws of development” as the premises for constructing a revolutionary political organization.

Tronti based his analysis on the recent wave of workers’ struggles as an expression and confirmation of a stage of the autonomous political growth of the class.⁵¹ In identifying the political situation of the working class, the early 1960s signified collective attitudes and practices that, in later years, would be popularized through the slogan of the “refusal of work”: “planned non-cooperation, organized passivity, polemical expectations, a political refusal, and a permanent continuity of struggles” (Tronti 1964a, 18-19). Reaffirming the shared position of QR, working class “rupture” was the key contradiction of capitalism, and this rupture was displayed through a general “refusal” of capitalist social relations by the working class. Tronti laid out the potential of this refusal to signify the rejection of claims by workers to capital. “We can foresee,” Tronti wrote:

that even at a certain point the relationship between the working class and capital will be overcome, in the sense that the workers will not make any more claims to capital ... [the class] will not be limited any longer to ask for some things, but to refuse those things that are requested: thus it can be foreseen that a more high form of development of the class struggle in which the requests, the claims, will be made only by the capitalists (1963a, 294).

As we saw in the previous chapter, Tronti’s “strategy of refusal,” and particularly his view that “labor needs to see labor-power, as a commodity, as its proper nemesis,” was

⁵¹ For a staunch defense of Tronti’s position against claims of “idealism,” see Albert Asor Rosa’s review of *Operai e capitale* (1967).

now presented as the key strategic line of working class militancy that emerged out of the early 1960s (Tronti 1963, 25-6). In this great “refusal,” Classe Operaia initially found the possibility, the potentiality, for the unification of the workers’ struggle through the construction of a workers’ organization, giving expression beyond particular struggles and generalized to the whole class. The basis of this formulation for revolution in the West was to organize the working class’s political refusal of commodification and capitalist social relations, reaching a “critical moment” where the class would be capable of putting into crisis the “economic mechanism of capitalism” (1963a, 295-6). In short, workers’ political rupture of capital’s “economic mechanism” was the proper way for overcoming neo-capitalism.

If the autonomous development and political growth of the working class presupposed the latter’s analytical distinction from capital, what role did the latter play in determining the situation of the class? As a political force, capital, was responsible for bringing the working class together as a social subject; capital provided the material basis for the unification of the working class. The historically determinant position of “social capital” was responsible for the “technical composition” and “social composition” of the working class. That is, the working class was prepared by capital within a specific set of relations that socialized the class with certain attitudes and behaviors in the direct process of production, which needed to be understood and analyzed as the basis for the political organization and growth of the working class. The experience of QR, and the investigations conducted there, particularly Romano Alquati’s analysis, demonstrated a willingness to struggle among the working class that Tronti utilized to construct his understanding of the “mass worker” of Taylorist production. While, theoretically, the

potentiality existed for the class to reach the “critical moment” of rupture in the capitalist system, the actual prospects were far-off; it was necessary, in order to make this passage, to organize working class resistance. In the short term, with the birth of the Center-Left government and the onset of the economic crisis in 1963-4, the immediate strategic goal of the class was to organize itself in order to “provoke a certain type of capitalist development that [went] in the direction of revolution” (1964a, 20). That is, capitalist economic development was not the immediate strategic target for the working class; rather the concern here was with the development of workers’ political power as a determinant factor shaping capital’s economic development. Thus, the working class was, in the short-term, in favor of capitalist economic development, but it simultaneously refused capital’s political development, putting against the latter its own political power and control over the course of such development. If workers evinced certain antagonistic attitudes, it was the political task of Classe Operaia to identify those and to organize the working class around these attitudes and behaviors in such a manner to push capital into a revolutionary process.

Tronti’s thesis that the working class, under the situation of “social capital,” politically determined capitalism’s “political mechanisms” of development seemed to be verified with the inauguration of Italy’s first postwar Center-Left government. On the one hand, the Center-Left signified a request by capital to bring the workers’ movement into government as a direct consequence of the revolts of July 1960 and subsequent increase in militancy through 1963. In short, it was deemed necessary, by elements of the Democratic Christians and the leading industrialists, that the working class be integrated into the government in order to control their political militancy. The first proposal for

government planning appeared in an “Additional Note” to the “General relations on the economic situation of the country,” written by Ugo La Malfa, the Republican Minister of Budget in the Fanfani Government (1962-3).⁵² La Malfa’s proposal highlighted the need to obtain union collaboration in order to force a policy of wage restraint on the working class. In exchange, the government would commit itself to improving basic social services (i.e., transport, housing, etc...). This type of exchange had already been established with the PSI, as the latter agreed to support the Fanfani government, albeit without their direct participation, in lieu of promises of reform.⁵³ As a result of this agreement, by December 1963, the PSI entered the government to form the first Center-Left government in the postwar period, as the basis of a government that increasingly was shifting its role to economic and social planning, now with the direct collaboration of one of the working class’s historic political parties.

The first Center-Left government confirmed Tronti’s prediction that the PSI’s entry into government would polarize the Socialist Party between those who saw in the class a politically antagonistic force against capital, which constituted the foundation for a socialist program, and the reformists who sought to use state power as a democratizing force leading to a long-term transition to socialism. This polarity developed through the

⁵² For discussion of La Malfa, see (Crainz 2005, 218-9; Sassoon 1986, 52-3). Amintore Fanfani was President of the Council of Ministers from February 21, 1962 to June 21, 1963 as part of a tripartite government composed of the Christian Democrats, The Democratic Socialists, and the Republicans.

⁵³ Of the promised reforms, the only one passed was the important nationalization of the electricity trusts. This reform supported the PSI’s basic position of using the government to control investments and direct development away from the monopolies and into the democratic planning of the State. This basic goal of their reforms, however, was disrupted by the compensatory scheme for the former trusts. Upon nationalization of the trusts, the former owners were allowed to remain as financial service companies, and thus they maintained a critical function in the Italian economy (Ginsborg 1990, 268-71).

fall of 1964 with members of the CGIL, notably the Secretary-General Vittorio Foa, rejecting the call for working class sacrifice as a condition for government reforms, and, ultimately, produced the second post-war fracture in the PSI (in January 1964 a group of deputies and Senators left the PSI and formed a faction under the older party name, the PSIUP) [Foa 1975, 120]. The basic complaint levied against the PSI: the party was too ready to sacrifice working class autonomy to party politics (DiScala 1988, 146-7). For its part, Classe Operaia welcomed the Center-Left while attacking the politics of reform. With the PSI integrated into the capitalist system and rendered functional to capitalist reforms, the class would more readily be able to identify its friends and enemies. Left to itself, the class would be shown that their struggle had to be “the direct work of the workers organized” (Classe Operaia 1964, 1). In short, CO expected that the experience of the Center-Left would further demonstrate the need for workers’ organization at the base level.

A crucial fact for CO was that the Center-Left and the politics of planning emerged in the absence of a revolutionary workers’ organization. In this scenario, working class collaboration in a politics of planning could only serve to advance the command function of capital in tandem with its economic development; that is, to make capital stronger both politically and economically. It was this perspective of reformism that was the target of CO’s polemics, but it was not a complete rejection of capitalist reforms. Rather, as Tronti noted in “Lenin in England,”

It is clear that if the working class had a revolutionary political organization, it would aim everywhere at making the highest developed point of capitalist reformism. The process of building a unification of capital at the international level can only become the material base for a political recomposition of the working class ... if it is accompanied by a revolutionary growth not only of the class, but also of the class organization. If this element is absent, the whole process works to the advantage of capital, as a tactical

moment of a one-sided stabilization of the whole system, seemingly integrating the working class within the system (1964a, 19).

The Center-Left arose out of capital's political need to stabilize economic development in the aftermath of the workers' struggles of the early 1960s. Without the presence of a revolutionary workers' organization, this process threatened to politically subordinate the working class to capital. Against the prospects of a subaltern status, Tronti and CO began to speak of the political destabilization of the Center-Left in the sense that the class needed to block capital's political stability, even while capital advanced its economic development and unification internationally. Thus, the working class strategy developed by CO remained within a determinist position of the need to develop capital at an international level in order to broaden the scope of the class's "political recomposition," but within the context of a revolutionary class organization.

The Center-Left government represented a political response to the workers' struggles of the early 1960s. One of the key elements of these struggles was the ability of the working class to "use" the unions in order to decouple wages from productivity. That is, through the demand for wages (considered as a basic aspect of union struggles—defense of the material condition of labor-power), workers were able to break the connection between productive output and pay and thus turn an economic claim into a political demand. By late 1962, wages began to outpace productivity (Barkan 1984, 60-4). The wage struggle was a crucial strategic feature of CO's political line, that forged the later practice of demanding wages for the proletariat's "needs" as a strategy for overcoming the commodity nature of capitalist society. As we saw above, this demand for wages was only one part of the political action practiced during the workers' struggles. But it was a practice that the bosses could also directly respond to, given their

control over the functioning of the circulation of capital. Immediately, the bosses responded to these wage increases by passing costs along to consumers (industrial and private individuals) through inflated prices. Business further responded to the increased cost of labor-power by engaging in an investment strike and by directing capital to foreign markets. The effect of the bosses' response was to put an end to the "economic miracle," as their actions induced the Italian economy into a process of inflation, monetary instability, and a balance of payments crisis. By late 1963-early 1964 business interests were able to produce a general climate of panic over the state of the economy (Ginsborg 1990, 271). It seemed that, after years of consumer euphoria, the gloom and doom of 1948 was on the horizon, and along with it, another round of deflationary monetary policy.

Politically, the first victim of the economic downturn was the Center-Left reform package. Throughout 1963, the pervading sentiment within the DC was that reforms would have to wait until the economy was repaired; even La Malfa's proposals were premised on the favorable situation of the economy stemming from the economic advancements made during the "economic miracle." According to Guido Carli, General Director of the Bank of Italy, the necessary corrections to the economy required deflationary measures. From fall 1963 through winter 1964 the government responded to the crisis with a credit squeeze and directed economic policy toward the restoration of monetary stability and a rectification of the country's balance of payments (Carli 1993, 266-76). These deflationary measures set back any hopes of planning, and opened political space for a direct attack on workers and their organizations. From the perspective of Classe Operaia, "the objective posted by Carli is nothing other than a 'less

rapid but more controlled development': the move consists exactly in the conquest of control by the capitalist class on the working class" (1965, 20). The attack on the Center-Left was complete. All reforms were put on hold. As Guido Crainz described the political consequences of the deflationary measures: "the Center-Left ... survived only as a governing formula, as a modality of exercising power that contradicted its original project, and thus contributed to discolor it in an irremediable way" (2005, 240). As we see in subsequent chapters, the experience of the first Center-Left developed within *operaismo*, in the words of Franco Berardi, a "radical anti-reformist" position (1998, 57). The initial features of this "anti-reformism," would not develop, however, until the question of organization became more fully pursued and, specifically, directed towards the PCI in the aftermath of Togliatti's death in August. In any case, rather than offering a possibility for working class control over capitalist development, the experience of the first Center-Left sullied the idea of reformism as an ideological tool for working class integration into the capitalist system.

From workers' struggle to workers' organization

While the renewed militancy of the workers' struggle was initially perceived by CO as the catalyst for developing the thematic of a workers' organization, by the onset of the economic crisis and the Center-Left government, the relative position of power and situation of the working class altered the discourse of Classe Operaia. Throughout the whole period, however, the theoretical position of, and justification for, organization remained the necessity of giving political organization to the workers' struggle in order to initiate a revolutionary process. However, whereas during the 1960-63 wave of workers' struggles the class was able to "use" the union struggle in order to impose salary gains

delinked from production, by 1964 this strategy had to confront the stringent pressures and relative weakness of the working class once the economic crisis was underway. Yet, the wage remained a fundamental expression of the material needs of the class; the understanding of the wage, as distinct from any connection to value in the production process was, Tronti surmised, a “*political fact*” (1964c, 99). Following the general position of the narrow and one-sided vision of the “working class point of view,” Tronti later wrote against the view of the labor theory of value that attributed the production of wealth in society to the workers. Rather than propagate this moralistic position, Tronti asserted that, as a political fact of the working class, “the labor theory of value means *labor-power first, then capital ... Labor is the measure of value because the working class is the condition of capital* (1966, 224-5, emphasis in original; Wright 2002, 83-5).⁵⁴ In view of the economic crisis and the recent workers’ struggles, CO, building off the class’s wage demands, advocated as its strategic line the need for an “open struggle” in order to prevent the unions from suffocating the class’s militancy within the confines of the contract (Classe Operaia 1964a, 1).⁵⁵ The “open struggle” signified the willingness and availability of the workers to express a “direct conflict with capital in a continuously aggressive form”—through “polemical expectations” of the wage, understood not as a desire of economic improvement, but as a political demand—which meant that it was

⁵⁴ In *Operai e capitale*, Tronti’s previously unpublished section, entitled “Marx, labor-power, working class,” laid out a theoretical analysis of the wage relation in terms of power. This analysis will be discussed towards the end of the current chapter. The importance of this theoretical development will also be discussed in Chapters 6 and 7 in connection with the general demand by the working class for wages to meet, not production or output, but proletarian “needs.”

⁵⁵ Throughout the militant practice of *operaismo* the polemic against the contract, and the union’s continued acceptance of this basic collective bargaining practice, as a “cage” constraining the workers’ struggle in the bosses’ interest of “maintaining social peace” imposed with the “help of the union organizations” (Sacchetto and Sbrogiò 2009, 18).

incapable of being bottlenecked by contractual negotiations and other forms of behavior that recognized the legitimacy of capital (Ibid). During the economic crisis, the goal of the “open struggle” was to block production, continue to impose the struggle on the union, and construct a political organization to advance the power of the workers’ autonomous struggle. From this general perspective of workers’ organization out of the “open struggle,” CO, through the course of 1964, focused on the question of organization as the key to workers’ revolution.

Classe Operaia convened at Piombino, a small town in the province of Livorno, from May 1-3, 1964, to discuss the question of organization. Tronti opened the convention with an address that outlined the shortcomings of the experience in QR and CO up to that point on the question of institutions and workers’ organization (1964b). According to Tronti, within *Quaderni Rossi* there was a complete lack of development on tactics, no clear understanding of how to attain objectives, or any discussion of organizational forms (Ibid, 376). Rather, their general slogan, “workers, it is you who needs to decide,” reflected the theoretical immaturity of the group’s understanding of revolution. In short, the approach lacked an understanding of how to maneuver through “passages” in organizing a revolutionary struggle. Tronti identified three basic “passages,” an analysis that remained central to subsequent workerist practice: theoretical elaboration, general political discourse, and the political-practical moment of intervention (Ibid, 377-8). At most, in QR, Romano Alquati had sketched a general outline of a similar set of steps in his discussion on workers’ inquiry and co-research, but his discussion only touched upon the second of Tronti’s passages and completely neglected the “political-practical moment.” It was the latter that Tronti wanted to develop within

CO: “the journal needs to assume as an immediate work to resolve ... the formation of a true and proper *political cadre*, that ... translates this [political] line at the workers’ level...” (Ibid, 380 emphasis in original). The origins of this new cadre were less important; though preferably from “immediate worker extraction,” this was not essential (Ibid, 383). The crucial matter concerned the development of a network of cadres ready to elaborate a political line at the base of the working class.

Following this convention, Classe Operaia dedicated the sixth number of the journal to the question of organization. The lead editorial, “Intervento politico nelle lotte” (Political intervention in the struggles), laid out a fourteen-point analysis of organization that roughly paralleled Tronti’s classification of passages in revolutionary practice. Within the context of international capital and Italy’s experiment with the Center-Left as a step towards politically planned economic development, CO confronted the question of the historic institutions of the workers’ movement and the role they played in the thematic of workers’ organization (1964a, 1). Within international capital, Italy was characterized by the workers’ struggles, which offered a “unifying moment” for the international class struggle. The goal of organization, as we have seen, was to develop a politically strong working class that could push capitalist development in a revolutionary direction. In the previous wave of struggles the class had been able to “use” the unions and push them beyond their limited economic function of defending labor-power to give them a political character. But their structure, understood as the political line that dominated the union, remained economic in nature. The political task of the class, in confronting their historic institutions, was to develop a unified and autonomous workers’ movement capable of imposing a “new structure” in order to ensure that the CGIL and

the PCI would maintain a “non-reformist character” (Ibid, 20).⁵⁶ This first incursion into the institutional question and form of organization slowly carried CO in the direction of the traditional organizations, to the neglect of searching for new organizations, and produced a fissure in the strategic approach of the group that would increase during the course of the next two years.

While the workers’ movement had been capable of using the union for its own end, the goal of focusing on the union as the new locus of organization was dubious to many. This division centered on two diverse positions. One, expressed at the end of the fourteen-point analysis, warned against the development of the workers’ struggles into a historical minority or fringe movement, perpetually marginalized in the political battles of the class. On the other hand, there existed within the factory a considerable opinion that rejected the existing union movement as capable of providing the organization that the workers needed. For example, in a pamphlet circulated by CO in factories around Turin, entitled “Lottiamo per la nostra organizzazione” (We struggle for our organization), there was a clear rejection of the unions and a declaration for the need to construct autonomous workers’ organizations (1964b, 1). The pamphlet also rejected the push towards the PCI, which was viewed as irretrievably lost in its turn towards social democracy and strategic goal of entering the government. Rather than focus on regenerating the official institutions, the pamphlet emphasized the need to construct a new organization out of the actual workers’ struggles: “the new party of the working class will not be born from any of the current parties, nor will it be the result of their

⁵⁶ In chapter 5 below, we see how this strand of working within and against existing institutions developed in the workers’ struggle at Milan in the experience of the *Comitati unitari di base* (United base committees) and retained some influence in the *Comitati Operai* (Workers’ Committees) in the Veneto-Padua region.

unification or disaggregation, but the fruit of a long experience of managing the struggles: in these all the organizational forms flow together developing themselves in the struggle” (Ibid).

While the group expressed differences of opinion on the proper locus of organization, there existed a general consensus on provoking a revolutionary process in the capitalist West. The passages that Tronti had laid out at Piombino were accepted, with the development of a political line and the need to execute this political line at the base. The general goal of organization, from both sides, also reflected the desire to have a relationship between the class and its organization that approached synthesis. That is, the type of intervention that was formulated in terms of organization and the party sought to harmonize the relationship between the construction of the political line and its articulation and practical execution in the workers’ organization. In this manner, the journal had accepted a fairly rigid form of political work that became theorized in a neo-Leninism that accentuated the need for guiding and controlling the workers’ struggle through the workers’ organization. In any case, Classe Operaia had assumed for itself the role of constructing a “precise political line” to be executed by the class, while this line was “verified” in the struggle and developed through the political expression of the workers. As the question of organization advanced the group also began attributing to itself the capacity for directing the struggle at the “strategic points” of capital with the journal acting as the leading coordinator, both centralized and on a national scale, of these strategic attacks on capital (Classe Operaia 1964c, 1). While this latter position was at odds with those focusing on the workers in the factory as directing their own struggles, CO, particularly after the death of Togliatti in August, moved toward this type of

“external” direction of the class struggle. If the Center-Left government and the economic crisis of the mid-1960s had produced the need for workers’ political organization to stave off the social democratization and integration of the workers’ movement, it was resolved with, in the words of Franco Berardi, that “dangerous burden” of “political voluntarism” inherited as an “element of Leninism” within the history of the workers’ movement (1998, 68).

Tronti’s Leninism

Tronti’s introduction of Lenin must be understood within the changes that took place in the PCI after the death of Palmiro Togliatti on August 23, 1964. The political proposals that Tronti derived from his analysis of Lenin were intimately connected to his analysis of the PCI as an organization for class revolution. As early as May 1964, Tronti had pointed to the need to struggle within the existing organizations. In “Vecchia tattica per un nuova strategia” (Old tactics for a new strategy), Tronti argued that the recent worker struggles had “overcome” and “broken” the “capitalist use of the union” (1964c, 99). This organizational and strategic victory by the workers demonstrated that they were capable of imposing a modicum of political control over the traditional organizations. Within the context of the bosses’ response to the workers militancy (i.e., Center-Left and economic crisis), Tronti wrote: “[i]t is not enough to refuse collaboration to resolve the cyclical difficulties: it occurs to carry these difficulties ... in the productive structures,” where it would be necessary “to force the struggle to high levels, breaking in these points the workers’ spontaneity, imposing the open character of the conflict, overcome the cult of passivity in the open struggle, and pull itself behind ... the old organizations” (1964c, 100).

The type of revolutionary jump that Tronti advocated pointed to the need to transform the “passive” struggles of the early 1960s, both against the bosses and the historic left, into an open struggle for a political line in order to determine the outcome of the economic crises. This push into the old organizations offered the best strategic approach for breaking the cycle of capital. As a justification of this approach, Tronti argued that the crisis offered the opportunity to begin an “open conflict ... in which the chain will not be broken where capital is weakest, but where the working class is strongest” (1964c, 101). The working class was not necessarily “strongest” in a quantitative sense, but, for Tronti, the strength of the working class was identified by its organizational ability to impose a revolutionary process on capitalist development. Since any new organization seemed destined to a minority position, it was strategically imperative to conquer the historic institutions and impose on them a workerist political line. With Tronti, the early discussions on organization quickly reverted to the old positions of party politics, stifling the experiment with new modes and forms of base organizations. The slogan of CO became “from the factory to the party and to the new party in the factory” (Classe Operaia 1964e). Only through the party, through the prospect of the party-form, would it be possible to transform the working class’s behavior from a passive revolt to an open struggle.

The death of Togliatti, at the end of August 1964, opened new political space for diverse positions vying for direction of the PCI. For its part, the PSI was already tarried by its social democratization and the left-wing PSIUP split. In the PCI, Togliatti had left behind a mass party that promoted structural reforms as the basis of an alternative vision to the social democratization of the left. Within the international communist movement,

this domestic program reflected the Cold War's ideological expression of "peaceful coexistence" between the capitalist and communist blocks. However, within the Italian communist movement, 1956, the Sino-Soviet split, and the "economic miracle" challenged the direction of the party.⁵⁷ In the aftermath of 1956, the party had increasingly developed a left-wing position that was trying to push the party back into the factory struggles and to reconnect its political program with the base of the working class (Amyot 1981). This program, advanced most energetically by Pietro Ingrao, challenged the conservative wing of the party led by Giorgio Amendola. Over the next year and a half, up to the XI Congress in January 1966, CO increasingly took interest in the happenings of the PCI and attempted to affect these debates by pulling the general discourse towards its understanding of the "workers' point of view."

Debate within the PCI referred not to the actual workers' struggles of the early 1960s, but to the experience of the Center-Left—its failure to advance reforms and the onset of the economic crisis. For Ingrao, the Center-Left represented an attempt by capital to integrate the working class through progressive reforms; through an alliance of progressive forces in the political alignment of the DC, the capitalist class, and the PSI, the Center-Left signified the social democratization of the left. Against this alliance, Ingrao proposed a new "historic bloc" of social forces with the working class as the leading actor capable of rejuvenating the PCI towards a more class-centered orientation. His proposal was an attempt to establish a connection between the party's political line and the workers' struggle. In the immediate period, the PCI would use workers' power in the factory to strike at the "heart of Italian capitalism" and would connect this militancy

⁵⁷ The pamphlet recognizing the origins of the split from those sympathetic to the Chinese system is "Le divergenze tra il compagno Togliatti e noi" (The differences between comrade Togliatti and us) [December 31, 1962].

to a series of reforms that would augment workers' power (Amyot 1981, 57). In the long-term, Ingrao envisioned a devolution of power away from the centralized State towards more local and regional forms of a democratic federalism that loosely paralleled the type of workers' power and direct democracy that had been the basis of Libertini's and Panzieri's "workers' control thesis" six years earlier. As such, the Ingrao position sketched out a broad possibility for unification with the PSIUP and sought to enlarge the role of the working class within the traditional left institutions. This last point did not go unrecognized within some circles of CO; over all, however, Ingrao's position was problematic insofar as it sought to eclipse workers' autonomy within the party-guide and "use" the class for its own political line.

On the other hand, Amendola viewed the Center-Left as a general failure: it had failed to produce reforms and it did not begin to solve Italy's myriad social and economic problems. The failure of the Center-Left, Amendola believed, opened the possibility for the PCI to capitalize, electorally, on its shortcomings and pointed the way to the PCI as the only party capable of constructing a new government. It followed that the direction of the party should focus on winning the battle for democracy, to reform the state structure, and create new forms of "democratic planning" in alliance with the working class and progressive social and political forces. Amendola's proposals focused on increased public services, an improved standard of living, and increased economic security for the working class. But his position demonstrated little in the way of a transition to socialism. In the end, his vision of the PCI was state-centric and technocratic; the working class was viewed only through the lens of electoral politics with little to no respect for the working class's autonomous political power (Ginsborg 1990, 291-4).

Classe Operaia approached the historic left on the assumption that, if the workers could maintain a certain level of consistent crises through organized revolt, then the historic institutions of the workers' movement would fall within the revolutionary process (Negri 1983, 88). The chief problem for the PCI was that Togliatti had "left an ambiguous heredity on the terrain of method," and it was the strategic goal of CO to direct itself to use its methodological analysis of workers' revolution—the "workers' point of view"—to push the institutions of the left towards a correct relationship between the party and the class, between the institutions of the workers' movement and the actual workers' struggles (Ibid, 86). The problem was one of method: the debate internal to the PCI focused on methods that were best suitable for attaining state power and achieving a certain measure of reforms, albeit with diverse positions on the idea of development. Whereas Amendola's theory on development resided in reforms that would correct the inequalities and imbalances between private and socially consumed goods, Ingrao's theory rested on the devolution of power to more localized forms of democracy and workers' control. Both positions resided within the general level of capitalist development, theorized by CO as "social capital," and, as such, did not directly address the working class perspective within the appropriate, historically determinant situation of Italian (and international) capital. Perhaps it was a shortcoming of CO's discourse (often criticized as "fabbrichisti," or too factory centered), but they consciously refused to construct a perspective of development outside of the political development of the working class. (Not until the student movement's appropriation of the workerist discourse would *operaismo* begin to address the question of development in terms of proletarian

“needs” as the basis for directing the material value of labor-power in a program of socially productive relations.)

Classe Operaia's focus on the historic institutions of the left marked the beginning of an attempt to impose the methodological position of the “workers’ point of view” on the entire left. Their position, with respect to the PCI, was not to engage the party internally, but to work on overcoming the fragmentation of the workers’ local struggles in order to juxtapose two conceptions of political organization: reformist and workers’ (Ibid, 87). As we saw above, the workers’ plan was that of blocking production at strategic points and organizing the class as a political force, at the factory level, in order to control capitalist development, pushing it in a revolutionary direction. On the other hand, the reformist plan was identified as an attempt to integrate the working class into a “modern, pluralist, and contractual capitalist structure” (Paci 1964). From CO’s perspective, the debate within the PCI was viewed precisely in these terms: the real struggle was between the attempt by social capital to pull the PCI towards a social democratic orientation and the real existence, at the workers’ base, of the idea of communism (Negri 1983, 86). As Rita Di Leo wrote in Operai e PCI (Workers and PCI):

To realize an economically and politically stable society, with the active collaboration of the working class is the legitimate dream of intelligent bourgeois politicians: if such dream represents the highest plan of a communist party, more than a million workers strong, the conflict between a reformist strategy and revolutionary tactics becomes inevitable (1965, 28).

In short, the organizational question could not be overcome unless the workerist left was able to solve the problem of workers’ unity that existed between the communist cadres in the factory and the “new forces” that Alquati had previously identified in his work with QR. Only through the organizational unity of these workers could the militants of CO

begin to push the factory into the party and begin to impose the working class point of view as the methodological basis for the direction of the PCI.

Tronti's 1905 in Italia (1905 in Italy) focused on the need for this "leap" to form workers' organizations as the answer to the political power of the class (1964d). This article represented an attempt to bring Lenin into the West and directed the political task of workers' revolution toward what Lenin had called the "weak link" in the chain of international capital. The reference to 1905, of course, was to the formation of the soviets in Russia that Lenin had theorized as fundamentally important in developing a relationship between the workers and the Bolshevik Party. The upshot of Tronti's introduction of this historic point was that "without 1905 there is no October 1917" (Ibid, 109). The analogy served the point of bringing the "party in the factory" as the urgent necessity of workers' organization. While his analysis touched on many themes that were already circulating within CO (i.e., the PSI was dead as a class party, and the Lombardian reformists were the gravest threat since they sought to integrate the working class), Tronti emphasized the need to overcome the "ambiguous relationship" between the workers' movement and the working class (Ibid, 107). The novel point for those in CO was that, now, Tronti was highlighting the role of the PCI as having a "real relationship with the working class" (Ibid). The immediate effect of this discourse was to alienate those who had been attracted to CO because of its appreciation, and support for so-called "spontaneous" class struggle. Tronti took direct aim at these elements within the group:

[t]he cult of spontaneity always tends to overcome itself in a fetishism of organization. It is the destiny of being in the minority. It needs to be refuted. The just Bolshevik majority attains, again, a complete victory. The dilemma is not between spontaneity and organization, but between two possible ways to arrive at the new organization (Ibid).

And the new organization, against the position that CO had expressed in its pamphlet that had been circulated to workers in Turin during the summer, could hardly come from anew:

[a]n alternative organization, on the general political level, in this moment in Italy, is not seen by anyone. Here, the circle is closed. To break it does not mean to abandon the research on this alternative, but to plant it in the heart of the workers' struggle, at the head of this struggle, as a material guide and as the principal objective (Ibid).

While Tronti exalted the need for political work to alter the course of the PCI and to establish a new organization, the point was to rejuvenate the PCI, to alter the course of the existing organization in order to set it anew. This was possible, Tronti maintained, not by searching to reproduce an organizational form, but to go to work “in the factory, in production, among the workers, the few organized as well as the masses of unorganized” and direct their political power into the PCI (Ibid, 108). From this point forward, the work of CO was firmly directed towards the internal struggle of the PCI with the hope of developing the “workers’ point of view” as the dominant method of the party.

This focus on the PCI provoked early waves of discontent within CO. The small section from Como (immediately north of Milan) expressed disagreement with the tactical and strategic position of Tronti’s 1905 article. In an internal letter, the Como group stated: “it is a clear confirmation that the way from the factory and production ... was now patently substituted by the way of tactics and a monkish withdrawal in order to recover party cadres and the union” (reproduced in Trotta and Milana 2008, 437-8). As an alternative, the Como group pointed to the “14 points” that came out of the Piombino conference the previous May, which, in their interpretation, “identified the forms of struggle and intervention as beginning a diverse workers’ organization as an alternative moment to all the old and new discourses on worker reformism” (Ibid, 438). Another

consequence of Tronti's position, and one that he had expressed as early as May, was that the class struggle had to take on an immediate national context rather than the internationalism that part of the group had prioritized.

While the second issue of *Classe Operaia* had been dedicated to the question of workers' struggle in Europe, the increasing focus on organization, and ultimate, introduction of the discourse on the party, had pushed Tronti and others to reject the international struggle as secondary to the Italian situation. At Piombino, Tronti remarked that an international perspective was not feasible at this moment because "the international discourse ... can never be captured as a practical moment of the concrete articulation of a political line" (1964b, 382). *Operaismo* became trapped within a nation-state framework, and increasingly within the traditional structures of the state with the acceptance of the party-form as the appropriate organizational instrument for workers' struggle. Internationalism was replaced by an identification of Italy as the "weak link in the chain of capitalism," and the assertion made by Tronti that only a national revolution could unleash an international revolution. The Italian workers, rather than forge political and material relations with the working class in Germany, France, and elsewhere, were now perceived to possess symbolic value for the international class struggle. The dominance of this turn within *operaismo* was upheld by the editorial body of CO: "workers' internationalism is not a useful frame: it is a structural component of the class" (1964d, 4). Despite the general push towards the traditional nation-state and party structures, internationalism did not disappear, but remained alive in smaller sections of the group.⁵⁸ I return to the question of internationalism in the next section. What matters

⁵⁸ In bringing workers' internationalism back within the state system framework, Tronti utilized Lenin against various Marxist thinkers of the post-Bolshevik Revolution, interwar period

here was that Tronti's position on the PCI and discussion of the party became fully developed in the last issue of 1964.

The last number of the journal in 1964 was dedicated to the question of the party. Tronti's article, Classe e partito (Class and party), was the lead theoretical article whose significance pointed to the political work that would dominate CO throughout 1965. Here we find Tronti's mature expression and formulation of the party as the revolutionary organization of the working class. While the formulation was not without its contradictions and difficulties, it represented the culmination of his theoretical contribution to *operaismo*, with the party identified as the "instrument" of the working class. In this analysis there are several difficulties with regards to the application of a "party-form" into the realm of workerist theory and with the attempt to merge this external force with the question of an autonomous workers' organization. While Tronti's discourse seemingly closed the circle within CO on the question of organization, his introduction of the party remained a problem for subsequent theoretical developments.

Tronti posed the question of the party in terms of the development of the "subjective consciousness" of the class. Given the conception of class composition, the party was viewed as an essential component in generalizing the workers' struggle at the national level. As such, the party was the working class's "collective brain that has within

in Europe, thus bringing the workers' struggle back within the traditional institutions of the state system. The consequences of this move generated fractures, particularly later on in the student movement as it searched for new forms of organization that looked all too familiar to the Luxemburg-Lenin debates. The general problem of carrying the class struggle within the nation-state is aptly captured by the "systems theory" of Arrighi et al: "State encapsulation of the projected development of the proletariat," they write, "contradicted the uniting of the workers of the world. It deflected the formative revolutionary tendencies into national and international organs, that is into organs that work through, and so reinforce and depend upon, one of the fundamental structures and planes of operation of the capitalist economy, namely, the relational network we call the interstate system" (1989, 68).

itself the reality of the facts of the class, of its movements, of its development, of its objectives” (1964e, 113). In its role as the class’s “revolutionary will,” the party had to possess the intellectual qualities of “foresight and anticipation,” combined with the ability to “measure, control, manage, and thus organize the political growth of the working class” (Ibid, 112). For its part the working class was capable of “spontaneous struggles,” strategy at the level of the base, but deemed incapable of making the necessary passage to unify these local struggles into a broader movement. Tronti was explicit on this point, albeit bifurcated between the categories of tactics and strategy:

The party ... is not only the scientific carrier of strategy, but the practical organ of its tactical application. The working class possesses a spontaneous strategy of the movements and of its development: and it is the party that detects, expresses, and organizes them (Ibid, 113).

In order to comprehend the recent expression of class struggle, Tronti argued that a correct relationship between the class and the party had to be premised on the overcoming of the distinction between economic and political struggles—the working class had already given political content to their economic demands (i.e., the wage as a political demand). The correct relationship, then, saw the working class as a theoretical and political subject with the party serving as the embodiment of the consciousness of this subject on the political terrain. It is arguable to what extent this party would assume the form of an “external” vanguard; that is, what role the “subjective consciousness” of the party would have in relation to the working class. Consistent with the basic sentiment of *operaismo* to locate theory directly in the workers’ struggles, Tronti noted that the “correct relation” between the class and the party could be measured in terms of how “organic” the party was in relation to the factory. Hence the slogan adopted by CO: “the party in the factory and the factory in the party.” However, this does more to obfuscate,

than clarify, the problem. In order to understand what Tronti intended, it is useful to examine his discussion of this “correct relationship” in connection with his understanding of the left’s historic institutions.

Within the official workers’ movement the distinction between economic and political struggles was sustained by an understanding of the purpose and role of the union and the party, respectively. The unions functioned as instruments to “defend, conserve, and develop the material valor of social labor-power” and the party signified a political arm of the “workers’ political interests” to attack capital. Thus, the organizational relation was seen as developing from the political expansion of the class, through the politicization of economic demands (the union function) and the revolutionary tactics of the party (Ibid, 115-6). For Tronti, the original idea of CO—“making politics with the class”—evolved on the axis of an intertwined relationship between the expression of struggle by the class and its theoretical expression, generated and organized by the party. In this manner, 1905 in Italy provided the analogy for a preparatory phase in organization that, through the use of the PCI, would serve to commence a revolutionary process in Italy.

As a life-long member of the PCI, Tronti argued for the application of this strategy into a full-blown defense of the PCI in order to preserve its status as the last class party in Italy. The political objective of the class struggle was identified as the need to capture the workers’ movement in order to organize the political force of the class. Within the climate of the economic crisis, Tronti argued, the working class was not strong enough, organizationally or politically, to prevent capital from reaching a more mature level of development. The only option, he believed, was to develop the working

class's political maturity to impede the "political stabilization of the capitalist class"; that is, to prevent the social democratization of the PCI. "The immediate objective," Tronti wrote, "is to have a politically strong working class in the presence of the economic maturity of capital" (Ibid, 117). This was captured and propagated by CO in the general slogan: "maturity without stabilization, economic development without political stability." For much of CO their political work was directed to the defense of the Communist Party, not at the upper echelons of party, but towards the communist workers in the factory.

This turn towards the institutionalization of the class struggle provoked resistance within the group. In December 1964, comrades from Genoa left CO. While the internal matters of the dispute are not well known, Tronti's position with regards to the PCI and his conception of the workers' party were likely to have been the central points of dissent.⁵⁹ In no small manner Tronti had brought the autonomous workers' movement into the official workers' movement, at least as a strategic goal. His assumption that they would be able to take over these forces resided solely on the ability to impose a political line that was generated from the methodological analysis of the "workers' point of view." Years later, Toni Negri critiqued CO's lack of institutional analysis of the official workers' movement (1983). However, a more severe judgment of Tronti's theory of the party emerged later from a former communist militant in the journal La Classe (Sbardella 1980).

⁵⁹ The only indication in the archival material, according to Trotta and Milana's research in *Archivio Romano di "classe operaia"* (Roman archive of Classe Operaia), appeared in a note by Pozzi [in *carte Tronti, autografa su 4 cc*]: "At Genoa ... Classe Operaia is not present, because of the lack of the Genoese group. First, they are not in agreement on our discourse on the PCI ..., they have refuted the hypothesis of conflict. Their present situation is of a total worker passivity, and these are appraised in a populist manner" (cited in Trotta and Milana 2008, 437).

While Tronti's analysis had the merit of developing a theoretical solution to the organization of the class in a party-form, the content of the discourse revealed a rather limited understanding of the actual problems at hand, and thus was woefully short on the solutions to the problem. Raffaele Sbardella, in his La NEP di "Classe Operaia", took aim at the revolutionary nature of Tronti's theory of the party. Taking issue with Tronti's identification of the actual problem of the historic institution's lack of a correct line, Sbardella noted that, for Tronti, "political institutions [were] rediscovered for the class, not on the premises of alienation—which Raniero Panzieri was concerned with—but as instruments that the class manages to conquer, control, and utilize" (1980, 240). Tronti's critique of the PCI was limited to an understanding of its "structure" that was equated with its political line and method for generating that line, but had nothing to say about its representative nature and its internal authoritarianism. Tronti's instrumentalist conception of the party ensured that the "presence of the workers in the party" could not be a "transforming phenomena" (Ibid, 249). Sbardella identified as the basis of Tronti's theoretical errors a more general problem in his attribution of the party as the embodiment of the working class, or, in his words, as the "incarnation of the Subjectivity of the class"; that is, for Tronti, the idea of autonomy was redirected towards the party (Ibid, 241). All that was necessary for Tronti was to conquer the party in terms of method, and this would ensure workers' autonomy even if it ossified the working class as a fundamentally external and passive element with regards to the actual affairs of the party. In this vision, the class remained subjected to the happenings of its party; the party as a function of the class satisfied Tronti's view of the "correct relationship" between class and party.

From a perspective that shared many of the concerns raised by Sbardella, Franco Berardi (Bifo) critiqued Tronti's theoretical analysis for its fundamental confusion: his thought, Berardi noted, "oscillates between an exaltation of workers' political spontaneity and a stress on the subjectivist-voluntarist function of the vanguard party" (1998, 65). Within these two positions, Berardi found the fundamental flaw of Classe Operaia to be nothing short of introducing an out-dated ideology (Leninism) into a new situation of class politics. For Berardi, the need for a political will external to the class was fundamentally at odds with the method of "class composition" and autonomous workers' struggle. Tronti's theory of the party seemed far off from *operaismo's* original intervention in factory life and workers' struggles. Indeed, as Tronti's position became increasingly focused on the PCI and the institutionalization of the autonomous workers' movement, the group from Padua-Veneto registered a vociferous dissent that, within a year, laid out an alternative for workers' organization.

Porto Marghera: a dissent

In the early 1960s some dissident PSI members from Padua and Veneto came into contact with the work of Quaderni Rossi and, specifically, Panzieri's development of Morandian themes on workers' autonomy (Isnenghi 1980, 222). Among those impressed with the ideas of *operaismo* were Guido Bianchini, Antonio Negri, Luciano Ferrari Bravo, and Francesco Tolin, who inaugurated political work in petrochemical factories through the distribution of Potere Operaio di Veneto Emiliano, which came out as an insert in Progresso Veneto (Potere Operaio 1963).⁶⁰ The Veneto region was dominated by the

⁶⁰ Bianchini was a powerful organizer in the workerist circles in Veneto. As one of the older participants, he was in the Resistance at an early age and played an important part as orator and militant in arguing against the centralization that gripped *operaismo* in favor of and respect for the capacity of workers to share information and forge their own instruments of struggle

petroleum and chemical industries controlled by large companies such as Breda, Sirma, Italsider, Edison, and Vetrocoke. After the affairs of Piazza Statuto, and throughout 1963, workers in the Porto Marghera zone began forming assemblies to demand salary increases, income parity, and the elimination of worker categories. These workers' assemblies rejected the union struggle after past experiences of betrayal and duplicity and began forming autonomous struggles with the inclusion and support of local student groups and university professors (mainly from the University of Padua, from which derived Toni Negri, Alisa Del Re, Luciano Ferrari Bravo and others). By 1963 Il Potere Operaio dei lavoratori di Porto Marghera began circulation within the local section of Classe Operaia, with contents that focused on the regional struggles but also carried CO's critique of the Center-Left and the government's attempts to introduce the planning of capitalist development. These initial assemblies quickly developed into frequent meetings that focused on the development of a workers' vanguard organization to organize the class's "autonomous needs" in Porto Marghera (Sacchetto and Sbrogiò 2009, 18-23). The Veneto region, with its mixture of internal peasant migration and budding industries, produced one of the more dynamic and powerful autonomous workers' movement tied to *operaismo* that rejected the state-centric and party-dominated centralization advocated by Tronti.

(Zagato 2001). Toni Negri came into *operaismo* from a radical Catholic youth organization, then into the PSI, when he began, with Bianchini and others, to publish Progresso Veneto and, later, Classe Operaia and Potere Operaio (Negri 1983). His theoretical contributions will be the central focus of later chapters. Luciano Ferrari Bravo grew up in Veneto and was an assistant to Toni Negri at the University of Padua (Negri 2003). Francesco Tolin, brother-in-law of Bianchini, was the responsible director for the publication of Progresso Veneto, Classe Operaia, and Potere Operaio (Wright 2010). The journal Progresso Veneto began publication in 1959 and initiated the political development of workers' autonomy as a distinct political tradition in the Veneto region (Isnenghi 1980).

Toni Negri registered the region's dissent with the general line of CO in his contribution to the first number of Classe Operaia in 1965, "Lenin e i soviet nella rivoluzione" (Lenin and the soviets in the revolution) [1965]. Negri's article, diplomatically executed, was preceded by a more direct opposition of the Paduan group to Tronti's political proposals that detailed the extent of their disagreement. The Paduan group of workers' autonomy, much like the previous experience in QR, argued that not only was the PCI "past redemption," but the proper starting point for the question of organization was to recognize the "integration of the entire workers' movement, with its factory cadres, into bourgeois society and its precise anti-worker function" (Padua Autonomia Operaia 1965, 439). Tronti's discourse neglected these "preliminary facts" which derived from the workers' direct experience of the previous five years. In doing such, Tronti had put the problem backwards; instead of placing the party as the "preliminary condition" of the workers' struggle, the Paduan group argued that the political work of organization could only arise as the "mature expression" of the class struggle (Ibid, 440). If Tronti had begun to shift his analysis towards the political will of revolutionaries in the party, then the group from Padua signified what Berardi identified as the "compositionist" conception of the revolutionary organization. Consistent with his critique of Tronti's Leninism, Berardi identified the particular contribution of *operaismo* in its understanding of class composition as the determinant factor: "the compositionist method departs from the twentieth century Marxist tradition: the force of historic transformation is not the subjective political will, nor the necessity of dialectical law, but the cultural action that determines the process of social recomposition" (1998, 58). As this conception is of fundamental importance, as a complementary concept to the analysis

of the circulation and reproduction of capital in the “social factory” analysis, it is worth quoting the position of the Paduan group on this point:

The political work of the class consists essentially today in making live, practically in every workers’ struggle, the strategic proposal of the conquest of power through the revolution. The organization and the revolution coincide in the same strategic moment. The organization is the revolution. *To organize signifies tying together, in the struggle, the mass organizations internal to the factory, at a national and international level, unifying the struggle in time and in space* (Padua Autonomia Operaia 1965, 442, emphasis added).

Here we find not only a reaffirmation of the internationalism that had been an early focus of CO, but also an argument that located the conquest of power directly in the workers’ organisms as the proper bodies of revolution. While the argument was not sustained by the critique of the party as an alienating feature of the workers’ practical struggle, we can infer this position from the understanding that *organization* and not the *party* is the direct expression of workers’ power, that there could be no other organizational center than the workers’ themselves. Moreover, only this type of bottom-up conception of organization could allow for the workers’ own creative expression in the class struggle, an essential component in ensuring the democratic nature of working class revolution.⁶¹

Negri’s Lenin and the soviets in the Revolution developed this dissenting opinion through an analysis of the relationship between the party and the soviets in Lenin’s political thought from 1905 to the October Revolution. For Negri, Tronti’s discourse on the class-party question seemed to parallel Lenin’s discussion of the relationship between the soviets and the party: in Lenin’s thought the soviets began as revolutionary class organizations only to slowly evolve into the formation of a new provisional revolutionary

⁶¹ While this document does not contain an author, the argument set forth is consistent with the theoretical position of Bianchini, who vociferously argued for a “directly working class generalization of the struggles” against all efforts at centralization (quoted in Wright 2010). Similarly, Luciano Ferrari Bravo argued that a materialist understanding of the working class was precisely this “creative force” of the working class exercised in their struggle against the capitalist system (Negri 2003, 69).

government. Likewise, Tronti had theorized the class organization as a leading governing structure of the proletariat. That is, the distinction between the soviets as organs of the workers' movement and as forms of a governing apparatus revealed an ambiguity over the role of workers' autonomous organizations. Tronti, by delimiting the scope of strategy and tactics to the party at the national level, dragged workers' autonomy and the new forms of workers' organizations into an institutional mold. Negri regarded the conception of the party in this scheme as an external imposition of the party on the class. As had happened in 1917, and as Panzieri had warned upon the rupture in QR, the expression of a political line that emerged outside of the class struggle, at the level of the workers' base, could only result in an authoritarian imposition on the workers, with the party, as the "subjective organization," as the primary entity of class struggle. According to Negri, this was precisely Lenin's idea of the "correct relationship" between the party and the workers' movement, that resulted in the soviets being reduced to a mere "organization of consensus" determined by the party-guide (1965, 32).

It is noteworthy that Negri's disagreement with Tronti was based not on the question of a vanguard but on the location of the vanguard. For Negri, the vanguard was internal to the working class and its struggle. Tronti, on the other hand, was seen as advocating a view of the working class as a political, or strategic, instrument of the party functioning as an external vanguard. (This argument points to a further development (and recovery) later in *operaismo* of a discourse on the structural features of the class organization in terms of its internal democracy and worker's control over their own organizations.) Negri alluded to the fact that the earlier soviets had as the "center of the organization" a delegate structure with strict responsibilities and the possibility for

workers' to revoke delegates (Ibid, 27). It was this democratic function of the soviets, as mass organisms comprised of a workers' delegate structure that, in the context of the Italian movement, found expression in the autonomy of Morandi and was developed within the PSI by Panzieri and others in the post-1956 era. This tendency had a palpable influence within the Veneto group as Bianchini was deeply committed to workers' direct democracy, a position that attracted him to aspects of the PSIUP in 1964, as well as others who drew their direct experience from the factory struggles in Porto Marghera (Zagato 2001).⁶² Negri's critique of the discourse on the party, in this sense, embodied an understanding of workers' autonomy as an analytical distinction and gave primacy to the workers' struggles as the basis of class composition, not necessarily out of any particular consideration of workers' consciousness and political direction, but rather as a materialist view that rooted the revolutionary class struggle directly within the factory struggles and the direct experience of the workers in these processes.

The position emanating from Padua-Veneto was decidedly a minority position of dissent as CO focused its attention on the slogan "party in the factory" and similar themes that reflected the predominance of the PCI within the class struggle. In fact, only one year after its formation, Classe Operaia seemed to have lost much of its theoretical dynamism as it turned to the question of organization in terms of the party. One of the results of this tendency was a general closure within the factory as the space of the class struggle. Tronti had already committed himself, in part, to this tendency by formulating the "social factory" as characterized by the increasing proletarianization of advanced capitalist society with the waged worker as the defining feature of the class. Also, the focus on

⁶² The rise of workers' delegates as a leading form of workers' organization emerged in 1969, particularly at Fiat in Turin. See chapters 5 and 6.

“class composition” was considered secondary since the idea of the “social factory” was locked into that “particular commodity” of capitalism—labor-power—resulting in the ossification of experiments with new organizational forms and opportunities to generalize the class struggle. Since the factory became the center for the political organization of the class, and CO focused on the “high points” of capitalist development as the proper strategy to confront capitalist development, the conceptual apparatus that had served as a dynamic turn in Italian Marxism seemed to increasingly close itself within the factory gates and the idea of organizing the workers’ party. While I return to the discussion of the “social factory” and “class composition” in the next section, I finish the discussion of CO’s developments on the organizational question by examining their emphasis on the workers’ use of the PCI and the attempt to stave off the process of social democratization within the communist movement, the group’s dominant priority in 1965.

From the “party in the factory” to the “class party”

At the beginning of 1965 *Classe Operaia* entered a small crisis. Financial difficulties had forced the journal to be published bi-monthly, rather than monthly. The journal also began producing, with each issue, a leaflet for intervention at the factory gates. This latter development was in stride with their new program of political work that took shape after the convention at Como in December, which targeted the communist cadres in the factory. Significantly, this change in publication and the commitment to focus on the communist cadres reflected the general strategy of preventing the social democratization of the PCI and, in the long run, attempting to impose the “workers’ point of view” on the party. Their immediate hope was that they would be able to provoke a move toward the left within the party by cultivating this cadre at the base in direct antagonism to the

reformist leadership. As 1965 began CO focused its work almost exclusively on the PCI and influencing its political developments through the factory.

The timing proved fortuitous for CO, even if they were ultimately unsuccessful in developing the PCI left. The general international climate of “peaceful coexistence” that marked the early 1960s depiction of the Cold War relations appeared to be over with the United States’ bombing of Vietnam and the general tide of national liberation struggles in the so-called Third World.⁶³ The idea of “peaceful coexistence” had its domestic parallel in Togliatti’s postwar *Italian Way to Socialism* and the party’s focus on winning the battle of democracy as a precondition for socialism. Domestically, the economic conjuncture was nearing its end, with economic recovery based almost primarily on the bosses’ political power in the factory—new investments in plant and technologies were virtually nonexistent; owners overcame the economic crisis by extracting more production from a leaner workforce, further rationalizing the production process, changing job structures, and imposing new work procedures. In short, according to CO, the end of the economic crisis demonstrated the political attack by capital against the working class. Both the international climate and the national climate were conducive to the type of political line that CO was propagating. As such, it prepared to combat the PCI by taking the struggle, for the life of the party, into the factory.

⁶³ During this period, CO began a small collaboration with the Franz Fanon Center, which was established on January 1963 by leftists in Milan as a result of the Algerian war, and as a center of inquiry for the “political prospects of the third world”(Trotta and Milana 2008, 493). *Classe Operaia* had a fairly limited perspective on national liberation struggles as they retained the position that capitalism would be struck in the “weak link” of its international chain—Italy. Maintaining an essentially American-European centered worldview, CO claimed that the “true contest is made here among us, in Europe and in the USA: in the factory, not in the jungle” (*Classe Operaia* 1965b, 487).

In 1965 the Italian communist movement prepared for two important conventions that determined the political program of the PCI: the Conference of Communist Workers, held in May at the historic port of Genoa, and the XI Congress of the PCI, the first post-Togliatti conference, held in January 1966. As its slogans the PCI adopted the “party in the factory” and the “*partito unico*” (the only party), positions that represented, respectively, the Ingrao and Amendola factions. CO, as noted above, sought to put these two positions in opposition, utilizing the first for its own formulation while directing its polemics against the latter.

The “*partito unico*” was criticized from within the historical development of the PCI beginning from the immediate postwar period, Togliatti’s “new party,” to its formulation with respect to the Center-Left. The analogy that CO worked with found that the situation at the end of the war—destruction from war and fascism—was virtually unrecognizable from the post-economic miracle situation (a point the youth movement refuted in practice and theory). Instead of accepting abstract calls for winning “democracy,” CO focused on the common denominator of the two periods: the political needs of capital as the basis for the reformist line within the party. Amendola’s position focused on the distortions of modernization and development produced by the economic miracle and, more generally, neo-capitalism. His position reflected that of corrective reforms which sought to rectify the structural inequalities in the national economy. This limited approach, in fact, did not contain any of Togliatti’s arguments about a gradual transition to socialism. Rather, as Albert Asor Rosa wrote in the lead editorial of CO, the problem was that Amendola’s “democratic planning” represented an attempt to “subtract from the capitalist system its fundamental contradictions ... substituting this with the

myth of a modern and rational evolution of certain economic factors, abstractly considered” (1965, 24). Moreover, Amendola was proposing the use of the profit as a tool for redistributing capital (i.e., the politics of income), virtually ignoring the class’s autonomous demands on the wage as a political phenomenon, and not simply a call for better economic conditions within the capitalist system. From this analysis of both capital and the working class, CO rejected Amendola’s position as nothing short of an attempt to rationalize capitalism. This position exemplified the attempt at integration of the working class within advanced capitalism, both politically and economically, that CO sought to defeat (Ibid, 26).

In its return to the factory and focus on the communist cadres, CO sought to overcome the contradiction within the PCI between what they identified as the “real force of organization”—the working class—and the reformist politics of the leading group with its desire of collaboration with capital (Ibid, 23). Approaching the factory, the short-term goal was a two-fold approach: attack the bosses while simultaneously removing the reformists from the party. Tronti laid out this position during a conference at Gobetti Theater in Turin, leading up to the PCI’s workers’ conference in May. In this address, Tronti began with the political passage out of the economic crisis as a point of stabilization between capital and the State. Economically, the system was stabilized by the response of the bosses against the factory workers, but politically the approach towards equilibrium witnessed the first coherent attempt at planning that finally became a bill in the Parliament by 1967. The Pieraccini Plan,⁶⁴ Tronti wrote, demonstrated the fact

⁶⁴ Early attempts at planning began with the Saraceno Commission that met throughout 1963 with participation from experts, industrialists, and trade unionists. The final product became called the Giolitti Plan after the Budget Minister. This plan was not approved because of a change in government, with the final product put forth in 1966 by the new Budget Minister, Giovanni

that the conjuncture established the “basis of the structural, economic, political, control on the movement of the working class, which renders possible for the first time a planning on the long period of Italy” (1965, 463). The immediate result of the economic crises was that the Italian State now had a controlling function over capitalist development. Whereas Italian industry was able to return to its “particular function,” the State now became an explicit partner of private industry in controlling the “entire society” in a division of labor that left to the industrialists the “production of profit” with the State holding the reigns of “control over the distribution of income” (Ibid). For Classe Operaia this push to the “planner-State,” as it was later coined in Potere Operaio, and the conjuncture were inseparable affairs, both tied directly to the bosses’ counter-attack on the working class as an attempt to control the class and integrate it within a long-term stabilization of capitalist development.

This “objective” situation of Italian capital had already been the dominant position within CO on the crisis. Their concern was not so much with the new unity between industry and the State, but the deepening divisions between the PCI, with its push towards social democracy, and the working class. The uptake of the economic crisis was a new situation where there existed more unity in the capitalist bloc, in the sense that there existed a governing unity, along with a more divided working class that witnessed the increasing separation between the party and the class (Classe Operaia 1965c, 1). The only way to overcome this separation for CO was to put the party inside the workers’ movement. Only this approach could offer the real basis for understanding the workers’

Pieraccini, ultimately being approved by Parliament in July 1967 (Sassoon 1986, 51-2; Ginsborg 1990, 273-80). A consequence of this plan, as we will see in the next chapter, was its proposals for reforming the school system, which was one of the important elements in the formation of a mass student movement.

struggle and reveal the necessity of a political response from the working class (Tronti 1965, 466). The entire purpose of the “party in the factory,” Tronti stated in his address to the Conference of the Communists in the factory, was “nothing more than the problem of the existence of the organization in determinant moments of the passage of capitalist development, and the existence of a political organization ... tied directly to the place of production” (Ibid, 468). Again, the need to develop a politically strong working class within capitalist development pointed to the need for organization, not in order to produce a general crisis of capitalism, or for taking over state power, but for expanding and generalizing the class’s political power.

As Tronti’s discourse increasingly focused on the recovery of the PCI as the workers’ organization, it became clear that the role of CO and other groups was being called into question. Was CO simply an appendage of PCI politics? Or did it have a different purpose? Towards the end of his discourse at the communist workers’ conference, Tronti concluded that the work of CO and other minority groups had outlived their usefulness. Against the recent passage of capitalism, Tronti noted,

the obligatory passage is that which reestablishes in real, concrete terms, the problem of the new revolutionary organization. Before this passage, each attempt of constituting itself in a new revolutionary organization repeats the exact historical errors of minority factions of the workers’ movement, which are foreign by nature, in principle and fact, to all the experience that we have made up to now (1965, 476).

Given the overall pessimistic evaluation of this passage, Tronti’s comments were omitted from CO’s supplement to the conference, but it is important as it concluded Tronti’s elaboration of the problem. The focal point of activity for workerism was now the PCI. Over the course of a year or so, the need to experiment with new models of organization, which was the founding argument of CO in their rupture with QR, became reduced to the historic institutions that workers’ autonomy had sought to overcome in its initial

theoretical analysis. However, a caveat remained: the political work of CO was to bring the party into the factory, into the material and political existence of the class movement as expressed from the direct point of production. A two-fold objective was established: convince the working class of the need to revitalize and conquer the PCI as its organization and battle the reformists within the PCI as the primary enemy and obstacle of the working class's revolutionary organization.

Approaching the XI Congress, Aris Accornero, a member of the PCI who had a particularly close relationship with Classe Operaia, published a criticism of the group's assessment of the situation in the communist periodical Rinascita (1965). He confronted, among other things, CO's strategy of conducting a two-front battle, against capital and towards the party. Accusing the group of narrow sectarianism, he took aim at their unilateral and narrow understanding of the party's politics, limiting their critique to "reformists" in the PCI, because, the latter did not follow CO's "absurd street" (Ibid, 513). Accornero charged CO with an unwarranted reductionist approach to capitalist society that confined historical determinations to the affairs of two competing classes who were attributed with virtually uniform characteristics, despite the empirical evidence. In particular, Accornero took aim at the discussion of the politicization of the class, claiming that CO was advocating worker spontaneity: "[h]ow can it be directly political if it does not pass through the class organization? And it is enough that a salary struggle was organized by the workers because it became political?" Rather than remain trapped behind the factory gates, confounding questions of politicization of the union, or unionization of the party, Accornero suggested that CO learn to walk with two legs, one in the factory the other in society. Against Tronti's previous claim that society could

never be revolutionary, as the site of the circulation of money, Accornero's criticism, at least, exposed the narrowness of CO's discourse. Even if his critique was unjust (i.e., Turin is not Italy), it pointed to the lack of a critical discourse on the circulation and reproduction of capital, which had been theorized in QR, but was lacking in CO (Wright 2002, 80-1).

Advancing the most developed theoretical analysis of the communist workers, Romano Alquati came the closest in CO to developing an understanding of "class composition" within the social relations of production of advanced capitalism. Given, Alquati's understanding of the "social factory" as the expansion of the proletariat through tertiary industry (shared by Tronti, but phenomenologically different from Panzieri), it was not unforeseeable that his analysis represented the high point of this otherwise narrow discourse. Beginning in 1965, Classe Operaia dedicated a column to investigating "class composition" alongside the question of the party. Alquati brought to the discussion the need to develop the "social fabric of class recomposition;" that is, an examination of the social life of the worker and how capital has penetrated that life.

Remaining within the context of productive labor and the workers' struggles, Alquati pressed the need to understand the "connective tissue" between various portions of workers' struggle in order to have a practical organizational form in the "party-factory" nexus. In particular the search for working class unity necessitated inquiry in order to

find new connections with regard to the preceding moments, modifications in the connective tissue, new uses of the diffuse territorial net, or of certain categories that reproduce or develop for the first time a generalizing function, because they ... have acquired a determinant mode of relations of force, shifting all the terms in a phase of struggle (1975, 226).

Through this investigation CO could begin to understand the type of organization necessary to produce a continuous struggle, but also locate better forms of organization pertinent to the expression of working class unity that the struggles themselves demonstrated. Within this moment, it was necessary for Alquati to produce research on the “new structure of the working class.”

For Alquati, it was not sufficient to restrict analysis of the working class to the immediate point of production. Turin, for example, was identified with all the characteristics of a “factory-city,” where there was no discernible distinction between the “plants where surplus-value is created, the residential zones where labor-power is reproduced, and the centers of administration of the movements of variable capital, of commodities, products and semi-worked raw materials and auxiliary materials” (1965, 9; 1975, 230). Thus, the idea of “class composition” that emerged out of Turin presented the type of situation where the logic of the factory was reproduced throughout the entire social order; the production, reproduction, and circulation of capital were all present as the dominant force of social relations. However, reflecting the general paucity of analysis conducted by CO on the processes of reproduction and circulation of capital, Alquati’s article ended with a discussion of direct production and the role of the party in relation to this process. For example, the discussion was situated within the direct process of production, albeit within “social relations” that connect the cycle of capitalist accumulation:

the problem of the Communist Party in the factory is always confronted at the level of social relations of production, and assumes the more precise form of relations between the “boite,” the middle industries, and the auxiliary functions in which are prevalently concentrated the communist cadres of the factory, and the workers’ social mass of the large factories—in particular the motor sector—which execute a role of “mass vanguard” in the working class struggle on a social scale (1965, 10; 1975, 232).

It might be the case that *operaismo's* focus on the high point of capitalist development prejudiced their view of capitalist social relations towards the large factories and the more concentrated forms of the working class. It is also reasonable to conjecture that this was a holdover from the focus on monopolies in the postwar discourse of the left-wing parties. However, a better explanation focuses on their research and intervention which was directed against the structure of neo-capitalist social relations, that were premised on the dynamism of the large monopoly structure and the resulting transformations of Italian society to the production and consumption of consumer durables. Accornero's accusation that CO focused only on Turin neglected to point out the city's role, especially Fiat, in determining Italy's economic development. That aside, in examining the more advanced parts of Alquati's discourse the discussion of the "social fabric of class recomposition" was still concerned only with the effects of production. This point appeared in another pertinent component of neo-capitalism: the working class and the rural question.

Alquati's discussion of the "green factory" focused on the question of agriculture in relation to industry. Again, the focus was on the PCI, and criticism was centered on their position. While the PCI had recognized that salaried workers in agriculture were "workers like the others," they deemed agriculture an "autonomous sector," separated by its particular "mode of production" (1975, 255). Against this position, Alquati pointed to the cycle of capitalist accumulation and noted that agricultural production was "objectively integrated into the monopolies" (Ibid, 256). Investigating the "Padana Irrigua" (the agriculture zones that surround the Po River), he argued it was no longer useful to operate in terms of the old "town-country" dichotomy, but rather the distinction that needed to be made was that between the city-region. The idea of the city-region was

expressed as the “decentralization of industrial production in the rural zone around poles of capitalist productive development” with the consequent decentralization of residential surroundings and productive activity (Ibid, 260). From this analysis (which bore enough similarities to Panzieri’s position on the territoriality of the monopolies as “islands”), it was the PCI who remained stuck within an idea of industrial production, trapped in the “Industrial Triangle,” unaware of the new class composition and, much like in the 1950s, out of touch with the changing social relations of production. Alquati, introducing the discussion of territory and capitalist production, wrote:

[w]hoever looks at the old “Triangle” as it was transformed in the new ellipses, Turin, Genoa, Milan, Marghera, and the transformation of the vertexes of the “Triangle” in the “city region,” can observe as the movements of struggle of the working class have already begun to impose also in Italy that type of rupture of the “city-country” relation that Marx had put as a claim of the communist program (Ibid, 260-1).

Anticipating the decentralization of production that became the dominant tendency of capital in the early 1970s, Alquati’s analysis criticized the PCI for failing to see the possibilities of political struggle within this new framework. Thus, the attack on the monopolies, executed by the PCI, neglected any serious organization of the workers in these areas. While the PCI had accepted that the agriculture workers were part of the working class, they were incapable of seeing the unity that existed within the workers’ struggles.⁶⁵ This fluid conception of “class composition,” tied to the analysis of the “social factory,” was the key to understanding not only the changes taking place within the social relations of production, but also to developing the so-called “workers’ point of view” within those relations. Alquati concluded his investigation of the “green factory”

⁶⁵ The theme of the working class in relation to the “backward” sectors of the economy had already been treated by Negri in the third number of 1964, in his *Operai senza alleati* (Workers without allies), as part of a rejection of the PCI’s and the historic left’s strategy of inter-class alliances (1964). The rejection of alliances was restated in CO’s intervention at the XI Congress of the PCI (below).

by pointing to the problem that CO was trying to impose on the PCI: “the problem is that of the political direction of a unity of movements that already exist” (Ibid, 273). Movements that stemmed directly from the place of production, that is. Despite the brief allusion to moments of reproduction of labor-power and control over other commodities, Alquati’s discussion of these aspects of the “social factory” never materialized within CO. It would take some years for this analysis to develop, and a new impetus from other sectors in society, before the “social factory” would be used to demystify capitalist social relations beyond the immediate point of production.

In anticipation of the XI Congress, CO published, in early December, its pamphlet, Nascita di una forza nuova (Birth of a new force), which represented its contribution to the Congress’s debate (Classe Operaia 1965d). Despite the theoretical explorations of Alquati on the need for expanding the discussion of the social composition of the class, CO focused its attention on radicalizing the PCI in view of the metal-mechanics contractual deadline in 1966. The pamphlet was not only a contribution to the PCI Congress, but was also circulated in the factories in order to lay out CO’s proposals to the communist workers in anticipation of a renewal of the types of attacks that had already been circulated in the communist press (i.e., Accornero’s critique, above) [Gasparotto 1965, 518-21]. It is appropriate to read this document as a summarization of the work that CO had executed up to that point, and, as such, it represented its mature expression for organizing working class revolution.

Focusing their criticism on the line of the reformists in the PCI and the role of the official workers’ movement in the latest wave of struggles, CO highlighted the role of the working class in preventing the social democratization and integration of

the workers' movement into capitalist planning. The problem with the PCI's leadership was that it acted more like "shadow ministers" proposing economic plans in hopes of being called into government (1965d, 5). In contrast to the official line, CO proposed a "minimal program," centered on the construction of a workers' revolutionary political organization.⁶⁶ The goal of organization was to develop a counter-plan⁶⁷ to strike against the reformists and government planning, both of which were identified for their functional role in regulating capital accumulation. The factory was justified as the central focus of this anti-capitalist attack, because "only in the factory" did there exist the working class "mole that corrodes it and the gravedigger that wants to bury it" (Ibid, 9). The worker, as a subterranean force within the heart of capitalist social relations of production, symbolically captured the intent of CO's minimal program: the purpose of a revolutionary organization was to understand the dynamic class composition that occurred through the class struggle, to organize the moments of resistance expressed by the class, pushing these movements into a direction that worked to enlarge the movement and force capital into a revolutionary direction. The key here was that revolution was understood as a process. The reformists and those centered on the state, CO held, had lost focus of this process because they lacked the proper method for understanding working class behavior and attitudes. The result of this flawed method of analysis was that the historic left, the official parties and unions, had

⁶⁶ The idea of a "minimal program" also played a central role in the extra-parliamentary group *Potere Operaio* (Workers' Power) [see chapter 6].

⁶⁷ Massimo Cacciari, Toni Negri, and Asor Rosa began publishing a short-lived review under the name Contropiano after the dissolution of Classe Operaia.

focused on inter-class alliances in order to achieve state power and direct change from above. Classe Operaia, like the previous experience in QR, held that this was a flawed approach. Building off of Alquati's discussion of the agricultural worker, and the general thesis of the "mass worker," the position of CO was that there existed a

social mass of 10 million producers...; 4 million industrial workers ... in movement in the same direction. Thus, structure and articulation of the movement begins from the reality of a generic mass of social labor-power ... that gravitates around the working class of the factory, as its permanent and mature vanguard (Ibid, 12).

Continuing with the reduction of the class struggle to the factory and the industrial vanguard, they concluded:

[t]o see ... 4 million industrial workers as a social majority already made, in their dislocation, composition, and internal relations, in the logic of their anti-capitalist movement that unites one nucleus to another, one struggle to another: here is the sufficient force and indispensable army that is enough for a class party to provoke – through a series of conflicts—the crises and rupture of the system (Ibid, 15).

It was this "social majority," as a uniform mass of social labor-power, that, despite the uneven composition between workers in the North and the South, demonstrated a "class structure" that was both "solid and mature" (Ibid, 13). Again, at the general political level of class relations, the working class structure revealed a unified social subject with significant anti-capitalist attitudes and behaviors that moved in a historically conceived linear direction (i.e., expanding with time in militancy and numerically), attentively waiting its organization.

At the XI Congress the left-wing Ingrao faction suffered a fairly heavy defeat. Their conception of reforms was rejected in favor of "structural reforms" that sought, as a priority, to increase the voting base of the PCI through expanding alliances, and then to alter the relations of force in society. The general position of connecting day-to-day struggles with a broader program of reform was also rejected

in the name of focusing on a long-term, abstract, conception of controlling the state and using it as an instrument to turn capitalist profit into social use. The defeat of the Ingrao faction continued a process of removing the left-wing from positions of importance within the PCI. It did not, however, resolve any of the contradictions that existed between the party leadership and the working class base (Amyot 1981, 70-2). This push towards eliminating the Ingrao faction and the inability to resolve the distance of the leadership and its political line from the day-to-day struggles led to the break away of the *Manifesto* group in 1969 (see chapter 6, below).

Within *Classe Operaia*, Albert Asor Rosa concluded that the “pre-congressional and congressional debate did not manage to create a true left” inside the PCI (1966, 21). The strategy of confronting the PCI was a “mistaken battle,” only resulting in demonstrating the shortcomings of the approach. The PCI would never be anything more, he concluded, than a party “for the defense of backwards social interests” (Ibid, 22). Toni Negri, and the group from Padua-Veneto, also shared this assessment. Notably, the workers’ base in the Padua-Veneto region had registered a series of victories and expansion of the struggle with contributions coming primarily from socialist circles in the PSIUP. In light of these developments, Negri wanted CO to allow for a modified version of the national pamphlets in order to eliminate the line on the PCI as an “absurd closure of the discourse” that precluded alternatives to organization (Trotta and Milana 2008, 530). By July 1966 this initiative began to take place with the publication of *Potere Operaio* under the aegis of *Classe Operaia*, edited by Massimo Cacciari. This new publication signified an attempt to construct an “alternative organization of the class vanguard,” against the

PCI and the unions, indicating one direction that the militants in CO would take in the aftermath of the failed strategy of trying to salvage the PCI from its turn towards social democracy.

This position was further buttressed by Asor Rosa's interpretation of the post-XI Congress failure of the left. With the onset of purges from the PCI and the newly formed PSIUP, Asor Rosa argued that the new work of Classe Operaia should target those militants disillusioned with the historic parties and work towards a political reunification of the revolutionary left (Di Leo 1966, 539). The positions stemming from the Padua-Veneto group and from Asor Rosa, a former Communist Party member alienated by the failure of the left, created fractures within the group's tactical and organizational choices. These conclusions drew particular frustration from Rita Di Leo who defended the "workers' use of the party" (Ibid). If nothing else, Di Leo argued, the position of Ingrao had the merit of demonstrating that the PCI "is not a fossil ... but an instrument of power in which, with patience, the conquest is organized" (Ibid, 540). These positions have lent credence to the idea that the eventual dissolution of Classe Operaia centered on the question of organization and the idea of the workers' party (Negri 2007). Indeed, by the summer of 1966 there had emerged clear divisions over the future of the journal: the group from Rome and Turin posited against the Venetians and Asor Rosa; the groups from Lombardy and Tuscany were neutral (Trotta and Milana 2008, 524). While this might merit some consideration, insofar as there were quite real

disagreements with the direction of work emanating from Padua-Veneto,⁶⁸ there was, still, the consideration of Mario Tronti, the founder and principal animator of the journal.

As early as the workers' conference the previous May, Tronti had begun expressing his opinion that the work of the group was exhausted (1965a, 476). This position was further enhanced by his interpretation of the metal-mechanics strike that began in January 1966, the introduction of the Pierracini Plan, the unification of the PSI and PSDI in a social democratic position, and the possibility that this unification held for bringing the PSIUP and PCI into a revolutionary position. If 1966 was the first year of state planning, then the metal-mechanics strike of 1966, according to CO, demonstrated a clear rejection of this position. With the adherence of workers from Fiat after one month, the strike began to take on strategically important nodes of Italian capital, developing into a national strike by the middle of March. In the lead editorial of the first issue of 1966, published in May, Tronti opened the discussion by noting that there was a "jump" in the movement: "[t]he isolated vanguard does not exist anymore, they do not have reason to exist. A process of massification of the struggle is in act" (1966a, 1). But the struggle did not point in the direction of organization. Rather, it was settled on the basis of union unity, with rather modest gains that fit within the reformist schemes of capital (the so-called "*gabbia contrattuale*" (contractual cage). If union unity centered on economic concerns, then there was space for the political organization of the

⁶⁸ In a letter from Romano Solbiati to Tronti, dated August 8, 1966 it was written that, we "need to clarify the position of the group from Padua, provoke a discussion with them to avoid a rupture, and to soften their presence in the group" (Trotta and Milana 2008, 546-548).

workers. Against the alignment of social democratic forces, Tronti pushed not towards the organizational problem, but for a united front of the mass struggle against the social democratization of the left. In this battle, there was no room for minority groups: “we have been thinking that in large part the reasons for our direct political presence have been exhausted.... [t]he practical work needs to involve more men, more movements, more experience” (Ibid, 32). The problem of political organization, for Tronti, became secondary to the need for staving off and defeating the social democratization of the left. The “united front against social democracy” became the order of the day.

By the end of the summer it was clear that the work of CO was coming to an end. No longer advocating a clear mission for the revolutionary organization of the working class, the journal, in its last three numbers, focused on clarifying the prospects of the workers’ struggles and the usage of certain conceptual tools and methods for approaching the process of revolution. On this problem some clear divisions can be identified that ultimately led to a flowering of projects as CO slowly disappeared. On the one hand, there was the pressure to end the direct political presence of the journal, transforming it towards a cultural and political expression that could be a force for change in the culture of the historic left and guide workers’ culture at the base level. To this end, a group from Florence established a center in the name of Giovanni Francovich, one of the militants of the Florence section of CO, who had died in a car accident at age 25 in January 1966. The “Centro Francovich” was established in March as a place for seminars, research, courses, conferences, and publications directed towards the class struggle (a similar center—“Il Centro

Cultural Monzese” (the Monzese Cultural Center)—was established in Milan) [*Classe Operaia* 1966, 30; Trotta and Milana 2008, 550-2, 555].

On the other hand, there was a significant position that maintained the need of a newspaper or journal while continuing to work on agitation at the base in order to form the nucleus of an autonomous workers’ organization. The introduction of Potere Operaia between March and May of 1967 represented the response from the Veneto group, while Asor Rosa established a short-lived journal, Classe e partito (Class and party). The experience of Potere Operaio had a particularly important role in this development since the struggles there in 1966 were expanding and, with the launching of the chemical workers’ strike in July, demonstrated a real capacity for a worker vanguard to lead the process of building an autonomous workers’ organization.⁶⁹ However, it is noteworthy that in this last phase of work, this latter group, while differing from Tronti’s assessment, did not abandon the question of the party. In fact, while Asor Rosa had previously noted that the PCI was destined to remain backward looking, he still maintained, “only the party can have an *integral vision* of the class conflict, regulate the consequences, and above all sustain the worker offensive” (in Trotta and Milana 2008, 562 emphasis added). However, it was up to the workers to “straighten the line of the party” as a basic prerequisite for any attempt to carry the party in the factory (Ibid). Similarly, the first number of Potere Operaio pointed out the need to accentuate the contradiction of the PCI as having a “vast influence at the class level” while carrying forward a reformist

⁶⁹ As we will see in chapter 6, the journal Potere Operaio di Veneto-Emilano would be short-lived, morphing over time into Contropiano (Counterplan), then to La Classe [May – July 1969], before returning as a national organization of Potere Operaio in September 1969.

discourse by using this contradiction for the “expansion of the revolutionary movement” (POv-e 1967, 1-2).

For his part, Tronti, in one of the last meetings of *Classe Operaia*, offered his understanding of the experience of the workers’ struggle over the past several years, and directed his comments toward the prospects of political struggle. His analysis centered on the Keynesian revolution as a “revolution of income” that put in motion two forms of income—workers and capital; salary and profit (Trotta and Milana 2008, 570-1). The workers’ “choice of the salary” as the “terrain for struggle” was met with this “revolution of income” on the one hand, and the attempt, by capital, to conquer society. From this analysis, the workers’ struggle, through the salary struggle, put capitalism in crisis. Thus, for Tronti, the point of arrival for the workers’ movement in the late 1960s was to continue the salary struggle as a fight against capitalist planning which was based on “a politics of income” and the “control of the salary variable” (Ibid, 575-6). However, when he turned to the question of the international dimension of Keynesian political economy, he noted: “the system of capitalist production was somewhat very young” (Ibid, 578). Tronti utilized this important point to drive home his central objective: “The working class,” he concluded, “needs to be within and against capital for each general struggle; within the party and against the state” (Ibid, 580).⁷⁰ Given the international perspective of capitalist planning, Tronti asserted the need to abandon the work of CO in favor of trying to ascend to the “vertexes of power” in order to manage capitalism in the direction of its overthrow. In line with the functionalism

⁷⁰ Luciano Ferrari Bravo subsequently developed this theme within operaismo in a much more theoretically sophisticated manner than Tronti’s treatment.

and instrumentalism that characterized his understanding of the party, Tronti wrote: “capital can be consciously managed in some national points ... until its existence becomes superfluous to the working class, and thus the international conditions for its overthrow will be mature” (Ibid, 579). For Tronti, the struggle amounted to a battle of power—“only force is decisive”—with the need to play the fox, working inside the institutions in a conscious attempt to direct them to their ruin. For Tronti, the work of CO was over; the only thing left for the workers’ movement was “mass entry” into the PCI in an attempt to win government power. In a strange twist of affairs, Tronti had directed autonomist Marxism back into the very institutions that it sought to negate, with an analysis focused on capital and income, outside of any sociological understanding of working class subjectivity.

The end of Classe Operaia was less the consequence of differing approaches to the question of the PCI within the workers’ struggles and more the result of disagreement on how to develop the workers’ revolt. Tronti’s development of the relationship between the workers’ movement and institutions led him to a position that increasingly pointed towards altering the political line of power, in-line with his functionalist approach. For Negri, Asor Rosa and others, the “mass entry” position was doubly mistaken in its negative assessment of the workers’ capacity for self-management of the struggles and for neglecting to confront the “repressive reality” of the official workers’ movement (Negri 2007, 83-4). Commenting on the Roman group years later, Negri charged them with a certain incapability and incompetence in “making politics” with the class: “[the Romans] were completely incapable of any

intervention in front of the factory—they were comrades who were never able to speak with the workers and never managed to” (2007, 79).

Conclusion

Classe Operaia signified an important turn within *operaismo* that was reflected in its strict emphasis on the mass worker as the expression of the working class’s political subjectivity within neo-capitalism. Based on this unified working class subjectivity, CO introduced the question of organization leading to analysis on the use of institutions within a revolutionary process. Their logic was consciously one-sided, representing the so-called “workers’ point of view” as the dominant and determinant explanation for capitalist development. While the narrowness of this approach has been criticized as “factoryist,” CO was able to bring its discussion of the factory relation to the culminating point of political organization and direct intervention in the workers’ struggle, providing an understanding of material life in the factory that up to this point had alluded the left. By establishing the factory as the locus of political organization, CO established one of the key features of worker revolt in the wave of struggles from 1968-73. In terms of the “social factory,” CO introduced territory as a central theme of capitalist circulation and reproduction. The effects of the decentralization of industrial production and the emergence of territory as a factor in anti-capitalist resistance will be discussed in the last chapter. In the next chapter we see how the student movement appropriated parts of the workerist analysis by critiquing the school system as part of the reproduction of capital through the training of a new labor force. With the locus of anti-capitalist resistance spreading to the school system, there emerged an increasing ferment of worker-student politicization and unity that propelled the wave of struggles from 1968-1973. Further, CO

began to rethink the international question; even if Tronti's use of Lenin recycled outdated conceptions of the "weak link" in the capitalist chain, parts of CO (particularly Sergio Bologna, Antonio Negri, and Francesco Tolin) began searching for a new understanding of international social capital and for proletarian unity within these processes. Included in this discourse was an analysis of the workers' condition in "existing socialism." Their preliminary discussion of this topic noted that the "mechanisms" for "managing power" over the working class in the USSR were "similar" to the capitalist countries. In fact, the actual relations of production, from the "workers' point of view" were strikingly similar (Di Leo 1966). This early critique of "existing socialism" further developed after the events of Prague in 1968. This initial discourse on internationalism was carried over in the student movement and emerged in the analysis laid out by the extra-parliamentary groups Lotta Continua (Continuous Struggle) and Potere Operaio (see below, Chapter 6-7). Last, the fundamental contribution of CO remained the methodological development of the "workers' point of view" as the proper analytical tool for explaining and guiding the class struggle within Autonomist Marxism.

In the last issue of the journal (March 1967), they emphasized the need to continue the salary struggles by the class, since the salary-profit nexus was considered to be quite stringent. The journal editorialized that the future struggles would be more effective and more powerful on this terrain. What they did not foresee, however, was the generalization of this demand by other social subjects, who, in turn, would assert themselves in the class movement as an attempt to break the reproduction of capital and thwart the cycle of the circulation of capital (the student and community movements; importantly, the women's movement). We turn now to examine how this "workers' point

of view” came to be understood and applied to the school system by a radicalized student body that saw the role of the university as a conduit for the reproduction of capital. In doing such, the student movement developed the “social factory” analysis beyond the factory gates to the processes of the reproduction of capital.

CHAPTER 5

STUDENTS AND REVOLUTIONARY CLASS POLITICS: CAPITALIST

PLANNING, THE SCHOLASTIC SYSTEM, AND STUDENT REVOLT.

The university functions as an instrument of ideological and political manipulation intended to instill in them [the students] a spirit of subordination to power (whatever form it is) and to cancel, in the psychic and mental structure of each of us, the collective dimension of personal existence and the capacity of having relationships with each other that are not purely of a competitive character. —Guido Viale, *Contro l'Università*

The social system of advanced capitalism increasingly takes the form of a network of totalitarian institutions aimed at the total control and domination of the persons subject to it ... Authoritarianism in a neo-capitalist world is not a hangover from feudalism; it is the fundamental form of class domination, to which all social institutions are subordinated—Luigi Bobbio and Guido Viale, *La strategia del movimento*

The school is ... a place for the production of qualified labor-power and re-enters as social cost in the broader cycle of reproduction of capital.

The student is defined as labor-power in his process of qualification and thus as a subordinate social figure, not only in relation to his future salary position in the productive process, but in his university activity in which the capitalist division of intellectual work immediately defines him in terms of an executor of mental processes and of predetermined and fragmented experiences.—*Tesi della Sapienza*

Introduction

In this chapter I examine the student movement's contribution to *operaismo*. I am particularly interested in demonstrating how the student movement discussed the “social factory” as a means to enlarge the conception of working class composition to include the student as part of the working class. The term “student movement” is intended here as a descriptive term that reflects diverse university and high school protest movements. It is not intended as depicting a homogeneous movement.⁷¹ In short, for lack of a better

⁷¹ As we have seen in previous chapters, it would be equally incorrect to speak of a singular *operaismo* (Borio et al 2002). Fabrizio Billi correctly notes that the theoretical and strategic differences between Quaderni Rossi and Class Operaia constitute a fundamental diversity in the tradition of *operaismo* to the extent that it is more correct to speak of the plural *operaismi*. This is a rather obvious point: *operaismo* was not a homogenous theoretical movement. For Billi, the history of *operaismo* unfolded in the movements of '68 with a “direct evolution” towards Potere Operaio, as “one of the constitutive principles” of Lotta Continua, and smaller influence elsewhere (1999, 163-6).

expression, “student movement” is used; it is little more than an inexact term that is utilized to generalize about a far more heterogeneous phenomenon that, for reasons of space and purpose, prevents me from exploring its significance in greater detail. Importantly, the student movement was not so much a theoretical movement as it was a social movement, with practice informing its politics to a greater extent than theoretical formulations.⁷² But as the movement matured and searched for answers to the social problems it was confronting, the work of *operaismo*, particularly from the positions of Panzieri and Rieser in QR, but also with affinities to the Venetian and Florentine positions in CO, offered a conceptual framework to investigate and understand a revolutionary class politics. In particular, the student’s appropriation of sociological inquiry (“sociology of the base”), class composition, the social factory, and aspects of revolutionary theory (i.e., organizational questions such as the critique of centralized authority, the need for revolutionary party to emerge from the movement and live in the movement, and the rejection of external vanguards) provide a framework for examining the trajectory of *operaismo* as it found space in the student movement.

Before arriving at how the student movement began appropriating the language and theory of *operaismo* there are several background factors that must be introduced. The first section describes the generational features that mark the particular nature of the student movement with respect to their parent’s generation. Emphasis is placed on the

⁷² The student movement did not emerge out of the need to construct new theoretical tools. Rather, theory followed from the practical need of confronting reform of the educational system. The trajectory of the rise of the student movement, its relationship with the official organizations of student representation, its position with respect to the three main political parties, its understanding of itself, and its demands, verify that theory was virtually always a reflection upon practice. This is certainly the case with the majority of documents produced in the movement. For the best discussion of this point see Rossana Rossanda’s *L’Anno degli studenti* (The year of the students) [1968, 55].

psychological and cultural effects of the “economic miracle,” as marking a rupture in the mode of living and attitudinal behaviors of the new generation. A second factor is the emergence of an “existential ambiguity” that permeated the youth. New means of communication—film, phonographs, and television—signified the birth of a truly global culture. Last, their reading preferences demonstrate the intellectual hue of the youth movement—an admixture of existentialism, psychoanalysis, humanist Marxism, and *operaismo*.

The second section of this chapter discusses the relationship between the student movement and the ideas of *operaismo*. While I do not want to overstate the connection between the development of *operaismo* and the rise of the so-called “New Left” of the student movement, there were direct connections (Santarelli 1996, 143-6; Massari 1998, 41-63; Urso 1999). At the same time, I do not want to undervalue the influences of previous movements, as one prominent scholar does in his characterization of the student movement as an “event,” particular to the schools (Revelli 2001).⁷³ Rather, in agreement with Urso and others, the student movement must be understood as part of a broader social process, with its own particular configurations that were characterized by their experience as students (Hellman 1976). While Urso highlights the idea of “rupture” as a connecting point between the student movement and Autonomist Marxism, I put

⁷³ Revelli argues that the student movement constituted an “event” (as opposed to a “process”) that was marked by the explosion of student protest *inside* the university. This rather narrow assessment misses not only previous theoretical and cultural influences, but also minimizes the connective tissue between the youth in general and the student movement, connections that were evident in protests in the *piazza* and other manifestations (for example, the December 1968 protests in Milan during the opening night of the theater season at the famous *Teatro alla Scala*, followed by a similar protest on New Year’s Eve at the resort of Bussola on the coast near Pisa. Both protests were “social” in nature, and the composition of the protesters was predominantly young, but by no means limited to the student movement.)

emphasis in the second section on the idea of the “social factory,” the idea of “autonomy,” and forms of knowledge production. This section highlights the common ground between two distinct but congenial tendencies that emerged within the student movement.⁷⁴ The central point of this section is to understand the means by which the student movement began to formulate its questions in terms of the “social factory,” understood in both the Trontian and Panzierian versions discussed above.

This is demonstrated by analyzing the more prominent theoretical documents that emerged from the student movement in universities at Pisa, Trento, and Turin. From this analysis, the student’s conception of the “social factory” emerged as a totalizing system based on despotism and control—the core power features of social capital. Within this configuration, the role of the university, the role of the student, and the political obligation or commitment for revolutionary struggle developed. The student’s appropriated the conception of the “social factory” in order to critique the university within a particular phase of neo-capitalism and to situate their struggle within a class analysis. Their significant contribution to the conception of “class composition” derived from their emphasis on the social division of labor and their role as the subjects of what they identified as the political and technical-social functions of social labor.⁷⁵ A consequence of this sociological focus was that Tronti’s logical-deductive method of

⁷⁴ Careful attention must be placed on the word “within” as the positions of *Classe Operaia*, and to a much lesser extent, *Quaderni Rossi*, were particularly lacking with regard to the question of educational system and the role of the student as a subject within neo-capitalist social relations (Wright 2002, 96-7).

⁷⁵ This criteria for a definition of the working class was addressed in the *Tesi della Sapienza*: “A definition of class” must be seen in terms of “the capitalist division of labor internal to the cycle of social production, that is, from the distinction between the fragmented executive-social functions and social functions that are repressive management-administration-control” (1967, 174).

discerning revolutionary practice under conditions of social capital was dismissed in favor of examining the phenomenological effects of social capital on the reproduction of labor-power.

The third section of the chapter concludes by focusing on the limits of the student movement as autonomous actors in revolutionary theory. The problem derived from the uncertainty and flaws in their analysis of the university in its relation to capital and the state. This became evident by at least the spring of 1968 as the focus of “student power” increasingly sought ties with those advocating “workers’ power.” The slogan that captured the general sentiment of this period, “students, workers united in the struggle,” reflected the expansion of revolutionary struggle beyond both the university and the factory into the broader contours of capitalist production and reproduction. The uncertainty over political space⁷⁶ for revolutionary politics and its organizational form dominated the student movement as it gained momentum moving into the tumultuous “Hot Autumn” of 1969. The generalization of working class struggles, involving neighborhoods, rent strikes, consumer action, street protests, workers’ occupations and strikes, the student’s revolt, and the formation of local assemblies and committees, seemed to offer the premonition that a revolutionary struggle was underway.

⁷⁶ One of the key features of both the beginning of *operaismo* and the student movement was an emphasis on autonomy as an organizational and institutional separation from the traditional political parties, trade unions, and organizations of student representation. They each also shared a critique of these as bureaucratic and centralized, resulting in a failure to recognize the demands of the base, and imposing a political line on the respective members. For Panzieri, autonomy was a central theme for establishing a revolutionary workers’ culture. The student movement soon neglected its emphasis on autonomy as it confronted the workers’ movement and problems beyond the university. Their response was a step-backwards organizationally that only began to be rectified in 1973 when *Potere Operaio* dissolved itself as an organization and various small cells of *Autonomia* emerged in a loosely federated network of struggles. Thus, the idea of a political space for the movement proved quite problematic, despite varied experiments in this regard (see Ch. 6).

Configurations of a new generation

The youth of the “economic miracle” politically emerged in the revolts of July 1960. They embodied a different outlook, a reflection of more confident times: their spirit was emboldened by the genuine feeling that, through activism, they could take control of the social forces at play in society and reconstruct a new world; their sensibility was imbued with irreverence towards the previous generation’s values and mores expressed in the “holy trinity” of M’s: *macchina, moglie, mestiere* (car, wife, and professional job). The basis of the “economic miracle,” with its vision of social organization and progress was directly challenged. But the economic miracle had broader connotations for the Italian psyche. Fundamentally, it signified the possibility of a better world, it provided better material conditions, and it turned Italy into a world economic power. According to Piccone Stella, the youth confronted the “economic miracle” with considerable “ambiguity”: the “new ambitions of the *boom*, combined with the attraction towards a mutable and indecipherable remixing of values” inaugurated, a “subterranean process” that redefined the culture (1993, 12-13; Crainz 2005, 79, 142-3; Balestrini and Moroni 1998, 197). Initially expressed through anti-conformist attitudes and behaviors, their culture, socialization, and ideational framework produced a lively dissent from established views and mores.

New needs and new consumption

The social transformation of Italian society during the “economic miracle” was a determining force in shaping the objective conditions of the new generation. As previously noted, its major characteristics were the development of mass consumer markets through large-scale production along Taylorist-Fordist lines. One of the effects

of this opening was that for the first time on a large scale capitalism targeted the family structure through mass consumer products that affected their daily happenings: refrigeration fundamentally altered both the quality and quantity of foodstuffs that Italians consumed, television challenged the family nucleus by opening new horizons in the cultural imagination of the youth, and the automobile became not only a status symbol, but also a means for expressing the rapidly changing social understanding of time and force: the young interpreted the automobile as an “exaltation of a vital energy” of self-expression (Piccone Stella 1993, 250).⁷⁷

The expansion of consumer markets entailed the construction of new needs in the youth. However, capitalist culture could not contain the interpretation that the youth gave to these new needs. This dichotomy reflected a basic feature of the cultural effect of neo-capitalism: the introduction of mass consumerism unleashed in the new generation the feeling of instant gratification in order to satisfy their immediate needs.⁷⁸ In order to understand the dynamic of neo-capitalism through the psychological and cultural effects of new consumer markets along with the construction of new needs and how the young generation understood itself in front of these transformations, it is useful to examine the

⁷⁷ For this type of depiction of the youth’s imagination and the “economic miracle,” see Pier Paolo Pasolini’s film *Mamma Roma* (1962).

⁷⁸ Elvio Fachinelli used the psychological and cultural connection between “needs” and “desires” as central to the existential revolt of the youth in what he termed “dissident desires.” Fachinelli wrote, “...the group has put in motion the dialectic of desire.” Continuing later, “to a society that offers the satisfaction of needs, they perennially oppose it as NOT ENOUGH” (1968, 88-9). As a more general observation, we might consider Daniel Bell’s description of this shift in capitalist culture. In his *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, Bell wrote: “the cultural realm is one of self-expression and self-gratification. It is anti-institutional and antinomian in that the individual is taken to be the measure of satisfaction...” He continues: “In this democratization of culture, every individual, understandably, seeks to realize his full “potential,” and so the individual “self” comes increasingly into conflict with the role requirements of the technical-economic order (1978, xvii). It would take another shift in the capitalist organization of production to incorporate this idea of “potential” within the productive framework of Italian capitalism (see Ch. 7).

broader international conditions of this generation, first from a cultural perspective and then from a more distinctly political and economic framework.

In terms of cultural expression, television's affect on the youth's global imagination paled in comparison to film and music. In both realms, certain features captured not only the Italian youth but also an entire generation of youth across the spectrum of advanced industrial capitalist countries. This burgeoning global culture confronted the preceding generation's moral order, sharply criticizing its existential emptiness and fundamental decay (Lumley 1990, 73). In Italy, perhaps more than any other film, Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* (The Sweet Life, 1960) depicted the decadence of a new bourgeois intent on realizing the potentiality of individuality through the immediate gratification of needs and desires. While the mainstream reaction, particularly, but by no means unique, from the Catholic sector, deplored the film's immoral displays of sexuality and other suggestive moral transgressions, others saw in the film a recognition that Italians no longer lived in the postwar condition of "delayed gratification" and repression, justified in the name of reconstruction, but lived in a "decadent" society, with all sorts of excesses and existential conflict (Crainz 2005, 157-9).

The central theme of Fellini's film was not to point out the moral decadence of the social order, but to highlight, in his words, the "terrible existential emptiness" of neo-capitalist culture (quoted in Crainz 2005, 162). While critics were outraged by such scenes as Nadia Gray's strip show during a house party, and the free display of casual sexual relations, the message that Fellini sought to drive home climaxed in the film's final scene. With the main character, Marcello, sitting on the beach, away from his group of fellow partiers, he notices a young, beautiful girl in the distance who is trying to

communicate with him. Separated by an inlet of water, they are incapable of physical contact; the girl's voice is drowned out by the sound of the ocean. In his failed attempt to listen to the girl, Marcello expresses futility—he is incapable of developing his own thoughts of what it might be that the girl wants; she, in turn, prays him to understand as he turns around to leave, accentuating the tragedy that the innocence of love is seemingly lost in a world of existential emptiness, or drowned out in the constant “noise” that marked neo-capitalist culture. Fellini's understanding of the moral crisis that confronted a new consumer world with rapidly changing moral codes was also reflected in a new wave of Italian film that sought to explain the social transformations of the economic boom.⁷⁹ Importantly, this existential void was captured in a broad array of film that focused on the individual who was heroic and rebellious, violent, and full of ethical ambiguity.

International films caught on in Italy with the importation of the Western from the United States – the “Spaghetti Western” – as well as films from a new generation of independent filmmakers that focused on the theme of the individual as rugged, self-reliant, rebellious, and, oftentimes, violent. The “man with no name” (played by Clint Eastwood) in “A Fistful of Dollars” (1964), later, the role of Peter Fonda in “Easy Rider”⁸⁰ (1969), and earlier James Dean in a “Rebel without a Cause” (1955, Italian release 1956) were films that stressed the outsider, those cast aside by not only society but also by history. The “man with no name” resonated with the same protagonists in Pasolini's films *Accattone* (The Scrounger) [1961] and *Mamma Roma* (1962). The former

⁷⁹ Adagio highlights three films as marking a decisive turn in film's capacity to shed light on the social changes underway during the economic boom: Luchino Visconti's *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* (Rocco and his brothers), Federico Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* (The Sweet Life), and Michaelangelo Antonioni's *L'Avventura* (The Adventure) [1999, 236-7].

⁸⁰ Adriano Sofri of *Potere operaio pisano* characterized Peter Fonda's role in “Easy Rider” as a “perfect Italian variant of the protagonists of 1968” (quoted in Cazzullo 2006, 10).

depicted the criminal lifestyle of an unemployed rascal who cheats and robs, trying to get by in a life suffocated by dreadful existence of the underclass. The latter featured the life of an aging prostitute trying hopelessly to change her life and to offer her son, Ettore, a more healthy and sane world. These forms of anti-heroes that came from the margins of society reflected the angst and ambiguity of the role of the individual in the age of the economic miracle. The introduction of the underclass into history, as a living subject, with the display of bourgeois decadence and alienation as the dominant mode of existence in the economic boom produced a sharp break with the norms of neo-capitalist culture.

The consumer culture of the early 1960s produced a general leveling effect in Italian society that cut against previous social roles. Modes of dress, particularly, became more homogenous among the youth. The July 1960 protest that produced the cultural icon of the ripped t-shirt and jeans was both a consequence and a partial rejection that demonstrated the class nature of the protest. On the one hand, jeans were the universal class leveler, but the image of the ripped t-shirt demonstrated the general poverty of the working class (Lumley 1990, 70-2). Connected to the trend of dress was another: the rise of rock-n-roll and the global culture of music.

The expansion of music as a consumer item was the result of an increase in production of records and record players. Crainz writes: “[t]he evolution and successes of the record market contribute in a decisive manner to the self-definition of a youth universe and has more general implications” (2005, 149). With the advent of records and phonographic players an international market was established in youth circles with a vibrant diversity of sounds and messages: the Rolling Stones, Pink Floyd, the

Temptations, Jimi Hendrix, the Grateful Dead, Bob Dylan, and the Beatles. A sector of the new music was connected to the *beat* culture as well as the emerging culture of experimentation in mind-altering substances (particularly marijuana and LSD). Thus, the Italian movement contained elements within it that were influenced by the poetry of Allen Ginsberg, the advocacy of *The Psychedelic Experience* of Tim Leary (which in its own right influenced large portions of the new music), and the Yippie movement associated with Jerry Rubin. Music fed part of a void within the existential condition of the youth by transgressing the limits of the real, searching for new ways to connect as individuals with others in the belief that an infinity of possible worlds remained to be explored, and that their generation had the capacity to overcome what appeared to be an absurd social system. In this sense the “existential ambiguity” of the boom generation highlighted a rapidly changing world in which the individual had the possibility of forging new norms and modes of living.

While the new forms of communication began to draw the world closer together, particularly the sensibilities of the youth, within Italy this cultural shift was augmented by an expanding publishing market that, for the first time, began to reach broader audiences along with their nascent consumer demands. Throughout the 1950s it was standard that the publishing houses produced for the upper-middle class. Einaudi, in Turin (where Panzieri had briefly worked), was one of the few exceptions.⁸¹ The young students were consuming literature that was outside of the dominant intellectual circles. In fact, their

⁸¹ *Libreria Feltrinelli* (Feltrinelli Bookstore) and *L'Istituto Feltrinelli* (Feltrinelli Institute) became central reference points in the successive years, not only for the production of literature for the movement, but also as a place of discussion and meeting. Giangiacomo Feltrinelli's role in left culture was particularly important for not only gathering information on the European working class, but for Feltrinelli's own personal affinity for the Third World liberation struggles with emphasis on Cuba (Feltrinelli 2001).

literature reflected the ambiguity with which they found themselves that was premised on a rejection of the previous generation's values. In a series of topics that reflected ethical shifts and diverse intellectual tendencies, the youth read a host of new literature: on the question of sexual behavior they read Wilhelm Reich's *The Sexual Revolution*; for a critique of the family as a repressive and ultimately conformist entity they went to RD Laing's essays; philosophically they were interested in the Frankfurt School, the young Marx of the *Manuscripts*, Sartre, Camus, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche (Crainz 2005, 160-1; Balestrini and Moroni 1988, 197-200). The dominant themes that they derived from these works were alienation, totality, critical rationality, and the importance of individual choice or decision-making (see below). These shifts in literature began to deepen and focus their theoretical and philosophic questions. Importantly, this background sheds light on the formation of new needs derived from the introduction of mass consumer markets. Below, I demonstrate more concretely how this "subterranean process" impacted the politics of the student movement. Before turning to that important point, it remains to understand the ideational and social configuration of the youth generation.

Ideational and social configurations

As the younger generation was defining itself culturally, a broader protest culture was emerging that focused on international political events. The United States' war in Vietnam, while the most prominent theme of early protest, often led and organized by the official left and their civic associations, was part of a broader international outlook that was fundamentally shaped by anti-imperialism. The youth's rejection of imperialist politics stemmed from an increasing identification with the "wretched of the earth" (Fanon), especially those who fought in the periphery or margins of the capitalist system,

domestically and internationally. Indeed, after the initial movements over school reform, anti-imperialism quickly became the leading focus with 1967 known as “the year of Vietnam.” (As we will see below, the politicization of the struggle also reflected a deeper political commitment within the student movement.) The critique of imperialism was based on the relationship between legitimacy and power. Its normative aspect was part of the broader climate of the Nuremberg trials and universal human rights in the postwar era. Hence their outrage was not only against perceived aggression and criminality of the United States in Vietnam, but also against authoritarian regimes in Greece and Spain.

The idea of “peaceful coexistence”—the trope of Khrushchev-Kennedy Cold War relations—was regarded as a fiction, rendered as propaganda in face of the Third World liberation struggles and the response those drew from the dominant world powers. Latin America exercised considerable influence, particularly the Cuban Revolution and Che Guevara’s definition of a “revolutionary.” Elsewhere, Maoism emerged from within the communist left as a result of the Sino-Soviet split as the perceived egalitarianism of Mao was seen as a welcome renewal against the gray bureaucracy of the Soviet model. In the student movement, these two influences were popularized in the slogans: “make one, two, three Vietnams,” and Mao’s decree to “shoot at the headquarters” (Balestrini and Moroni 1988, Scalzone 1988, 30). This international perspective and particularly the expression of “peaceful coexistence” had domestic implications. Oreste Scalzone, a student at Rome during this period, later wrote: “In our attitude there was a criticism of peaceful coexistence that translated in a criticism of social coexistence ... the focus on parliament, the participation of unity of the constitutional arch, the constriction and regulatory management of the struggles by the union” (Ibid). Peaceful coexistence neither

existed internationally nor nationally: the workers' struggles in Italy, the planning of education and structure of academic authority, the family, these and more were the domestic counterparts of a broader contestation of authority that spread throughout the Italian ideological spectrum.

Shifts in both the Catholic and Communist movements opened new space and possibilities for more liberal or democratic orientations. In the Catholic world, Pope John XXIII turned attention to social justice and ethics, culminating in his final encyclical *Pacem in Terris*. As Ginsborg writes: "the encyclical stressed the need for the increased economic and social development of the working classes, the entry of women into public life and the justice of anti-colonial struggles in the Third World" (1990, 261). While officials in the Vatican were awkwardly confronted with the appeal to "all men of goodwill," at the local level there were sympathies for Latin America's "Marxist priests" (i.e., Camillo Torres). The focus on ethics and social justice resonated with leftist portrayal of the workers as an exploited class. Shifts in the Communist movement, particularly the current of *operaismo*, pushed the focus on exploitation away from economic terms towards the broader power dynamics of capitalist social relations, speaking in terms of "despotism," "domination," and "control." In these two dominant political cultures, there was a greater opportunity and proclivity to include the working masses within their orbit. One of the basic contradictions that pervaded the period, however, was that within these cultures the base, or membership, often found itself at odds with the political line of the leadership. In this regard, the student movement and the working class experienced similar phenomena in their relations with the political institutions and party structures.

The basic questions that students were asking stemmed from the tradition of Western Marxism and were framed around themes of alienation, totality, and critical rationality. Their approaches varied between philosophy, psychology, sociology, and urban studies. They were the first generation to seriously consider the writings of the young Marx in the *Manuscripts*. Here they discovered psychological, sociological, and methodological criteria that were not consistent with the PCI's focus on development and production. Rather, they found a critique of capitalist social relations that highlighted man's four-fold alienation and continued impoverishment through capitalist development. Not only did the wage system increase workers' political dependency on capital, but it also constructed new needs through its social and technical power. For young students, Marx's claims that highlighted the workers' loss of control over production, the decimation of the individual's creativity and interests that prevented social relations to be based on genuine human need resonated strongly.⁸² Thus, the young generation encountered a Marxism that was closer to the dissident left of the post-Stalinist era (even if many workerists disdained the humanist tendency within Marxism), particularly in the shift of focus towards the subjective component of capitalist social relations (i.e., worker's inquiry) away from more traditional "economic" questions (i.e., production, development, property relations).

Capitalism as a system of control had been introduced to students in the North (particularly Pisa and Turin) through Panzieri's interpretation of Marx's "Fragment on Machinery" in the *Grundrisse*. Here they came into contact with theoretical positions that

⁸² This is particularly true of the various Architecture Departments that were among the first to criticize the influence and control of capital over their professional training and intellectual work. For an excellent discussion of the experience at Veneto during the late 1960s and 1970s, see Gail Day "Strategies in the metropolitan Merz" (2005).

demonstrated how knowledge production, determined by the needs of capital, imposed a form of technological rationality on society. (Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* was published in 1967 and sold 150,000 copies in its first year) [Lumley 1990, 121]. To confront this problematic the student movement turned to the use of inquiry in Quaderni Rossi as a foundation for new forms of knowledge production to combat the social power of capital. The linkage of these two themes—capitalist despotism through its use of technology and workers' inquiry as a democratic mode of knowledge production—served the movement in their critique of the university system as part of a broader logic that connected the university with the power of capital and the role of the state in university reform.

In trying to understand the totalizing nature of capitalism, the student movement also accepted Sartre's critique of dialectical materialism and his consequent formulation of freedom and truth. In his *Search for a Method*, Sartre critiqued the Hegelian position of freedom that locates truth in history (1963). Against this totality of history as the determination of freedom, Sartre posed the concept of "totalization" as a character in history that is not determined dialectically but is present in history through the fact of individual choice. Sartre argued that the liberty of choosing was the positive content that allowed individuals to negate both internally and externally given conditions.⁸³ The ambiguity that this generation felt towards the boom was addressed through the problem of control and power exercised through the execution of individual choice. For Sartre,

⁸³ In a slightly different formulation, but as an important influence, Camus advanced the proposition that "with rebellion, awareness is born." The basis of this for Camus was individualistic: The rebel "confronts an order of things which oppresses him with the insistence on a kind of right not to be oppressed beyond the limit that he can tolerate" (1991, 15, 12). On the role of negative thought, Marcuse's *Reason and Revolution* was an important influence as well (1960).

“man” not only “makes himself,” but this claim recognizes as a precondition that individuals have the ability to imagine that the world is something other than it is, and to also imagine themselves differently. The fundamental determination of human affairs is choice and how this is exercised in the basic circumstances in which people are living.

The student movement rejected economically deterministic explanations of social theory. This rejection derived from the influences of Panzieri’s interpretation and use of the Frankfurt School as well as existentialist arguments associated with Sartre and Camus. Within the parameters of these influences the movement was able to forge a loose international class analysis that targeted neo-capitalism at home and imperialism at the international level. At the international level, the movement found cultural icons in the figures of Che and Mao.⁸⁴ These figures were certainly appealing for their symbolic messages of what it meant to be a revolutionary and for an egalitarian and anti-bureaucratic form of communism. However, politically, the student movement existed in a direct struggle against capitalist reforms in their own universities and cities.

The students confronted a university system that was outdated and faced with legislative proposals for reform, one of the main pillars of the Center-Left government. Their ideational and social background evinced a dynamic “existential ambiguity” that began taking shape during the student’s confrontation with university reform. That is, without the question of university reform, or without the need (partially imposed by

⁸⁴ Balestrini and Moroni note that Che was particularly influential, especially after his address to the United Nations General Assembly (December 11, 1964). His definition of a guerilla in *La Guerra di Guerriglia* (Gorilla War) [Feltrinelli 1967] set out basic characteristics that resonated with sectors of the youth movement: discipline (and this is connected to Sartre’s emphasis on “being with others” as essential to revolutionary engagement), an acceptance of violence, the culture of small groups tied to the oppressed (“foco”), connecting the small struggles to a total attack against imperialism (1988, 177-8).

changes in the system of production, but also by the democratic ideals of the Republic's Constitution⁸⁵) for expanding university education, there would not have been a student movement. However, it is equally true that the determinant elements were not solely the dissatisfaction with regard to the universities, but with the "system" as a whole, and with the condition of the youth in the social system of neo-capitalism. And while the ideational background was somewhat diffuse, the student movement became more closely aligned with the analysis of *operaismo* through its struggles and, especially, from the Pisan students, who, after 1967, attained a large deal of theoretical influence over the national movement.

The student movement and themes of operaismo

From the outset, class was a central theme in discussions of the educational system. The entrance of the socialists in the first Center-Left government was premised, in part, on education reform. Its singular achievement was the *scuola media unificata*, or unified middle school, which eliminated schools of professional and commercial training and pointed the way towards equal education for all, opening the prospects for the sons and daughters of working and peasant classes to receive higher education. The workerists, for their part, saw in this a reflexive attempt by capitalist planners to implement the Fordist-Taylorist model of production within the schools. In fact, the exponents of *operaismo* had paid virtually no attention to the problem of education, with the partial exception of Panzieri. Their conception of class composition precluded the need to focus on training and qualification; with no need for the professional skilled worker of the past, education was seen as preparing labor for the assembly line and in managing these affairs (only

⁸⁵ Article 34 of the Constitution forms the basis for the "Right to Study." It stipulates that those who are "capable and deserving, also if deprived of means, have the right to attain the highest level of study."

later would they focus on intellectual labor, a consequence of the student movement). As we will see later, the student movement exposed the shortcomings of this approach as they confronted the role of intellectual production within a system based on the deskilling of certain forms of labor while increasing specialization and qualification of other forms of labor.⁸⁶ What, if any, were the new set of skills required by the productive system of international capital and the role of Italy in that schema? The student movement responded to this question by focusing on the capitalist system in terms of the division of labor.

During the early debates on education reform, the position of the traditional left focused on the “right to education” as a social goal of the postwar Republic. For them, the expansion of education, the democratization of knowledge to all social classes, was intrinsic to the democratic spirit of the Constitution. In support of the educational reforms the slogan of the “right to education” served as a normative basis by which students judged the actual situation in the schools. As Lumley notes, the reality of class society marred student’s school experience: “educational reforms, by improving the chances of young working class people going to university, drew attention to the fact that very few did. Students went to university with great expectations and found a tawdry reality” (1990, 58). The early student movement latched on to this disconnect between the unification of the middle school with the reality that the system continued to serve the privileged classes. The first document addressing this class aspect within the student movement came from a Catholic priest, Don Lorenzo Milani, along with his students at the Barbiana School. The *Lettera a una professoressa* (Letter to a teacher) sold over a

⁸⁶ Steve Wright attributes the focus on technicians and specialized labor to the influence of Andre Gorz’s *Strategy for Labor* and Serge Mallet’s *The New Working Class*. For the role of technicians and “class composition” in *operaismo*, see Wright’s *Storming Heaven* (2002, 101-6).

million copies within five years, becoming a classic of the movement (Scuola di Barbiana 1967). At its core, it was a denunciation of the class character of the educational system, with a cultural and social rejection of the idea of privilege, and particularly the boss's own formation of class privilege.

The *Lettera* derived from the Catholic left which had turned its focus to the poor and downtrodden that lived on the margins of society. It represented a sample of writings from students of peasant and worker origins and highlighted the school's neglect of the cultural and social problems facing Italy. In his review of the *Lettera*, Elvio Fachinelli, wrote in *Quaderni Piacentini*, that this "is the first Chinese text of our country" (Fachinelli, Fortini, and Giudici 1967, 66). The reference to "Chinese," widely used in the mainstream press as an epithet against the students and New Left in general, was a polemical term used against those within the left who sympathized and supported the Chinese model of communism against the Soviet system. The *Lettera*, for Fachinelli, sought to evoke sympathy for the plight of those who were "forgotten," who "pass through time without leaving a trace," and that "nobody will miss" (Ibid, 69). The student's letters brought attention to their subordinate and marginal position, not as an individual matter, but as a cultural and social problem of the Republic. What is interesting here is that the letters introduce class as the key for understanding why and how these groups have been denied identity and with it a sense of place and existence within the dominant culture. The limitation of the book, as Franco Fortini pointed out, was that it was pre-political; ultimately, it was a statement of faith (Ibid, 76). Against a

school that divided students according to wealth and riches, the students' letters attacked the bourgeois and their privilege as the central obstacle to social equality.⁸⁷

Class was viewed through the prism of social privilege and its affect on morality. There was no consequent discussion of pedagogy, content, or other questions of learning, or of the structural features of educational institutions. Rather, the class system was denounced to the extent that it had a negative moral effect. The neglect of social problems turned moral questions into individualistic concerns. For the students this meant the denial and, ultimately, neglect of other individuals. Against this individualistic and atomistic focus, the students' letters pointed to a "fraternal collectivity" where the privilege of the boss's culture was a contaminant that needed to be extirpated (Ibid, 77, 79). This negative appraisal of bourgeois culture was summarized in a key passage from the *Lettera*:

Pierino, you are lucky because you know how to speak and disagreeable because you speak too much.

He that does not have anything important to say. He that only repeats things read in written books from others like him.... Poor *Pierino*, you almost give me compassion. For privilege you have paid dear. Deformed by specialization, by books, by contact with all the same type of men. Why don't you leave? Leave the university, the burdens, the parties.... Quit reading; disappear. It is the last mission of your class (quoted in Balestrini and Moroni 1988, 183).

The class privilege of the bourgeois was seen as the central obstacle to universal moral harmony. Currents within the Catholic left began focusing on the moral consequences of

⁸⁷ Language, for example, was treated as an important factor in identifying class bias and privilege. Through the teaching of an official language, with control over linguistic practice, the children of peasants and workers were instructed to leave behind their local dialects and slangs in order to adopt proper usage. As an expression of their superiority, language was one way in which the *pierino* (sons of the bosses) exercised privilege in education (Balestrini and Moroni 1988, 181-2). Language would become a widely treated topic in the thought of the New Left, along with the introduction of automation and computerization. For an extreme example of a critique or protest against linguistic practice that recognizes social/usage rules, see Balestrini's account of the 1977 student movement in his *The unseen* (1989). The text is written without use of capitalization, punctuation, and other literary conventions.

the class system, highlighting the failure of the unified middle school system to realize the hope of democracy's egalitarian norms, as it did not address the social and cultural class system.

If the *Lettera* attacked the deformations on moral development that stemmed from class privilege in education, this remained a literary phenomenon that had not reached the level of national politics. A few months prior to the publication of the *Lettera*, students at the Liceo Parini in Milan set off a national scandal with their appraisal of the youth's condition in Italian society. In February 1966 students produced an article that addressed the question of "what the young think of today." While focused on questions of religion, sexual relations, family, and marriage, the students' responses demonstrated their rejection of the moral customs of Italian society. Exemplary in this regard was a young woman's response that if she were only offered a life dedicated to marriage, home and children, death would be an agreeable solution (in Balestrini and Moroni 1988, 185-7). The upshot of the national debate over the "Zanzara case" (literally translated as the "Mosquito" or "Gnat") was that a new generation pointed out the shortcomings of democratic institutions, and the need for modernizing such institutions. However, the response from the political, economic, and educational powers evinced their clear rejection of the students' concerns, as those students responsible for the article were expelled or politely asked to transfer to another school. The case highlighted not only the generational gap separating the youth from their elders, but also that the educational system was part of society, it replicated its norms and models of behavior that the young needed to adopt as part of their education. Thus, in the "Zanzara case" the students began deconstructing the understanding of the school as an autonomous institution responsible

for preparing citizens by locating the educational institutions within the spectrum of society, as a part of society (Lumley 1990, 94-6).

The *Lettera* and the “Zanzara case” demonstrate two things that remained with the student movement throughout the cycle of struggles between 1968-1973: a rejection of the class nature of the educational institutions and a form of existential suffering in the face of academic authority. In the early development of the student movement these were addressed primarily in terms of the democratic liberty of the student against the entrenched powers of the academic, political, and economic system. Their existential angst produced a lively rejection of external control that began to take shape in early 1966, but did not quite bear fruit until developments of the successive two years refined the students’ analysis of the educational system in capitalist society. By 1966, however, the classical veneration of education was shattered; educational institutions were viewed as integral to society, and the principle feature that reflected this was the class system.

The university in the “social factory”

Urso highlights the idea of “rupture” as one of the uniting features of the early culture of *operaismo* and the student movement. As this dissertation has argued, *operaismo* was in part the product of the post-1956 political rupture with the official left. Urso identifies a similar political rupture with the student movement during the years 1967-8, as students rejected the traditional form and content of politics. The connective linkage between the two is that like the post-1956 rupture, the student movement signified the arrival of “new subjects” that filled “space left vacant by [traditional] politics” (1999, 13). The idea of rupture is a useful heuristic for unfolding other, more linear connections that unite the ideas of *operaismo* and the student movement. I do not think it is useful to determine the

causes of “rupture” for each case in order to demonstrate theoretical connection. Rather, it is more appropriate to discuss how the student movement utilized ideas expounded by variants within *operaismo*. The benefit of this approach is that it does not limit inquiry to cases that demonstrate a direct connection (i.e., Pisa). Rather, it allows for an examination of cases that have less direct connection with the workerists.

I want to now examine the connection between *operaismo* and the student movement by focusing primarily, but not exclusively, on the universities of Trento, Turin, and Pisa. The central theme of each is their development of an overall viewpoint with regards to the “social factory.” This is discerned by a loose understanding of the “social factory” to include such terms as “the Plan,” “despotism,” “social capital,” et cetera. Differences or variations in usage will be explained in terms of the university movement’s respective focus and theoretical expression.

Trento

The example from the University of Trento is anomalous to the Italian student movement, but more closely connected with other European university movements. As part of an initiative begun by progressive members of the Democratic Christian Party, the University of Trento established the first Institute of Social Science in Italy (*Istituto superiore di scienze sociali*). The intent of the policymakers was to form a professional school that would train a new cadre of social managers suited to the economic and political needs of neo-capitalism. A unique feature of Trento was that its student body overwhelmingly came from outside of the province; it was, in this sense, the first truly national university. Also, the working class background of the student population increased throughout the decade forming the vast majority by 1968 (Silj 1976). As a

product of the Center-Left politics of planning, the University of Trento signified the first attempt to construct a class of “social engineers.” Its novelty at a time when sociology was given scant attention⁸⁸ was suggestive of the social transformations brought about in the “economic miracle” and the deeper economic-social formations of neo-capitalism.

The two years preceding 1966 were marked at Trento by participation in the national protest against the GUI Plan or Bill number 2314 that were organized by the traditional student representative organizations and coordinated around the themes of the democratic university and educational reform.⁸⁹ The protests were largely directed towards the interests of the dominant political parties, as the traditional student organizations reflected the type of submission to party politics that the unions experienced during the 1950s. In the top-down conception of the “party-guide” that Panzieri had heavily criticized, the student protests in this period were frustrated by their subordination to electoral and party politics (Boato 1979, 118). By 1966 students at Trento proved willing to demonstrate their commitment to more participatory democratic methods as a more effective way to have their power levied in discussions over university matters. Thus, the initial phase of the movement at Trento was within the traditional

⁸⁸ While sociology had been introduced, as we saw above, on the fringes of the left in Montaldi, Alquati, and others, within the dominant intellectual culture sociology in Italy did not have much diffusion. And where it did, “[f]igures of thinkers and sociologists such as Weber and Mannheim, grand schools of theory like that of Frankfurt (Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, etc.) for the most part they remained excluded from the Italian cultural horizon” (Balestrini and Moroni 1988, 205).

⁸⁹ Bill number 2314, or “Plan Gui,” which derived from Luigi Gui, the Minister of Public Instruction, who was responsible for the plan, focused on two essential reforms: the formation of training departments through specific lesson plans and the institution of three rankings of graduation, from one year diplomas to doctoral degrees.

structures and organized according to the hierarchy and division of labor that existed between political parties, their cultural associations, and the electorate.

Following Urso, the year 1966 marked the beginning of the student's rupture with the traditional form of politics and its contents. This rupture was initially expressed as a rejection of the student associations and parliamentary politics. In January the students occupied the school, opening a cycle of occupations and protests that lasted until November. The initial protest was against an attempt to divide the academic degree into political science and social science, but the implications of the protest soon went beyond the surface of this initial position. First, the protest began over the qualification of the student—against the division between political science and social science. At root, the students argued that this concerned the fundamentals of knowledge production and the role of sociology. Second, the occupation, as a tactic, went well beyond the protest methods of the traditional organizations and demonstrated the students' proper force. The key aspect of the second occupation in November 1966 was the recognition by the student body that their political autonomy was essential to their struggle. Third, the students developed a connection between the function of the university and the needs of the overall system. The isolated university did not exist; just as sociology was a "species of public intelligence," the university was seen as intimately connected to society (in Balestrini and Moroni 1988, 209). In consequence, the students argued that the only way to change the university was to through society.

In their “Bilancio della seconda occupazione” [Assessment of the second occupation]⁹⁰, the students indicated an early formulation of the connection between the university and society: “The Department of Sociology of Trento ... is a fact that invests by itself, objectively, all of Italian civil society, and within this, the cultural, political, and union forces that are directly involved in the problem of socio-economic development of the country and in the existence of reform and requalification of the university structures” (Movimento studentesco 1968, 37). The students understood the discipline of sociology as a “social operation” with “human and social obligation” central to its endeavor. The idea that the Sociology Department would produce social technicians and managers was contested by the students in terms of the limits of sociology as a technical function. In a similar spirit to Panzieri’s critique of the capitalist use of technology, the students at Trento began formulating a similar critique to the capitalist use of sociology and, by extension, to knowledge production and the role of the university in general.

Initially the idea of “scientific autonomy” was considered inseparable from the theme of university democracy. However, as the student movement began directing its contestation towards the social system, the focus on both autonomous knowledge production and university democracy became secondary factors to an examination of the role of the student and the university as situated within the capitalist system. The movement from Trento developed a critique of capitalism in terms of the commodity form as a systemic feature of capitalist relations. They did not believe that a socialist university was possible without a socialist society; the struggle had to confront the total system. They quaintly expressed the point in polemics with “reformists” that constructing

⁹⁰ Originally published as *La battaglia dei sociologi di Trento*, *Questitalia*, IX, no. 102-104 (settembre-novembre 1966): 138-44. Now in Movimento studentesco, *Documenti della Rivolta Universitaria* (Bari, 1968): 24-39.

a new university would only amount to the erection of a “ghetto of gold in a world of shit” (Rostagno 1968, 8).

We find the more developed theoretical expression from Trento in two documents, *Appunti sulla Struttura Scolastica* (Notes on the Scholastic Structure) and *L’Università come Istituto Produttivo* (The University as a Productive Institution) [Movimento studentesco 1968, 45-51; 51-61]. The documents are the result of the third occupation of the department, which was decided upon during a student assembly on January 31, 1968. The importance of this occupation was its emphasis on direct democracy and upholding the general assembly as the proper decision-making body through which the students organized seminars on topics of interest. The *Appunti* and *L’Università* were two of the more significant theoretical pieces that emerged from the student seminars.

These essays critiqued the university and its function of commodity production in terms that paralleled the insights of early analysis in Quaderni Rossi. Usage of terminology such as “social capital,” introduced by Tronti and Panzieri, was already present in the student’s analysis. For them, the Center-Left was its political face and their university was an experiment in producing commodities well suited to the needs of social capital. Within the overall system, the university was considered to be a “nodal” but “not decisive” productive institution. Its function was subordinated to “more decisive centers of power,” rendering it as part of the “material structures of capital” but in a manner that had not yet been formulated (Ibid 60; see Ch. 2). In pointing beyond the university to those “decisive centers of power” the students expressed themselves in terms of power; “student power” was used to signify a “permanent contestation of the university structure

and of academic power, as an instrument of rupture of academic authoritarianism” (Ibid, 60-1).⁹¹

The university, they found, fundamentally operated within the constraints of the “social factory.” Students expressed their “professional preparation” as a “social capital,” suited to the needs of a “bureaucratic business organization” (Ibid, 60). The university as a productive institution performed the function of cultivating labor-power both in the technical terms of its “qualification” and normatively through the transmission of goals and values. Of the leading values, schools imputed their students with the value of obedience, learning how to obey and how to take orders. The university, the classroom, the polity, family life, and the factory were all united in generating a certain form of passive obedience and readiness to execute others’ orders and commands. For capital, the need for a more highly educated labor-force was set against the need to ensure a specific type of training. The student’s expressed this contradiction in terms of mystification or ideology: “Capital needs to impede ... the full critical comprehension of the ... productive process and development of society” (Ibid, 49). In this understanding education was intimately subordinated to the productive process; education was viewed as contributing to the “valorization of labor-power,” with the qualification signifying an achievement towards those ends. However, educational training and application of such skills was controlled by the “authoritarian necessity of capital” that, “from a disposition of factors of production and of a division of labor subordinate to productive efficiency, that is to the logic of profit” (Ibid).

⁹¹ During this period Boato notes the influence of German SDS and the “Black Power” movement in the United States, and others within the movement at Trento (1979, 24).

The students identified the productive process as the key controlling factor that linked the university to society, and thus to the factory. In their more pointed investigation of the university, students at Trento examined in what ways the university could be considered a “productive institution.” The analysis situated the university within a broader system linking the goals of capital with the structure of power in society. Based on the assumption of the unification of international capital along with state intervention in terms of planning, they viewed the structure of power in society as being pulled to help Italian capital attain a quicker rate of accumulation and a competitive edge vis-à-vis its international competitors. The university, as part of this structure of power, was held responsible for producing commodities, qualified labor-power. They wrote: “[t]he scope of the productive institution (the university) is to position such commodity (student-graduated) on the labor market until it will be sold, and insert it in the overall cycle of social reproduction until it will be consumed” (Ibid, 51). The educational process internal to the university was reduced to that of producing commodities. Research, classroom lessons, and examinations were all discussed in reductive terms, limiting the character of such to their utility for commodity production. For example, knowledge production was critiqued for its passive transmission as a point of teaching obedience; the examination procedure as a similar subjective process for discrimination on ideological or class grounds (things not consistent with the values of a useful commodity).⁹² Thus, the university became centered in the productive process for its role in a commodity system. Characterizing the university in neo-capitalist society they wrote: “its love is the

⁹² Guido Viale, in his important article *Contro l'università* (Against the university), wrote: “the exams are the phenomenal form by which the university is present to the student-worker: a police officer called, for this occasion, a teacher, who in 5-10 minutes liquidates the accused with a series of questions” (1968, 92).

commodity, the quality and quantity of the object (labor-power) to be a commodity, to function eternally as such” (Ibid, 56).

The university functioned to create qualified labor-power for the economic structure. Its role was subordinated to the “decisive centers of power,” but was also fundamentally a power structure within itself. The student body was the immediate subject of this power structure. What they characterized as “academic authoritarianism” reflected their marginal role in the institution; deprived of power, of voice, of inclusion in effective decision-making roles, they increasingly viewed the university as a repressive and controlling institute. Over the course of occupations and protests a more radical wing of the movement went beyond the “democratic, co-management, and reformist illusions” of the “democratic university.” In fact, in their rupture with the traditional student organizations was also a rupture with the institutions of capitalist society. However, consistent with the Panzieri’s distance from the Frankfurt School’s analysis, the students were not fatalistically depicting an objective situation defined by total control. Their political practice had taught them that they existed as a politically autonomous subject and were capable of producing a rupture with the capitalist system. Like the workers, the students as labor-power in formation, were capable of resistance and generating a degree of revolutionary force.

The claim “student power” (*potere studentesco*) served to organize students’ sentiment against academic authoritarianism. Its initial claim was an expression of the desire for a “permanent contestation of the university structure and academic power.” This “permanent contestation” was closely akin to both Panzieri’s usage of “permanent revolution” and to Tronti’s “revolutionary process,” albeit less theoretically developed.

Like Panzieri, the students understood revolution to be a permanent affair within a cultural contestation that centered on power relations within the capitalist system. This culture was evident in Panzieri's depiction of a workers' culture and connected more intimately to the role of worker's inquiry as the origins of a process of constructing new worker's cultural and organizational bodies. Both an autonomous culture of knowledge production and the role of inquiry were distinctive features of the movement at Trento.⁹³ (Tronti's analysis was much more developed than the student's own configuration and would only be developed later in *Potere Operaio*.) By 1968, the student movement at Trento began appraising the lack of political organization of the student struggle. The assembly with its practice of direct democracy (often expressed as "speaking in the first person") was the basis of this approach, but autonomy now shifted away from the university and toward the political autonomy of the student movement. Thus, "student power" was formulated as the expression of the students as a politically autonomous subject that needed to be organized "based on the hypothesis of breaking actual structures (scholastic, economic, political) of the capitalist social system" (Ibid, 75). In this manner, the movement arrived as a political force that transcended the limits of the university to confront the total "system."

The overall position of Trento derived from understanding the power relations of economic planning, situating their own role within that planning, and establishing the theoretical and practical bases for contesting that planning. In doing such, their treatment of neo-capitalism, in terms of power relations, brought them into that part of the

⁹³ As part of an attempt to enlarge their struggles and to forge deeper connections with "worker-students," the movement at Trento utilized the technique of "Inquiry" practiced by QR. See "Inchiesta sugli studenti iscritti all'Istituto superiore di Scienze sociali di Trento" ("Inquiry on the students enrolled at the Superior Institute of Social Sciences at Trento") [in *Movimento studentesco 1968*, 79-88].

workerist culture that focused on knowledge production from the base (workers inquiry), on capitalist use and control over labor-power, on the role of rupture, and on the basic identification of revolution as a process, as the product of a culture that permanently contests the capitalist system. I now turn to a brief discussion of similar themes that were found in Turin.

Turin

The university movement at Turin paralleled Trento in significant ways. Here I want to focus on their understanding of the university and their connection with the working class. Turin, that peculiar “city-factory” that was the hallmark of neo-capitalist culture, represented a litmus test for the level of working class militancy in Italy. The city itself contained a significant working class culture, with *Quaderni Rossi* serving as one of the main actors outside of the official party and union organs. As such, Turin represented one of the more prominent examples where the original theoretical configuration of *operaismo* came into direct contact with the student movement.⁹⁴ Its importance also derived from the fact that the leaders of the Turin movement were prominent militants in successive years. Luigi Bobbio, son of philosopher Norberto Bobbio (one of the drafters of the Constitution), was among the founders of *Lotta Continua* (Continuous Struggle, LC) in November 1969. Marco Revelli, son of an oral historian, had participated in class struggles since the events of July 1960. He, too, was a founder of *Lotta Continua*, as well as later contributing to the workerist journal *Primo Maggio* (May 1st) as a historian of the “other workers’ movement.” Beyond these two “sons of the bourgeois” who retained considerable importance in the extra-parliamentary left, there was Guido Viale, “the more original leader of the Italian 1968” (Cazzullo 2006, 22). Viale wrote one of the

⁹⁴ Pisa and Venice constituted similar cases (see below).

fundamental texts of the movement, *Contro l'Università* (Against the University). The movement at Turin was important for its emphasis on matters inside the university during the initial phase of its protest and for articulating the “detonator thesis” as the understanding of the role that students should play in a revolutionary class struggle.

The movement at Turin was born out of failures that stemmed from the attempt at having student participation within the college. Between 1963 and 1967 students had fought for representation on a permanent commission to deal with curriculum and general changes in the university as it adjusted to new social realities. The students won a consultative seat on the commission, but had no effective decision-making role. In February 1967, along with 11 other universities, the students occupied the college giving birth to the assembly as the only valid expression of student power. Like at Trento, the occupation marked the beginning of a series of occupations that culminated in the occupation of the Department of Letters in Palazzo Campana on November 27, 1967. This occupation set the tone for others throughout Italy. On the basis of Viale’s emphasis for the need to give content to these protests, the Turin students established a coordinating committee. The committee affirmed the sovereignty of the assembly as the constitutional basis for students’ power and founded subcommittees that introduced counter-courses as an alternative to what they considered the “repressive didactic” of the professors.⁹⁵ Counter-courses demonstrated in practice that the movement had “overcome

⁹⁵ The counter-courses were fundamental in affirming the principle that the university was the “university of the students.” It not only grounded their intellectual concerns but gave content to their power within the university. The counter-courses were based on collective readings of pertinent material and were structured democratically with discussion leaders operating on a rotational basis. Where technical expertise was involved the individual was solely appreciated for such knowledge and not given other accolades or titles. The difficulty that remained unresolved was how to coordinate the different commissions that were conducting the counter-courses (Movimento studentesco 1968, 227-30). Typical of other experiences with

the abstract political line” of their early protest and began to construct possible alternatives (Movimento studentesco 1968, 227). Thus, the occupation marked a two-fold purpose: to reject the “academic authoritarianism” of the university and to establish an alternative.⁹⁶

The basis of this alternative resided in the establishment of “structural spaces” within the university. Anticipating the practice of social centers and “liberated spaces” that developed in the mid-1970s, students found in this theme the key to beginning a “complete restructuring of the university” (Bobbio 1967, 224). The need for “space” in the university expressed the strategic need to actualize the demand for student power, as the basis for combating their “social subordination” as students: the seminars and counter-courses provided an initial example of the potential in changing pedagogy towards a more self-determined research program; they provided the space for investigating new forms of the university; and they allowed for students to construct a

student seminars, they formed groups to investigate international politics and imperialism in Latin America and Vietnam: “the function and work of philosophy (on Marcuse); School and society; the pedagogy of dissent; Cinema and society; The youth and protest; Minority groups; capitalist development in Italy after 1960; the division of labor; the contents and methods of Humanities Departments; the right to study; Science Department commission; and Psychoanalysis and social repression” (Ibid, 229).

⁹⁶ Regarding the important theme of “academic authoritarianism” it is important to note that they were referring not only to didactic, but also to the roots of such authoritarian relations. Deriving their argument from the “social factory” thesis, Luigi Bobbio and Guido Viale wrote: “[t]he social system of advanced capitalism increasingly takes the form of a network of totalitarian institutions aimed at the total control and domination of the persons subject to it ... Authoritarianism in a neo-capitalist world is not a hangover from feudalism; it is the fundamental form of class domination, to which all social institutions are subordinated” (1968, 222). The Turin movement was significant in its emphasis that these relations were based on consent: “The roots of academic authoritarianism, as all forms of authoritarian power, do not reside only from a series of institutional and structural relations, but reside above all in the consent of those who are subjected to such power. The university is organized in a way to create and conserve this consensus; that is, in a way of maintaining the students in a state of passivity and division. It is this that we intend to say when we affirm that the authoritarian didactic is a form of violence exercised on the students” (“Didattica e repressione,” *Documento diffuso dal comitato d’agitazione*, in Movimento studentesco 1968, 261-271).

platform of claims that went towards the formation of objectives for a mass movement (Ibid). Thus, the initial upshot of the idea of “structural spaces” was, on the one hand, a strategic move designed to provide the spaces for organizing contestation against the university structure and the general apparatus of “social subordination.” On the other hand, it offered the real possibility of changing the professional preparation and pedagogy of particular disciplines.

These proposals were set forth in the seminar dedicated the restructuring of the Humanities Department, *Carta Rivendicativa per la ristrutturazione delle Facoltà Umanistiche* (Demands for the restructuring of the Humanities Department) [Movimento studentesco 1968, 253-260]. Here the students demonstrate their rejection of the college’s “professional predetermination” by insisting, “the university should, and can, furnish to those who attend it both an *adequate professional preparation* and *critical instruments* regarding the professional role” (Ibid, 253). At the same time the students needed to establish the means by which they could become a governing body, to organize themselves on “autonomous bases ... entirely independent from the post assigned them” in the university and the social structure (Ibid, 255). Practice, however, overcame these strategic proposals. On December 28th police entered Palazzo Campana, dispersing students. Two weeks later students reoccupied the Palazzo only to be violently broken up by police on January 23. However, the implications were profound: after the 28th students lost sight of their need for “structural spaces” as the counter-courses collapsed and they assumed a more direct confrontation with the professor’s power (now considered a “class enemy”). Like the experience at Trento, the Turin students invented the *sciopero bianco* (the white strike): students invaded classrooms and disrupted professors’ lectures

demanding that they address the concerns of the students. This was only one aspect of a deeper politicization of the movement that increasingly focused its attack on established authority.

After the experience of police violence their conception of authoritarianism turned towards the state apparatus and the overall “system.”⁹⁷ The university became a center for a broader “class conflict,” with the occupation serving the general political interests of the students in blocking the functioning of the system. The counter-courses were lost, the autonomy of the movement rendered ineffective in the face of political isolation vis-à-vis the working class, and the student movement was stuck between the need to conserve itself while expanding its political understanding. The issues grappled with during the struggles of 1967 culminated in the most important document to emerge from the Turin movement, Guido Viale’s *Contro l’università* (1968).⁹⁸

Against the university offered a concise summarization of a phase of struggle at Turin. For the movement at Turin, the university was viewed in terms of power, which also provided the connective tissue between the university and society. The power apparatus of the university reflected “other repressive apparatus in society,” including the police, the media, the family, and the “economic blackmail” exercised by the capitalist function of profit (Ibid, 97-8). Ideologically, the university was charged with performing

⁹⁷ Carlo Donolo’s interpretation of the student movement, “La politica ridefinita,” appeared in *Quaderni Piacentini* in the July 1968 edition. He summarized the changing contents of the movement’s use and understanding of the term “authoritarianism” as such: “it is the term that denounces the logic of society completely mediated by the dominant interests and that utilizes to its advantage the repressive functions of pre-capitalist, bourgeois, and technocratic institutions. It allows for a political interpretation of internalized repression, from the subliminal institutional violence as well as that which is explicit and material” (1968, 124).

⁹⁸ Twenty thousand copies of *Contro l’università* were printed and distributed to universities throughout Italy. Initially published in *Quaderni Piacentini* in February 1968, it has been reprinted in two anthologies (Università 1968; Fofi and Giacomini 1998; 2008).

the social function of “political manipulation” as a mechanism of cooptation in service of the dominant class. Particular to the analysis that derived from Turin, the student’s “social capital”—their professional preparation—was considered as a mechanism of control in so far as it was nothing more than “psychological conditioning” (Ibid, 85). For Viale and the Turin movement, the university

tends to instill in them [the students] a spirit of subordination to power and cancels, in the psychic and mental structures of each of them the collective dimension of personal existence and the capacity of having relations with those near them that are not of a purely competitive character (Ibid, 85-6).

This psychological dimension of university repression was evident in the traditional view of the “ivory tower” isolated from worldly affairs, combined with a ritualistic practice of learning that considered research to be conducted on ancestors worthy of veneration as *santi protettori* (holy protectors). For them, in a world that had become more unified through the general planning function of neo-capitalist society, it was inconceivable that academic culture and knowledge production should be separate from the world they were confronting. In this manner, they critiqued the reformist elements that wanted to democratize the university within the current institutional arrangements. Against this they claimed the importance of constructing “structural space” in order to determine their own educational pursuits. But this conception of autonomy was tenuous as long as it lacked any connection with other sources of power in Italian society. The question of the student movement’s relation to other potentially antagonistic or revolutionary forces remained unclear until the renewal of the workers’ struggle at Fiat’s Mirafiori plant in 1968-9.

The essay concluded with important self-criticisms and premonitions for the difficulties facing the movement. The occupation was seen as the result of assembly decisions that very few students actually participated in and this separation increased as

the movement became more political. The result was an excessive reliance on “leaders”⁹⁹ of the movement who considered themselves as asserting the more advanced expression of struggle. As we will see below, this generated a cleavage between those deemed “revolutionary” and those deemed “reformist.” The hierarchical culture of “leaders” lent no small hand in generating factional polemics.

The movement at Turin was subject to external criticism on the very basis that it lived in the center of neo-capitalist culture. The Turin movement understood the role of the student in a general schema of revolutionary politics as providing a “detonator” to the actual revolutionary class, the workers. To the chagrin of workerist currents in the Pisa movement and around Negri’s group in Veneto, they insisted on a university-centered focus (Cazzullo 2006, 23-4). The student as a “detonator” assumed that the “university can put a mechanism in motion that can put the system in crisis, marking the beginnings of a revolutionary process (Boato 1979, 179).¹⁰⁰ Within *Quaderni Rossi* at Turin, Vittorio Rieser noted that the student movement should operate as a “political stimulus” to the working class “as an example of long and open struggle that is considered necessary also at the workers’ level” (quoted in Rossanda 1968, 126). While I discuss in the next section the question of student-worker relations in revolutionary struggle and unpack the slogan of “student-worker unity” that dominated the successive wave of struggle, it is important

⁹⁹ “The most negative aspect” of leaders in the student movement, Boato, remarked a decade later, was that “from this collective enterprise, from a mass movement, the overwhelming majority of comrades remained “in the background,” they were expropriated from their product and from their collective experience. From this “background” emerged the “representative figure,” with a mechanism that functioned like the same expropriation and alienation of the masses from their own history (1979, 24-5).

¹⁰⁰ Within the Italian movement, the idea of the student movement as the “detonator” of a revolutionary class politics took on added importance after the French May (Wright 2002, 100; Bologna and Daghini 1968).

here to note that by early 1968 the student movement had generated a critique of the university that led them increasingly beyond from the immediate problems internal to university towards social structures of repression and domination, particularly the factory and the working class. While the student movement was in a period of uncertain change, the fundamental need to maintain its continuity along with its theoretical analyses led the movement towards society and the working class. Before turning to that important question, I first examine the case of the Pisan student movement as the most direct expression of workerist theory within the university struggles.

Pisa

The student movement at Pisa exemplified the most direct incorporation of workerist theory to explaining the student condition and the role of the university in capitalist planning. Part of the reason for this connection was the significant presence around Pisa of political parties and groups; old Morandian elements in the Psiup, left-wing influences in the PCI associated with Lucio Colletti, and direct experiences and connections with *Quaderni Rossi* all circulated in the political culture at Pisa—decisive factors in subsequent years with the rise of the extra-parliamentary left. A second explanation for the influence of workerist thought stems from the industrialization of the region and the particular historical memory of the workers' culture in that process. Situated along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, Pisa is couched between La Spezia and Livorno. While the latter had its own significance as the sight of the founding Congress of the Communist Party in 1921, the region was industrially centered in Massa and Carrara, just north of Pisa. The worker's culture contained strong anarchist, socialist, and communist elements with a vibrant memory of the Resistance, a period when factories were turned

into arms depots and subsequently destroyed by the fleeing Germans. “At Massa,” Luciano Della Mea writes, there was “a profound tie between a Resistance substantially “betrayed” in its values, in its hopes, in its early conquests soon overturned, and the new worker insurgency sustained by the youth of a new generation” (1998, 9-10).

This aspect of Pisan worker’s culture made its way into the broader culture of the dissident left after a young man confronted the elder Togliatti at Pisa’s elite school, the *Scuola Normale Superiore*. In March 1964, PCI leader Palmiro Togliatti addressed the problem of Italian political parties, and the democratic legitimacy of the Communist Party, to the student body. At the end of the discussion, a young student, Adriano Sofri, confronted the aging communist leader: Sofri demanded, “Why have you not tried to make the revolution?” Taken aback by the young “arrogant kid with a nasally voice,” Togliatti shouted back: “You try and make the revolution!”¹⁰¹ This small event was unsurprising. As a student, Sofri worked on a thesis on Gramsci and circulated within the currents of dissident socialist and communist politics. At Pisa, Sofri organized conferences that brought Lelio Basso, a left-wing member of the PSI and later Psiup, Raniero Panzieri, and others to the university. Moreover, Sofri, along with GianMario Cazzaniga and Luciano Della Mea (both students and members of the Psiup), had, during the winter of 1963-4, frequented reunions of *Quaderni Rossi* in Turin. Sofri also had contacts with *Classe Operaia*, attending the founding reunion at Florence (December

¹⁰¹ The best discussion of this event is in Rina Gagliardi, “L’Impossibilità di essere Normale: Sofri e l’occupazione di Pisa,” *Il Manifesto* n. 22, January 1988, supplement “1968 January.” Now reprinted in *Adriano Sofri: il '68 e il Potere operaio pisano*, pp. 237-243. The depiction of Sofri is from Aldo Cazzullo, *I Ragazzi che volevano fare la rivoluzione*, p. 7.

1963) and subsequent meeting of CO at Piombino (May 1964).¹⁰² It was also during this period that Sofri began personal, direct contact with Panzieri. The latter was central to Sofri's political development and understanding of himself as a radical (Tarrow 1989, 244). Panzieri's allure for the Pisan students went beyond his politics: Cazzullo writes that "[t]hey were much more impressed ... with his personal story, his distanced position (*posizione appartata*), his moralism ... [of] the necessity to make correspond proclaimed principles and practical behaviors" (2006, 9). Beyond this, Panzieri's ideas found a receptive audience. He introduced them to the writings of Pollock, Adorno, and Marx's *Grundrisse*. From these writings, Panzieri left his imprint on the young Pisan students as they embraced some of the central themes of *operaismo*: the "social factory" of neo-capitalism, the critique of technology, capitalist planning, and revolutionary politics as essentially an affair of the most developed countries (Michelucci 1998, 43). These themes remained alive in Pisa through the construction of *Potere operaio pisano* (Pisan Workers' Power), a small organization founded by Sofri that should not be confused with the similarly named group in Veneto-Emilia (POv-e). By the time the student movement matured as a serious force both in the schools and in society, Sofri's group played a hegemonic role in Pisa.

Like other universities throughout Italy, Pisa's student movement came into being as part of the national campaign against the proposed university reform (GUI). In the winter of 1966 various student movement leaders planned to organize an occupation of

¹⁰² Although Sofri's name appears on the third issue of *Classe Operaia* in 1964, his article was not published in the journal and he appears never to have had any serious political ties to the review, despite Vettori's assertion to the contrary (1973, 23). Michelucci, basing his argument from Cazzaniga's claims, noted that "Sofri and the group from Pisa (Cazzaniga and Della Mea) were never politically tied to Tronti's magazine and they continued to maintain ties with the editors of *Quaderni Rossi*" (1998, 43).

the *Sapienza* at Pisa. The *Sapienza* was the sight of the Department of Jurisprudence and the school's library. Built during the Renaissance, it was a symbol of ancient veneration that pointed to the construction of new leaders in an atmosphere of disinterested knowledge. Like the purpose of prominent universities such as the *Scuola Normale Superiore*, the *Cattolica* at Milan, and the Institute for Social Sciences at Trento, the *Sapienza* operated on the assumption of training the future leaders in order to control the "long period of democratic evolution" (Movimento studentesco pisano 1998, 252). The occupation of Pisa's *Sapienza* from February 7-11, 1967 quickly became a point of reference to the national student movement for three reasons: its theoretical elaboration, its declaration of an official rupture with the official student movement, and its political contents.

Towards the end of the occupation a group of students began drafting a document in order to give a formal position to the occupation. The resulting *Tesi della Sapienza* (Sapienza Theses) laid out the most formidable application of workerist theory within the student movement.¹⁰³ The document itself should be read as part of a debate within the left wing of the UGI (Unione Goliardica Italiano). The latter had already recognized, in its Congress at Naples in 1966, the role of the student within the university as "labor-power in qualification" (Tesi del Congresso Ugi di Rimini 1966). The importance of the Pisan Theses was to make the connection between education as the qualification and

¹⁰³ The original title of the document was "Progetto di Tesi del sindacato studentesco," and while it was a collective project, the authorship has been principally attributed to GianMario Cazzaniga, Vittorio Campione, and Umberto Carpi (Massari 1998, 216). Later it became better known as the *Tesi della Sapienza*, and was first published in "Riforma o rivoluzione universitaria," *Il Mulino*, 16: 369-91, and later in "Cronache e documenti del movimento studentesco," *Nuovo Impegno*, 8: 19-37; Massari *Adriano Sofri: il '68 e il Potere operaio pisano*, pp. 216-236; and *Università: l'ipotesi rivoluzionaria*, 165-185 (citations refer to the latter reprint).

training labor-power to the capitalist mechanism operative within the university. That is, the particular phase of capitalist society necessitated the university to enact a particular form of production of future labor-power. In this process the student's role was directly placed within the cycle of capitalist reproduction. The movement from Naples objected to this position on the grounds that this argument demonstrated no connection between the student movement and the actual, direct valorization of capital. The position from Naples derived from their reading of Marx's "theory of surplus-value." The Napoli movement argued that role of students in capitalist society did not lend itself to the production of surplus-value, as the students did not exchange with capital, and any money given to them for study was considered as a "form of income." As such, the "student condition does not present the fundamental characteristic of the working class, economic alienation, and thus the student is not identifiable as a social figure internal to the working class" (Sinistra Universitaria 1968, 153-4). Conversely, it was precisely this expansion of class-capital relations that the *Tesi* confronted and sought to overcome by demonstrating how capitalist society determined and controlled the formation of the student as labor-power in formation.

The *Tesi* went beyond the reductionist logic that identified the working class within the immediate and direct process of the valorization of capital; they extended the so-called "fundamental characteristics" of capitalism to include the cycle of capital's reproduction. This position derived from the *workerist* approach to the "organic composition of capital" as well as drawing the consequences of this analysis to the role of the student and the university within an international division of labor under an imperialist system. Utilizing the "social factory" thesis of Panzieri and Tronti, the *Tesi*

began its analysis by identifying the shifts in the organic composition of capital that increased the power of “constant capital” vis-à-vis “variable capital.” These changes to the structure of capital “have determined ... an expanding centralization of capital ... that implies an expanding control and more centralized world market” (1967, 169). As a result of the increases in power and control of capital, the labor market and the international division of labor evinced the “first form of [capitalist] planning”: “a stabilization of the international labor market in terms of a growing authoritarian centralization; that is, of despotic control on the availability of labor-power in the area of organized capitalism and the rape of underdeveloped areas” (Ibid, 170). These shifts in the organic composition of capital led the Pisan movement to reject the reductionist equation that limited the composition of the working class to the direct production of surplus value. Instead, they shifted the terrain of working class towards a focus on the international division of labor and capital’s “despotic control” and “planning” of work.

Two points are notable in the Pisa theses: the role of the university and the student within the international division of labor and the role of the university and the student with respect to the social mechanism of capital. We have seen in previous university movements a focus on the latter via the qualification of labor. However, the distinctiveness of the Pisa Theses was that it located the university and student within the reproduction of capital by analyzing these features through the division of labor. Against the position from Naples, the Pisa group argued that an understanding of capitalist production must view the university as a long-term social productive cost: “the school is configured at this level [capitalist planning] as the place of production of qualified labor-power and comes back into play as *a social cost in the expanded cycle of the*

reproduction of capital” (Ibid, 176 emphasis added). Here “social capital” confronted the problem that in order to control the availability of labor-power (i.e., the labor market), its power must extend to the “entire arch of development of labor-power,” from the university (i.e., formation, training, and qualification) to the final phase of capitalist use of labor-power (Ibid, 171-2). In this manner, the “social factory” thesis pointed the way to an understanding of “class composition” that went beyond the immediate point of production and direct process of the working class valorization of capital.

In order to highlight the social mechanism of capital in the university, the Pisa Theses argued for the inclusion of the capitalist division of work as essential to understanding class composition. The student was defined as internal to the working class, however, not based on a future positioning within the division of labor, but based on their current or actual role of intellectual work. This particular and technical feature of labor, which was notably missing in the workerist focus on the “mass worker,” was viewed as the subject of the capitalist mechanism of control inside the university: “in his university activity, in which the capitalist division of intellectual work is defined immediately in terms of the mental execution of processes and of predetermined and fragmented experiences,” the student is part of the working class (Ibid, 177). Thus, the student condition was understood in terms of their role as intellectual labor subjected to capitalist despotism. Moreover, within society the student was viewed as a “socially subordinated figure,” which operated on the “margins of the process of valorization” (Ibid). As Wright correctly notes, the Pisa movement, with its innovative use of the “social factory” analysis, remained divided between the findings of this approach and the more traditional focus on the direct point of production (2002, 95).

The theoretical elaboration of the *Tesi* connected the movement's concerns over their role in the university and the contestation of academic authoritarianism to the capitalist mechanism of control. Through the latter, they connected their subordinate role inside the university with a more general political struggle directed against the capitalist use of labor-power. Previous analyses of the university within the capitalist system (see Trento and Turin above) tended to generically identify the university as a place of capitalist control simply by the fact that the institution existed within capitalist society. The Pisa Theses, however, applied an analysis of the role of the university within the actual historic situation and phase of capitalist development—its role in the international division of labor, the function of intellectual labor, and the view of the school within social capital's planning function as a form of social investment. In doing such, the *Tesi*, while advancing a narrow functionalist argument of the university to the exigencies of the labor market, connected the university to capitalist planning in such a manner as to locate the student condition within the working class. Thus, they viewed the class relation not merely as a relation between the worker and capitalist exploiter, but more fundamentally against the entire social organization of capitalist production and reproduction. This analysis theoretically established the basis for a more advanced prospect of revolutionary struggle within the “social factory” thesis. However, to the extent that they did not move beyond the position of productive labor as the core feature of class composition, they faltered in articulating a theory of revolutionary class politics that would incorporate not only the production of capital, but also the broader cycle of capitalist reproduction.

As an initial theme for constructing a revolutionary politics, the *Tesi* advocated the formation of a student union to replace the traditional bodies of student

representation. The basis for such a union resided in the student participation in the assemblies, cementing these organisms as the effective bodies of student's political claims. The overarching goal of the union was put as guaranteeing the "contracts for all aspects of student life," and laid the organizational basis for connecting student struggles with the workers' struggles. The connection between workers and students was established on the grounds of social capital with the latter entering into the working class as the "first moment of the capitalist use of labor-power" (Tesi della Sapienza 1976, 184). But at this point students were politically isolated. Their view of the "historic left" reflected the position within *operaismo* that the unions were "backwards" and operated along "nationalistic lines" that fought for contractual gains within the workings of social capital (Ibid, 170). The political parties, particularly the PCI, were considered social-democratic and judged as historically moving away from a Marxist analysis towards an attempt to legitimize themselves within the system of representative democracy. As a result of this political isolation, and also a product of their inability to put a satisfactory end to the question of productive labor, the movement at Pisa proposed the "generalized salary" (*salario generalizzata*) as a student demand. As a step away from the broader configuration of the "social factory," this demand connected the students to the working class by means of defining university study as salaried work.

This demand was part of a broader affinity that had been developing in Pisa during the winter of 1966-67 as students began agitating with workers in factories throughout the region. The role of *Potere operaio pisano* (Worker's Power of Pisa), and particularly that of Adriano Sofri, was important in forming bridges between the two sectors. In February 1967, Sofri along with students from Pisa, a smaller group of

workers and activists from Piombino and Cecina, and workers from Massa, formed the journal Il Potere Operaio di Pisa. Sofri was responsible for including the workers, as he was directly involved in the factories at Massa where, after 1964, he held a university position.¹⁰⁴ Within the group at Pisa these connections with the workers' struggles put forth the need to clarify the basis upon which the students were considered to be part of the working class. In this sense the "generalized salary" offered the answer to those who still maintained that the production of surplus value was the fundamental signifier for inclusion in the working class.

As a strategic maneuver, the demand for a student's salary was meant to enlarge their configuration within working class politics while also addressing the concern over the "right to study." Thus, on the one hand, the students would be connected to the production of surplus value insofar as they would receive a salary and that would be universally applicable. On the other hand, it touched upon a central theme of student protest, the classist nature of the school system. As early protests focused on the material obstacles for working class students to university study, the idea of a generalized salary established a basis by which the movement could confront the classist element of the university. However, the overriding goal of this strategy was to enlarge the movement's appeal. In no small part the proposal of a generalized salary sought to mobilize workers and student-workers, dependent workers with school-age children, and young workers excluded from the possibility of school (Il Potere Operaio 1968, 10). In short, the demand for the generalized salary served the two-fold purpose of seeking actual material improvements for students' lives and as a rallying point by which to generalize the

¹⁰⁴ For an excellent discussion of this period and the formation of Potere Operaio di Pisa, see Michellucci (1998, 55-63) and Betrozzi (1980, 167-77).

student struggle beyond the university, while also maintaining a modicum of themes pertinent to the university condition. Its advancement, like that of the general position of the Pisa movement, pointed to a more serious problem within the student movement: its political isolation and, particularly, its ambiguous relationship with the working class. As Vittorio Rieser pointed out in his criticism of the generalized salary, the focus on immediate objectives that required an overthrow of the system pointed to a belief in the movement that the “masses” were “not politically mature enough for a revolutionary struggle in the long term without immediate conquests” (in Boato 1973, 192). At best the “concrete objective,” Rieser claimed, would produce a struggle that claims to be revolutionary but “*sans la savoir*” (Ibid, 192). In fact, the example from Pisa demonstrated what other student struggles in Italy were soon to learn: the students’ overwhelming reliance on social actors external to the university. We turn now to the important question of student-worker unity, which was the dominant theme of the student movement leading up to the explosion of the “hot autumn” in the fall of 1969.

Student-worker unity

Student-worker unity derived from the expansion and politicization of the student movement. It found roots in the theoretical elaboration that tied the university within power relations of the social system. In terms of the “social factory,” the line that most fully adhered to a workerist approach came out of Pisa. But this analysis oscillated between its understanding of the student in the process of capitalist reproduction—professional formation, qualification—and its identification with the direct process of production—waged labor—as the primary subject of working class revolution. The positions at Trento and Turin also evinced the same generalization: the totalizing nature

of neo-capitalism was the central premise of the student movement's development from the more localized struggles in the university to the more general social struggle. In this manner, the "existential ambiguity" of the youth became resolved, in part, by their struggle against the social system. The positive content of this revolt occurred in the act of protest; occupations, counter-courses, "white strikes," and assemblies were self-determined acts that constituted a new understanding of the "self."¹⁰⁵ The more mature expression of this appeared in the slogan "student power."

By the winter of 1967-1968 "student power" signified the need for a mass movement to contest the power dynamic of neo-capitalist social relations and the politics of planning. The student movement was notable for its rejection of bureaucratic top-down authority, which resulted in the movement rejecting any form of institutional mediation—refusing such approaches as "co-management" and representative forms of "participation" (Boato 1979, 206-7). Like the "movement of the base" that came to fruition in early *operaismo* and radical sociology, the student movement preferred, for the most part, to take the struggle directly to the workers. At best, the students viewed their role in a revolutionary class politics as a "partial force in absence of other organized forces" (Rostagno 1968, 171). This commitment to revolutionary mass struggle that defined their political obligation, tied to their acceptance of a dissident left's emphasis on the workers as a revolutionary force, opened the way to establish ties between the workers and the students.

¹⁰⁵ Mauro Rostagno characterized the assembly at Trento as such: "The logic of the assemblies is that of "becoming what you are" (1968, 14). The act of defining oneself in direct social interaction and participation reflects the existential current that runs through the youth of this period. Such claims of authenticity in revolutionary praxis did not materialize in subsequent years. As the next chapter illustrates, the existential critique became a marginalized position once the "hot autumn" pressed forward with the rise of the extra-parliamentary groups.

This process was not without its contradictions or antiquated baggage. Below, I focus on the attempt by the student movement to forge a method of social struggle, based on forms of organization and struggle that the students had developed in the preceding years. The importance of this student-worker unity is in the generalization of working class struggle to include areas of capitalist production and reproduction. The basic contradiction that the Pisans were unable to resolve—the connection between labor at the direct process of production (as giving value to capital) and labor-power in qualification—permeated the struggles that followed. Importantly, however, this expansive identification of “class composition” was reflected in the more diffuse nature of anti-capitalist social struggle.¹⁰⁶ Thus, the slogan of student-worker unity reflected a greater understanding of working class struggle that enveloped not only the factory, but also found its place in neighborhoods, hospitals, consumer acts, educational systems, and, ultimately, in political organization. The essential component of this working class analysis began from the workerist premise that only from the base, at the mass level, could a revolutionary class politics occur. In this manner, the initial approach towards the workers derived from the students’ own experience of direct democracy, in the form of assemblies that defined, for them, the constitutive power of their social subjectivity. The student movement hoped that the same affirmation of their existence could serve as the basis for workers’ radicalization.

¹⁰⁶ Negri is perhaps the more prominent figure that later interpreted this class phenomena through the concept of the “diffuse factory” with its central social subject defined as the “social worker.” It is interesting to note that Negri’s interpretation was an attempt to impose his understanding of the social factory and class politics on the student movement that, in fundamental ways, was responsible for generalizing theoretical analyses that stemmed from the workerist tendency in the Italian left (see discussion of Veneto-Emilia below and chapter 6).

In this last section of the chapter, I discuss the phenomena of student-worker unity in the birth of the factory committees at Trento; the origins student-worker relations at Pisa, the novel *Comitati Unitario di Base* at Pirelli in Milan, the workers militancy during the summer of 1968 at Montedison in Porto Marghera, and the renewal of labor conflict at Fiat in Turin. These activities established the groundwork for the expansion of working class revolt in subsequent years. Often termed as their *strisciante maggio* (creeping May)¹⁰⁷, the attempts at forging bridges between the worker and student movements was more like a process of long, patient work that reflected the culmination of a decade of dissident communist and socialist theory and practice combined with the political commitment of a new generation of revolutionaries.

The first experiment of this kind emerged at Trento with the establishment of factory committees through the intervention of the local student movement. During the winter of 1967-68, students from Trento began intervening in factories in order to forge linkages between the two struggles leading to the generalization of a method for political struggle. The initial phase of work consisted in student intervention at the factory level that dealt with the daily struggles of the workers inside the factory. At factories such as Serica and Nastrificio of Rovereto these initial contacts soon moved forward to emphasizing the nature of working class autonomy. Reflecting the workerist position, the students put forward propaganda that pointed to the necessity of workers adopting a “type of logic” that understood a commitment to struggle premised on the rejection of “being objects” with respect to the organizations of class and capital and to “assume the role of

¹⁰⁷ The phrase “creeping May” was coined by Emilio Reyneri in his “Il ‘Maggio Strisciante’: L’inizio della mobilitazione operaia” (1978). The “creeping May” was intended to “counterpose the Italian situation to the French ... giving the image of a gradual process deprived of the most violent exploding moments which destroyed the old system of industrial relations and profoundly changed the social and political system” (Ibid, 54).

subjects” (Università 1968, 72). One manner in which this was implemented took place in the practice of only speaking in the first person during department assemblies. This facilitated the establishment of workers’ committees—at the department and factory level—by those more “aware and political” (Ibid, 74). Within two months student intervention had been successful in establishing organizational expressions of workers’ autonomy through the erection of factory committees. From these early forms of autonomous organization, the workers then made political advancements by moving from an initial focus on the individual factory condition and the class struggle inside of it to the national plan of capital and then to a consideration of the European class struggle (Ibid, 75).

These advancements were complimented by to a solidification of workers’ direct power inside of the factory. Workers were increasingly demonstrating their unity in the face of bureaucratic management—in both the union and the company. The experience of self-managed struggle was the first step in establishing a deeper awareness of their potential for power and control. As part of their intervention in the factories, the students at Trento introduced a dialogue around the need to contest the entire logic of the system. The basis for this was completely within the framework of autonomous organization as an expression of power from the bottom: “...This choice of deliberately contesting the system, outside of the traditional channels of manifesting disagreement which are allowed by the bourgeois state, that puts the movement and all its articulations in a subversive position, outside the possibility of integration” (Movimento studentesco trentino 1968, 76). Like the critique that had developed during the university struggles, the Trento students ultimately sought to instill the workers’ struggle with that “effective

tie” between the two movements, the “condition of the worker as a commodity” (Ibid, 77). Through practice and propaganda workers had begun viewing the student-worker relations through the commodity nature of the class-capital relationship. As such, the students introduced a discourse on “social capital” that highlighted the “fundamentally totalitarian nature of the capitalist social system” which required that workers begin a “conscious refusal ... to be a productive machine in the boss’s hands” (Ibid).

This first phase of student-worker unity witnessed the student movement bringing their political struggle to the working class. The key innovation resided in the impulse for direct democracy, the rejection of productivist norms, the organization of workers’ committees at the departmental level and at the factory level, the role of rupture in revolutionary class politics, and the connection between students and workers around the commodity nature of capitalist social relations. The students described their work as part of a long “patient work” of revolutionary organization and struggle. But with factory struggles coming to an end in July 1968, the movement at Trento underwent substantial modification. However, its initial work in facilitating the creation of and organizing factory commissions set the tone for developments elsewhere.

At Pisa initial student intervention in workers’ struggles began during the March 1966 metal-mechanics’ contractual affairs at Massa where they focused on propaganda by distributing bulletins to the workers advocating claims beyond the union demands to include a reduction of the work day from 48 to 40 hours with a minimum salary increase of ten thousand lire a month for all (Bertozzi 1980, 285). From the position of future core of Il Potere Operaio, this claim was the unique and immediate manner in which the workers’ could begin to attain better living conditions. The struggle ended with the

unions signing an unsatisfactory agreement. At this point the intervention of students and militants in *Potere operaio* extended their propaganda beyond the division between the base and union bureaucracy to include an analysis of technological progress and capitalist planning. The metal-mechanics workers at such companies as Riv, Dalmive, and Olivetti continued the strike and began the process of self-organization that allowed for continued contacts with the students activists. This intervention also demonstrated that the workers were willing to strike and act outside of the contractual struggle.

The demand “less work and more pay” (*meno lavoro e più soldi*) was the basis on which the students sought to forge linkages with the workers through lending support to their struggles while also attempting to radicalize the workers’ demands. The following year interventions in the Olivetti factory in Ivrea produced some successes in expanding working class consciousness. The significance of this intervention was that it went beyond student support and distribution of pamphlets to the establishment of the journal *Il Potere Operaio*, which came out on February 20, 1967 as a supplement to “Lotta di Classe” (Class Struggle), a worker’s journal from Olivetti of Ivrea. In his encyclopedic history of “subaltern classes in Italy,” Renzo Del Carria notes that many who were involved in the factory interventions around Pisa were militants formed by their experience in the Tuscan branch of *Classe Operaia* (1977, 67). But here again the workers were relatively weak in the face of an “intransigent” response from the bosses. Despite the failure of the struggle, the important lesson from this intervention remained that the workers began producing their own journal with students and activists. For the student movement at Pisa, this directed their work towards generalizing the workers’ political struggle, much like at Trento, to include an anti-imperialist worldview connected

to an international class struggle that was based on immediate claims designed to solidify the political position of the working class through their autonomous organization. With the relative shortcomings of the contractual struggles, the students began organizing in working class neighborhoods.

Part of the push for students to intervene outside of the university was the result of police repression and academic reprisals. Importantly, the reaction to the students' occupations and protests by the forces of order provided the basis for identifying a shared enemy: the state's use of force to quell worker, peasant, and student struggles.¹⁰⁸ From this shared subordinate position vis-à-vis the constituted power of the state, combined with the aforementioned weaknesses in the factory struggles, arose the first actions in the neighborhoods. After many students were given suspensions for their role in the *Sapienza* occupation, they went to the public. In a small booklet published by the Pisa student movement they described their intervention outside of the university: "For all of the months that followed [the end of the occupation] more than a hundred students, divided into groups of four or five, went around to the popular quarters of Pisa distributing pamphlets, discussing problems of school and of the neighborhoods with its inhabitants" (Movimento studentesco pisano 1998, 258). This intervention reflected their depiction of the "social factory" as a "bourgeois system" that "exploits and dominates men, not only in places of work, in factory or in the country-side, *but in each moment of their life*" (Il Potere Operaio 1969, 291 emphasis in original). The struggle against capitalism was not limited to a particular aspect of capitalist power "but to extend it to all the gears of this

¹⁰⁸ Of the many killed and injured by police violence against protesters, the police violence at Avola (December 2, 1968), where workers and peasants were openly shot at for demanding a small pay raise and the murder of a student activist, Paolo Rossi at Rome by neo-fascists (April 27, 1966) were widely publicized within the student movement.

[capitalist] mechanism” (Ibid).¹⁰⁹ Thus, the student movement conducted interventions that sought to take the struggle to the workers, the university, neighborhoods, hospitals, department stores, and housing.

These interventions outside of the factory took on added importance a year later with the renewal of workers’ struggles at Marzotto and Saint-Gobain. In the first case, which occurred against the proposed closing of the factory, students intervened in the workers’ struggle by distributing propaganda, collecting strike funds, organizing reunions and assemblies with the workers, and participating in marches and protests (Movimento studentesco pisano 1998, 259; Moreno 1968). Their method of intervention was identified as being “direct management of the struggles by the masses” and of acting “autonomously in each sector of social life” (Ibid, 260). The second case centered on worker protest against restructuring. In the course of the struggle, wide sectors of the city came together. Luciano Della Mea described the struggle at Saint-Gobain as a battle that “acquired a social dimension” between the “workers of Saint-Gobain, the students, the laid-off from Marzotto, and young workers from all over the city” (1973, 68). Both struggles demonstrated the possibility for new relations with the city, not simply with the workers in the factory. That is, even though these interventions were taking place on

¹⁰⁹ This depiction of the “social factory” demonstrated a couple of important points: 1) they had not acquired the analysis executed by Alquati on the need to overcome the division between city and country that “social capital” had already done in areas such as the Po Valley (see Ch. 4); 2) by including in their definition “each aspect of individual life” they reaffirmed the core of the social factory thesis that the reproduction and production of capital were both necessary components of anti-capitalist struggle. Thus, the “gears” of the capitalist mechanism were diffused throughout the entire social order; the analysis of capitalism as a “social factory” brought into light the “despotic” nature of capitalist control over not only the “use” of labor-power, but also the formation of labor. In line with the Trento analysis this position affirmed the connection between the student and the worker in terms of capitalist control over their individual lives through the use of institutions such as the factory and the school. The logical consequences of introducing the reproduction of capital as a factor in anti-capitalist struggle was generalized in the following years to include housework, housing strikes, and an array of consumer acts (see Chs. 6-7).

concerns stemming from the workplace, they assumed a social dimension that brought workers and students into the same assembly in order to address pertinent themes of the class struggle.

Importantly at Pisa, the student movement and *Potere operaio pisano* maintained that the factory was not the primary or only location of class conflict. Rather than focus on the relations of production, they, as noted above, emphasized that the real target was the social organization of consensus (Il Potere Operaio 1968, 5). They criticized those who solely focused on the relations of production, and particularly the direct valorization of capital, as an approach that viewed the role of the student as assuming a “general political cadre” and assuming a “directly political struggle without worrying themselves with the problems of the schools” (Ibid, 7). Moreover, their interventions in working class neighborhoods seemed to confirm their assumption that in the “social factory” of neo-capitalism “violent class conflict occurs at the material and ideological level” in every facet of social life (Ibid, 9).

At Pisa, the renewal of the workers’ movement gave new breadth and purpose to the student movement and the large presence of *Potere operaio pisano*. In the aftermath of their interventions in the workers’ struggles the group examined their shortcomings and relative successes. In the middle of these considerations perceived need for greater organization began to take on serious consideration. Their interventions in the workers’ struggles had compelled the PCI to expel from the party those of its members who worked with PO. Moreover, the French May was interpreted as a clear lesson for the need for organization. Their assessment of the student-worker revolts in France was that the “absence of an organization and of a revolutionary political direction ... blocked the

expansion of the movement ... and had permitted De Gaulle to take control of the situation” (in Bertozzi 1980, 303). The question of organization was the focus of extensive debate during that September.

The pertinent aspect of this debate was not so much on the emphasis for “discipline” that was expressed by Luciano Della Mea, and ultimately led him to leave the group, but to the emphasis by Sofri’s argument on the basis of legitimacy for a new revolutionary party. Sofri maintained the need for revolutionary direction that was ultimately founded on a correct conception of a vanguard. He began by rejecting the idea of a party as being legitimate because of its “historic continuity,” from its “relations with the mass,” that its “revolutionary direction is generated ‘spontaneously’ by the masses,” or from a theorization of the “identification of mass-vanguard” (Sofri 1968). Rather, the only legitimate basis of a vanguard is that which recognizes as valid the working class as the only basis of political revolutionary leadership. In this manner, the role of the vanguard was to put themselves in “the service of autonomous mass organizations” (Ibid). In any case, Sofri argued, the formation of such organizations was necessary in the process of forging a revolutionary politics.

In the midst of debate over organization, the Pisa movement demonstrated its most publicized act of protest at the end of 1968 by organizing a New Year’s Eve protest at the resort of Bussola in Versilia. Organization for the protest stemmed from student and *Potere Operaio pisano* support for a general strike of department store employees. At Pisa, the movement offered their support to striking Upim workers who had timed the strike to coincide with Christmas shopping—December 21st and 22nd—as a protest not only against the bosses, but against the culture of conspicuous consumption. The students

intervention urged others to join them to protest the boss's New Year's festivities at Bussola. The protest was portrayed in pamphlets and posters as carnivalesque. For example, one pamphlet reads: "To the fat bosses and to their furred women, we want this year to personally extend our greetings. It will only be a small, symbolic homage of fruit and vegetables in order to prepare you for a 1969 loaded with other emotions!" (in Balesrtini and Morono 1998, 266-7). Bussola's importance was not only its symbolic jest at the bourgeois, but that it was a prelude of things to come. The manifestation, which contained a few hundred students and youth, was met with police violence. In short, police opened fire on the protesters turning a symbolic protest into what was judged as a "preordained" and systematic use of violence by *carabinieri* and police (Balestrini and Moroni 1998, 268; Potere Operaio di Pisa 1969). The lesson was clear: the "sensitivity of the workers, students, of the men of the popular quarters" was not welcome and would not be tolerated.

From the analysis of *Il Potere Operaio* this small affair demonstrated the dynamic that repeatedly occurred in 1969: the instrumental use of law enforcement, the conscious falsification in the boss's large newspapers¹¹⁰ (claiming that the police had not fired first, even though the protesters had no weapons and had publicly declared their intentions), the suspicion that there existed unknown groups tied to conservative state actors, and the necessity of organization in the movement (Balestrini and Moroni 1998, 271; *Il Potere Operai* 1969, 290-4). Thus, the experience of student-worker unity at Pisa went beyond forging connections within the factory, but enveloped a broader territory of class politics.

¹¹⁰ In the first half of January 1969, *Potere operaio pisano* conducted an extensive program of counter-information based on collected testimonies that denounced the role of the state and the blatant lies in the mainstream press. The tactic of counter-information was widely used after this occasion, with perhaps its most well known development of the period in "Radio Alice."

One of the key lessons from this approach was that once the movement went beyond the factory or the university and towards the city, their lack of organization and political power left them exposed to violent repression. The question of organization confronted the movement as a whole over the course of 1969—particularly after the revolt at Corso Traiano in Turin during July 1969. This initial experience in the Pisa movement pointed to the purpose of developing small base committees that focused on “all gears of the capitalist mechanism.” And while the group splintered in early 1969, with some joining other movements, and others like Sofri going to Turin to take part in the “student-worker assemblies” at Fiat, the importance of Pisa derived from their diffuse understanding of the social factory and its reach into the corners of daily life, combined with their interventions beyond the factory.

Milan and the Comitati unitari di base (United Base Committees)

Little mention has been made of the student movement at Milan during this period. Its significant components were in the Architecture Faculty at the Politecnico di Milano and at the prestigious *Università Cattolica*. What interests us here is the connection between the student movement and the workers in the city, particularly the struggles at the Pirelli factory. The connection between the workers and students did not arrive out of any particular theoretical analysis, but rather stemmed from acts of solidarity that derived from shared affinities of direct democracy, autonomous organization, and solidarity in the face of state repression. For the workers’ part, the formation of United Base Committees in early 1968 signified the emergence of autonomous workers’ organizations that marked a focus on the importance of workers’ voice and control. The students, on the other hand,

followed the other university movements in their rejection of the traditional organizations, giving place to student assemblies, counter-courses, and occupations.

At the *Cattolica*, the turning point came in late March when thousands of students conducted a “sit-in” in front of the university. The event ended with police firing on the students injuring numerous people, arresting dozens, and filing complaints against many more. The day passed in the memory of the student movement as the “massacre of largo Gemelli,” adding to the continued list of police and state repression of the student movement. What is notable about this violent affair was that it brought some workers from Pirelli to the *Cattolica* in solidarity with the students. These initial contacts began a process of collaboration between workers and students around the central themes of direct democracy and autonomous organization against a generically expressed capitalist system (Mosca 1988, 34).

The impetus for this collaboration came from the development of grassroots militancy and organization by workers at Pirelli. In important ways, the latter began the first example of worker antagonism after the defeats of the 1966 contractual affairs, setting the stage for subsequent radicalization in factories throughout Italy. Two particular innovations merit attention: the formation of the *Comitati unitario di base* (United Base Committees, CUB) and the innovative practice of *autoriduzione di rendimento* (self-reduction of output). The immediate context for the renewal of worker militancy at Pirelli occurred during contractual negotiations for the rubber workers. On February 13, 1968 the three main unions, in accordance with their unitary platform agreed upon the previous December, signed a contract with Pirelli.¹¹¹ The immediate

¹¹¹ For chronological accounts of the workers’ struggles at Pirelli during 1968, see (Pietropaolo 1970; Lumley 1990, Ch. 12; Righi 1988).

response from the workers was a call for democratic relations between the workers and the unions, and that contractual platforms, claims, and other decision-making procedures needed to be conducted through an “open assembly of all the workers” (Pietropaolo 1970, 71).

This general lack of union democracy and subsequent marginalization of workers’ voice were the determining factors behind the establishment of the first CUBs. The initial sign of dissension came in a pamphlet signed by “a group of Pirelli workers (*operai*), adherents to the CGIL and CISL” that denounced the relative “yielding” of the unions with Pirelli management (Ibid, 70-1). Over the next couple of months, workers continued discussions among themselves leading to the formal establishment of the CUB by the beginning of June. Their founding document, *Riprendiamo la lotta* (Resume the struggle), laid out their political approach, which reaffirmed a core theme of early *operaismo*—workers’ autonomy as the uncontrollable variable in capitalist planning. The Cub were defined as “autonomous mass organisms of the working class” that served as “an instrument of politics and of struggle, born from the existence of the workers that want to renew the struggle as they are aware of their condition of exploitation in the factory and outside the factory: it is the workers’ self-management of the struggle” (Avanguardia Operaia 1972, 19; Pietropaolo 1970, 74). Thus, the formation of the workers into the CUB began from the principle enunciated by *Quaderni Rossi*: revolutionary class politics is only possible when it starts from the grassroots, or when it “begins from the real existence of the workers” (Avanguardia Operaia 1972, 20). Importantly, the birth of the Cub, against the common experience of worker retreat and atomization after a contractual defeat, pointed to a unity of the workers that was the basis

for new struggles, outside of the contractual deadlines. Self-management of the workers' struggles immediately targeted the practice of the unions and their status as representative bodies of the working class. The Cub polemically attacked the unions as "managers of contracts," who sought to direct worker militancy solely towards those claims and issues that the unions determined (Ibid, 74).

Aside from this manipulative role of the unions, *Riprendiamo la lotta* revealed significant aspects of anti-capitalist politics. If the unions were attacked for managing contracts, the contract itself was viewed as part of the "line of economic planning," and thus an integral part of neo-capitalist development (in Foa 1975, 167). Their goal however, was not to replace unions, but to revive them from below; they harbored no illusions about becoming an "alternative to the unions" (Avanguardia Operaia 1972, 19). Rather, they sought to continue the struggle, outside of the contract, by beginning a process of constructing workers' unity through discussions and struggles "among all the workers, among the sections (*reparti*), in all of Pirelli" (in Foa 1975, 167). Thus, beyond their initial focus on rejuvenating the workers' "use" of the union, to borrow Tronti's expression, the CUB, in the course of discussions and struggles, became radicalized against what they identified as management despotism; rather quickly, workers' discussions pointed to dissatisfaction among such features of the Pirelli factory as hazardous conditions, elimination of classification or category structures, equality of pay, and towards direct control over the production process and determination over its organization. The latter was premised on the assumption that workers' needs, as defined by workers, should be the determining factor in organizing work. In this manner, during the course of 1968 and into 1969, workers at Pirelli asserted their opposition to the

capitalist organization of work, setting an important example for subsequent working class struggles.

Members of the student movement began frequenting the Cub at Pirelli in late June of 1968. The student intervention went beyond the workers' instrumental use of the students that occurred elsewhere. While they did perform service roles and other forms of solidarity, CUB documents claimed "students no longer have a subordinate role, but participate in the first person in the workers' political activity" (Comitato di Base Pirelli 1968, 2). Moreover, the student-worker connections stimulated student research, which was based off of workers' knowledge of the factory situation that focused on mutually determined problems to address.

It is important to add here that the students from the *Cattolica* who were participating in the CUB caused a scandal of sorts in Milan's society. The *Cattolica* educated leaders, not managers or technocrats such as at Trento, but the future political and business leaders. Thus, they were prejudiced by a view that considered the students to possess a contemptuous view of the workers and the poor. Such was not the case: in the student-worker assemblies they were equals; they marched down Monte Napoleone with workers smashing milk cans and flapping empty lunch pails; they attacked the state media, Rai, for its smear campaign against the workers; they suffered police attacks after a protest at the famous Pirelli skyscraper; and they enacted a militant manifestation against the conservative newspaper *il Corriere della Sera*, blockading entire arteries of streets, preventing the paper from being distributed—also known as the "battle of Viale Solferino." In short, the student practice in the CUB was part of a broader

acknowledgement among the workers that the “consciousness of their own interests and rights in the workplace ... leads to general struggle in society, and vice-versa” (Ibid).

The establishment of CUB's at Milan led to a flowering of similar experiences over the next year. We now turn to the example of Porto Marghera and the establishment there of workers' committees and the role of student movement along with *Potere operaio veneto-emiliano* during the long summer of 1968.

The “long summer” of 1968 at Porto Marghera

Student-worker politics in the Veneto region was heavily shaped by the presence of *Potere Operaio di veneto-emiliano* (POv-e) and its organizational presence in the workers' struggles in the factories. While I have not discussed the student movement at Veneto in any depth in this chapter, the example from this region serves the purpose of demonstrating how the existing organizational framework that derived its political experience within QR and CO came to confront, or better yet, avoided the question of the student movement. In fact, from its initial publication in March 1967 up to May 1968, POv-e made no attempt to theoretically explain or understand the significance of the student movement. This was not for a lack of student radicalism and militancy in the region; student protest extended beyond the school to support for workers' struggle as early as the 1965 workers' struggle at the Sirma factory. The outlook of the burgeoning student movement was summarized in an inter-university Assembly at Ca Foscari where the students put forth a “national strike against the Gui plan” combined with the need to respond with a “general and global struggle” of the workers and students together (Chinello 1988, 183). Two years later (April 1967) the student movement began launching occupations of various faculty based on the need to assert “student power”

through the general assembly and to organize for a “permanent contestation” against the system—two themes that assumed a central role in the region’s student-worker politics (Ibid, 188-9; Sacchetto and Sbrogiò 2009, 25-26). Simultaneously, students rallied in solidarity with striking workers at the Edison electrical plant, picketing in front of the factory gates under the slogan: “workers and students united in the struggle against the bosses.” With this last affair began formidable contacts between the workers and students with the latter introducing the assembly as an organ for decision-making at the base, which the workers’ movement would later adopt. This experience culminated in the long summer of 1968 with the workers’ struggle at Montedison¹¹² that definitively marked the arrival of student-worker politics at Porto Marghera.

The focus of activists in *Potere Operaio* followed from their experience in the journal Classe Operaia; the journal was concerned with workers’ problems in the factory, the struggle against the plan, workers’ autonomy expressed in the struggle, and, above all, political organization. The group distributed the journal at various factories beginning in 1967, utilizing the available organizational channels (i.e., internal committees, unions (the Cgil in particular) and the existing party apparatus in the factory) in order to build *Comitati Operai* (Workers’ Committees) as the organizational form, constituted by worker cadres, of the political expression of workers’ autonomy. The neglect of the student movement, despite the participation of students within the group’s own political work, stemmed from their understanding of class composition and the “social factory” as relating solely to the waged condition of labor; that is, wage labor was the necessary

¹¹² On July 7, 1966 the Edison Company (electric) merged with the Montecatini Company (chemicals) to form Montedison. The subsequent workers’ struggles were interpreted by POv-e as a contestation against the attempt to homogenize conditions of exploitation of the two groups, electrical and chemical workers.

condition inclusion in the “working class” and an understanding of the “social factory” as the increasing tertiary character of capitalist production. In short, for POv-e, the student did not exist as a “social figure” but could take part in the class struggle as a “militant and political cadre” (Sacchetto and Sbrogiò 2009, 26; Chinello 1988, 190).

Negri and others in Potere Operaio later sought to explain their neglect of the student question in terms of the latter’s relative minority status in the group. “The composition of Potere Operaio veneto-emiliano,” Negri wrote, “was an overwhelming majority of workers, so that the students’ problems ... were always mediated through a most difficult debate” (2007, 89). There are two problems with this explanation: for POv-e the students were not part of the working class and thus their questions were not given priority, and Negri’s simultaneous claim that these struggles began demonstrating the “diffuse factory” of the “territorial working class” that sought to “take over the city” is problematic with regards to the nature of their definition of the working class (Ibid, 86-7). The students took on a proper class perspective for PO only to the extent that there existed a wage relation, and to this end PO adapted the demand for a “generalized salary” to reflect the nature of working class production and reproduction. Here it is worth noting that their conceptualization of the “social factory” was determined by the wage as the key focal point of capitalist control as well as the key factor for understanding working class composition. The upshot of this with regard to Negri’s justification was that the student question had no autonomous recognition within POv-e and was only useful insofar as they renounced their self-understanding as students and committed themselves to the workers’ struggle. (Not until 1970 would the national group *Potere Operaio* give

consideration to the student movement and the question of the university and teaching within the “social factory.”)

Thus, despite the student movement’s presence in the workers’ struggle from an early stage, and their theoretical position of the university struggle as a “permanent contestation” against the system, POv-e did not discuss the student movement until May 1968. In his treatment of student-worker unity at Veneto, Steve Wright uncritically accepts the claim of POv-e that it was the students’ “turn to the class” that prompted the journal to pay attention to the students (2002, 97).¹¹³ This claim needs to be qualified. It was clear that the students had begun forging ties with workers in various different regional and local areas, but at Veneto, the approach of POv-e reflected a recognition of the students’ presence in anti-capitalist struggle that signified the need for *Potere Operaio* to direct them into the class struggle, centered in the factory. This entailed a complete abandonment by the part of the Veneto student movement of matters dealing

¹¹³ The interpretation of the student movement executed by *Potere Operaio* was paltry in comparison to the rich and diverse experience of the movement. Their analysis oversimplified the students’ own understanding of student-worker relations, polemically attacked the movement as mostly “sons of the bourgeois” who needed to first “negate their class origin” and then, and this is presumably how the students perform their “negation,” recognize that “the fundamental relations of exploitation exist in the factory” (POv-e 1968, 1). The expression “turn to the class” is rich with implications for understanding the narrowness of POv-e’s discourse: its configuration of the student movement as worthy of interest because it participated in working class struggles combined with this view of “negation” of their bourgeois upbringing was simply a fancy way of appreciating the fact that so-called “bourgeois” students had renounced their own political autonomy and dedicated their struggles to the cause of the workers. In short, the desire of the students expressed in the *Lettera a una professoressa*, that the bourgeois disappear (their last historic “mission”), combined with the Sartre’s invocation of “being for others,” harmoniously emerged in PO’s assessment of the student movement and its importance. The only thing left for the student was to renounce their own struggles and line up behind the workers’ struggle within a movement dominated by *Potere Operaio* (The approach of the students and the attempt of POv-e to control it by subsuming it within their framework and political line provides an early example of how PO would confront other extra-parliamentary organizations in subsequent years. In no small manner these smaller, factional struggles for domination proved detrimental to the project of workers’ autonomy) [see discussion of relations between the group *Il Manifesto* and *Potere Operaio* in Chapter 6.]

with the university, a position they were too ready to fulfill. Thus, if in January of 1968 the students intervened in the workers' struggle at Montedison around the slogan, "no to the harmonization of the university and no to the harmonization of Montedison," by the time of the Venice "student-worker" conference (June 8-9, 1968) we find students in the Architecture Department distributing a pamphlet based on the centrality of the factory worker in the class struggle: "There is nothing we can teach the working class: it is the working class that needs to teach the students many things" (quoted in Chinello 1988, 212). And it was not until after the Venice conference that Potere Operaio recognized the student presence in the workers' struggles. At a minimum then, it was not the students "turn to the class" that prompted POv-e to pay attention to the student movement, but the recognition of the availability to struggle among a mass sector that they could utilize as a force within the workers' struggles in the factory.

The first article recognizing the role of the student movement came out in the ninth number of the journal on May 10, 1968 entitled "Fiat Edison Marzotto Università: una sola lotta contro un solo padrone" (Fiat Edison Marzotto University: one struggle against one boss) [POv-e 1968]. Their assessment of the student movement praised the "general political level" of its contestation. But this contestation they believed had no realistic basis for autonomy.¹¹⁴ On the one hand, the example of Rome¹¹⁵ demonstrated

¹¹⁴ The article includes the following warning to the student movement: The "student movement needs to find in the workers' struggle those continuous and organic ties with the class without which it appears condemned to a slow political death" (POv-e 1968, 4).

¹¹⁵ On February 28, 1968 students at the University of Rome (Architecture and Physics Departments) conduct an occupation in order to control the examination process. The university's rector refused to conduct exams under the occupation and called the State's police forces to disperse the student body. The unique feature of this event is that the students repelled the police attack, which caused them to confront the question of defining themselves as a political movement. The Roman example gained national recognition, generated its own cultural folklore

that the students were capable of confronting the forces of order, but not in an organized manner. Moreover, the student's approach was deemed as being too anti-institutional. If the high point of their consciousness was in the reflection that they needed to forge ties with the workers' movement, then they needed to go further and lose their anti-institutional tendencies: "The Student Movement cannot renounce the channels that such parties [and unions] offer for the internal expansion of the student movement and above all for the birth of an organic political-organizational contact with the working class" (Ibid, 4).¹¹⁶ For POv-e, The establishment of student-worker ties went through the institutionalization of contacts between the student movement, the union, and the workers' movement. As a stopgap measure, *Potere Operaio* advocated the "generalized salary" for the student movement as a means to "open the doors of the university to the sons of the exploited classes" (Ibid). In this manner they sought to integrate the student movement within their political and organizational priorities. (The program of a "generalized salary" was the forerunner to *Potere Operaio's* demand for a "political wage"¹¹⁷ that developed in subsequent years [see Ch. 6].)

with the hymn of Valle Giulia, and marked the beginning of a dangerous process of countering state violence with "revolutionary violence" (Scalzone 1988, Ch. 2; Balestrini and Moroni 239-41; Rossanda 1968, 49-53). Two important actors at the University of Rome later formed part of the leadership of the national organization *Potere Operaio*, Oreste Scalzone and Franco Piperno.

¹¹⁶ At Rome, and though not yet a workerist in theoretical outlook, Oreste Scalzone warned about the dangers that the students' anti-institutional critique also could entail a rejection of the "revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat." His assessment of student-worker relations was premised on the assumption that only the working class was a revolutionary class, but he understood that diverse cultures interact in a revolutionary struggle, and that it was "necessary to define the political limits of a contestation at the university level, and to *identify the connections* between this battle and the hypothesis of a revolutionary work at the general political level" (in Boato 1979, 179-80 emphasis added).

¹¹⁷ During the National Convention of Workers and Students at Venice, Guido Bianchini introduced the idea of demanding 120,000 lire as a minimum salary for all, which PO

In late June 1968 the workers' struggles at Montedison's Petro-chemical plant in Porto Marghera developed on the themes of the renewal of production bonuses and equal salary increases for all workers. The role of student-worker assemblies and the intervention of *Potere Operaio* were central in galvanizing what the latter called an "articulated struggle" that the workers could use as a platform for demands to impose on the unions and the factory bosses. For POv-e, the articulated struggle served the purpose of not only organizing workers, but it also provided the basis through which the workers could generate demands, based on their immediate needs, that would destabilize the boss's power in the factory. The relative success of this platform among the workers forced the unions to accede to the demands on bonuses and equal increases in pay (based on fixed levels, not as a percentage of salary). By the end of May the unions submitted the platform to the bosses, with July 1st as the official deadline to settle the contract. In the course of the struggle, however, the workers' movement at the base level came into direct conflict with the unions over determining how to conduct the struggle; this struggle marked the rejection of any institutional integration of the student movement in the official left and led to the formation of workers' committees as organizational expression of workers' autonomy in the factory. The importance of this struggle in the long term was that it demonstrated that only through unity at the base with autonomous management of their struggles was it possible for the workers to confront and destabilize the bosses' system of power. A cursory treatment of the affair suffices to demonstrate this point.

During the course of the workers' struggles the unions confronted the affair on the basis of maintaining union unity (Uil, Cgil, Cisl) as the overarching goal of the

subsequently developed into a campaign for the "political wage" (Sacchetto and Sbrogiò 2009, 28).

contractual negotiations. In their view, they had already conceded an important point from the base—the platform of claims. Aside from this, the unions demonstrated a paternalistic attitude with respect not only to the students, but also to with the workers. First, from the beginning of the strike (June 21, 1968) students were present outside the factory gates and inside the workers’ assemblies. The unions and the political parties viewed the student participation with hostility; unions viewed themselves to be the sole proprietors of the workers’ struggle. The student movement was demonized as introducing the *filocinese* (i.e., supporters of Mao) who only sought to utilize the workers’ struggle for political ends to the detriment of union unity (Lotta alla Montedison 1968). During debate in the assembly, however, workers expressed their support and desire for the students’ participation. After two strikes that witnessed at least 90 percent worker participation, the workers’ assembly called for successive strikes on alternate days (*scioperi a giorni alternati*) beginning on the second of July. The unions expressed their complete opposition to what they claimed was an “illegal” form of strike; they vowed to return to offer new, permissible forms of struggle. At this moment the workers and students understood that they controlled the direction of the struggle and dismissed the union leadership as “sell-outs” and “swindlers” (*venduti e imbrogliati*). After the success of implementing the alternate day strike, the union leadership began expelling workers who were deemed responsible for deciding this form of struggle. With strikes continuing apace, a march of workers and students defied attempts by the union to direct it and headed to the local bosses’ newspaper, *Il Gazzettino*. The strike climaxed on the 25th of July with a massive presence of workers and students blocking all the entrances to the plant in order to prevent work replacements and “indispensables” from entering the

shop; the pickets lasted into the following week. As the militancy of the pickets increased, the plant management demanded entrance for those workers deemed “indispensable” for the maintenance of a normal manner of production. The assembly, however, refused to let anyone enter the factory. The strike ended with the unions signing an agreement with factory management; the unions did not consult the workers and they abandoned the initial contractual platform settling for a five thousand lire pay increase in three parts, with the white-collar workers (*impiegati*) receiving increases of seven thousand lire. Despite their effective management of the strike, the autonomous workers’ organization (i.e., the assembly) was insufficient to overcome the union-boss agreement.¹¹⁸

Despite the overall failure of the workers to organize themselves in an effective manner, a few lessons were drawn. Key themes from the student movement were introduced for the first time within the workers’ struggles: the need for worker unity that was not bureaucratically performed; the emphasis on democracy in the assembly; the construction of a platform that focused on equality; and the need for a permanent contestation as the proper manner for destabilizing the bosses’ power. The struggle also pointed to shortcomings that needed to be overcome in future struggles: organizationally, the workers needed to construct “assemblies in the factory” (the following spring (March-April) workers’ committees were established); they failed to generalize the struggle beyond their particular factory, meaning that the goal of generalizing the struggle remained at the level of intentionality without any practical efforts to the effect of realizing a generalized struggle (POv-e 1968b).

¹¹⁸ The description of this affair draws primarily from (Sacchetto and Sbrogiò 2009, 25-34; Chinello 1988, 212-4; POv-e 1968a; Lotta alla Montedison 1968).

Potere Operaio assessed the situation in the need to focus on political organization at the base level and the need to prepare the working class for the upcoming contractual affairs of the metal-mechanics, chemical, textile, and construction sectors based on claims of equal pay raises without respect to region, job category, or sector, a reduction of hours, equal health care¹¹⁹ for all workers, and a minimum income of 120,000 lire for all (echoing a similar claim that surfaced during the French May). PO further pointed to the need to establish workers' committees with decision-making assemblies as their governing form. These demands set the basis for continued intervention throughout Veneto and Emilia aimed at the establishment of workers' committees and a political organization of the working class in anticipation of upcoming contractual struggles. In any regard, the question of student-worker unity was answered by utilizing the students as instruments for the workers' struggles; they intervened throughout the region but within an overall project set forth by *Potere Operaio*. For the latter, their lack of theoretical insight and reflection on the student condition was met with energy and commitment to organization that eclipsed the students' own concerns, and led to the formation of political cadres. Overall, the project of PO met with considerable success in developing organizational linkages and generalizing themes of workers' struggle. However, by spring of 1969 focus turned to Turin and Fiat, as workers' struggles there had intensified beginning in the spring of 1968 with increasing militancy and scope. By spring 1969 Turin had become a tourist attraction for student activists and working class militants throughout Italy.

¹¹⁹ As we saw at Milan, the question of work conditions and work hazards increasingly became a focal point of workers' demands. In November 1968 *Potere Operaio* distributed a pamphlet addressing the question of hazardous working conditions in factories throughout the region. The key in both of these situations was that the workers refused pay as a substitute for hazardous conditions, posing the abolition of them as an unconditional claim (POv-e 1968c).

Student-worker unity in Turin

The student movement at Turin began its approach towards the working class following the occupation of Palazzo Campana that ended in late January 1968. Their understanding of the university-society relationship was premised on a generic “social factory” analysis that located complete power in capitalist domination over society, and emphasized the need for “structural space” and autonomy within the existing institutions as necessary to their political demands. This connection remained at an abstract level until events reinforced their commitment to revolutionary struggle. By the spring of 1968, the renewal of worker protest in March and May (particularly at Fiat), the slowing down of student protest in the university, and the imagination of the French May flowed together to produce a moment where the student movement could realize a continuation of class struggle by approaching the working class of Turin (Balestrini and Moroni 1998, 299-300). Reflecting on the period, Sergio Bologna wrote: “the French May was a watershed in the collective imagination. But concretely it did not capture the example of student-worker relations.... It gave rise to the ‘worker question’ in the university and in the base structure of the movement but nothing more” (in Balestrini and Moroni 1998, 300). The lack of a theoretical conception of student-worker relations in the Turin student movement was quickly overcome by external influences within the broader left that centered on the renewal of the worker struggles at Fiat as the key to the Italian class struggles. Thus, while the Turin student-worker relations began in March 1968, the perceived symbolic and material importance of the Turin working class generated a response from all actors in the revolutionary left that produced the organizational expansion of left-wing groups dedicated to revolutionary struggle without recourse to

parliamentary channels, hence the phenomenon of the so-called “extra-parliamentary left.”

The relative immaturity of the student movement in relation to the workers’ struggle was immediately evident. Beginning with a general strike over pensions in March and then a Fiat strike for a reduction of hours and claims over piecemeal work in May, the students’ approach revealed a general confusion about the working class. Ciafaloni, writing that July, commented: “the students did not know exactly what to say [to the workers],” continuing, “the large majority of the students hardly knew that national contracts exist at the category level and they did not have the slightest idea how to make a strike” (1968, 67). Student intervention, despite their general inexperience and their lack of theoretical development, was based on the democratic and egalitarian ideals that constituted their practice of “student power.” Their initial approach reflected these ideals insofar as the students rejected the role of the “vanguard” as well as the role of “intellectuals” guiding the mass of workers. Rather, they settled for the generic and elusive claim of being “at the service of the workers in struggle” (Ibid). That is, despite their inexperience they intervened in the workers’ struggle as subordinates, offering a general service role to the workers. To this end, on the morrow of the spring strikes, students and workers established their relations in the “Lega studenti-operai” (Workers-students League) as the incipient organizational form of student-worker unity.

For the student movement, the relation with the working class was premised on the theoretical understanding of the students’ role in the class struggle as a “detonator” for the broader rupture that was working class resistance. This understanding was buttressed by the student-worker revolt in the French May. Within the Italian movement,

Sergio Bologna and Giario Daghini gave credence to this example of the French students' role in anti-capitalist struggle, noting the importance of student-worker politics as a "trampoline" for the organization of working class revolution: "The [factory] occupation is a trampoline for launching decisions of a practical-political type that must then be translated into the organization of the social circuit of struggle" (1968, 53). For Bologna and Daghini, they insisted that the students needed to "entirely reconstruct" their theory in order to "anticipate the spontaneity" of the workers, and organize it (Ibid, 55). Importantly, this organization needed to involve the entire "social circuit" of class politics, linking factory struggles to the question of schooling, rent, the cost of living, et cetera.

The "Lega studenti-operai" (Student-workers league) was established after the spring struggles in order to establish more solid ties between the workers and the students in a struggle against capital in the factory, school, and social life. Included in the group were roughly one hundred workers (*operai*) from a few different plants, some white-collar workers and technicians, and approximately fifty students. Their work was divided into teams responsible for a particular factory where they would stand at the gates distributing pamphlets, collecting information from workers, and trying to begin discussions of a political nature of the factory and the capitalist system (Punto Rosso 2009, 48-9). The Lega was one of the principle bodies outside of the factory that conducted regular interventions and maintained a continuous presence among the workers as their struggles intensified throughout the fall of 1968 and the spring of 1969.

They considered themselves as "an autonomous and independent organization from the parties and the unions" that reflected the needs of the class for a more grassroots

and general class conflict. The factory, again, served as a “trampoline,” or the central starting point, for a more generalized class conflict; the factory was the central point of working class struggle that could detonate a broader more extensive class struggle throughout the contours of the “social factory.” In a small booklet the *Lega* wrote:

[t]he renewal of the struggle at Fiat assumed the characteristics of a general conflict that invested not only the despotic regime within the factory, but collected the ties between the factory regime and ‘external society’ ... [understood as] the rules of life and values that determine social relations between individuals, that condition their affective choices, their enjoyment and use of consumer goods (in Punto Rosso 2009, 48).

Given this understanding of anti-capitalist struggle they viewed the unions as “constitutionally incapable” of mobilizing and organizing this revolt. Despite this, their interventions utilized the union as a channel for the working class, but they also began constructing new class organisms, within the factory and in working class neighborhoods. Notably, the organization of the *Lega* was understood as cultivating a long-term struggle, focusing on mobilization and preparation for the Fall 1969 contractual struggles.

The workers’ availability to mobilization in a general class struggle against the boss at Fiat was surprisingly alive and well. After the May strike, the unions conducted an inquiry to gauge the workers’ understanding of the conduct of the strike and the workers’ view of the factory. The results revealed widespread support for the continuation and intensification of the struggle based on an existential hatred of the factory regime. Hence, an understanding of the power relations within the factory system and its organization of work that resulted in crippling and stultifying their very humanity motivated workers. In the inquiry workers wrote: we strike because we want to work “as men and not as beasts” (in Ciafaloni 1968, 64). And, as in the times of slaves “men carry chains that also pull them, but now the whip is missing.” Against this system that treats

them like slaves, they wanted “to fold [*piegare*] the capitalist Fiat after seventy years of bosses’ slavery” and with victory put an end to the “dictatorship in the factory” (Ibid).

This readiness to strike at a system deemed odious to human existence was dramatized in early December with the murder of two peasants in Avola, Sicily during the violent repression of a peasant protest by the police. Workers at Fiat, particularly the younger migrants from the South, conducted, for the first time at Fiat, an internal strike. “The strike today,” the workers wrote in a pamphlet, “is a day for our battle, it is the continuation of the spring strike and the pension strike: it needs to be the beginning of a new phase of struggle that is made within the factory that needs to end the truce at Fiat” (in Dina 1969, 135-6). The internal strike signified a direct challenge to the hierarchy in the factory, putting into conflict the relation between the workers and the foreman, management, and the leadership. The workers’ demands pointed to the need for control over the conditions of work and work rhythms as the departure for a more general class struggle. These struggles renewed with intensity in April, but in the meantime militants and activists from around Italy had descended on Turin in hopes of finding there the core of an unitary anti-capitalist movement.

The influx of militants from around the country overwhelmed the local student movement in its approach to the workers. Of particular importance was the presence of workerists from *Potere operaio di pisa*, *Potere operaio Veneto-emiliano*, along with militants from Rome, Milan, Florence, and Bologna (Berardi 1998, 103; Cazzullo 2006, 62). The upshot of this influx was to focus energies on the question of organization, with interventions directed towards the construction of workers’ committees. In April 1969, after police violence against a workers’ demonstration against the closure of a tobacco

factory in Battipaglia (just south of Naples) resulted in the death of two men and injured scores of others, workers' protest renewed a process of internal affairs that witnessed the birth of an autonomous workers' movement inside Fiat. Like elsewhere, the assembly emerged as the first form of organization linking students, workers, and militants. The assembly served the purpose of formulating claims and organizing work stoppages and slowdowns of production. Simultaneously, workplace delegates arose in departments and on the production lines. By May, this autonomous organization led struggles that pushed the workers' movement along lines based on a general "refusal of labor" and the slogan of "less work more money."

This intensification of the workers' struggle prompted the influx of workerists to begin producing La Classe, a journal of the "workers and students united in the struggle." With the struggles in May, the group around La Classe gave theoretical import to the general positions and slogans that emerged out of the student-worker assemblies by focusing on the need for autonomous organization centered on egalitarian salary claims. Their emphasis on material needs resonated with the demands of the workers for more control over the entire production process and grounded the understanding of this struggle not in ideological terms, but in the workers' own definition of their material needs (Wright 2002, 122). For example, the slogan "less work more money" offered a position around which organization of the struggle could take place, but concretely it was informed by the workers' own content: less work reflected the workers' decision making power over the work process and rejection of work rhythms; more money was an egalitarian call for equal pay raises for all and an end to merit raises. But it was the strictly workerist discourse that La Classe introduced that marked their presence and

importance within the workers' struggles; it also highlighted their inability to fully comprehend the nature of the class struggle.

A hallmark of workerist intervention initiated during the formation of La Classe, but dating back to the Piazza Statuto affair, was the need to theoretically push for the intensification and radicalization of the workers' struggle. In May and June at Turin, the journal introduced the question of technology and a guaranteed minimum social salary as the basis for extending the struggle as a general "refusal of labor." Based off of Panzieri's discussion of "Surplus value and planning," they introduced the question of technology, and particularly the introduction of automation, to demonstrate how the bosses' "progress" resulted in a higher level of exploitation by creating unemployment and reshaping job structures to create a hierarchy of labor, reflected in pay scales based on job categories (La Classe 1969, 7). It followed from this critique of technology that the "liberation of labor," they argued, "can only mean the concrete, material possibility of liberation of living work from the entire organized, productive apparatus of dead labor" (La Classe 1969c, 34). From this position it was sufficient that workers' initial claims targeted a reduction of work hours as the basis for equating technology with less work. The latter served as a basis from which La Classe sought to develop their political line within the class struggle by focusing their energies on "organizing the organization" (1969b, 2).

The rise of workers' autonomous organization in base committees, assemblies, and workshop delegates throughout numerous divisions demonstrated the extent to which workers were in control over their own struggles. The goal of La Classe was to extend this organizational form leading to an internal vanguard of workers who could become

the nucleus of the workers' political organization (1969a, 6-10). Their approach to organization rejected institutional mediation, locating the workers' base organizations as reflecting the revolutionary needs of the class. So, with the intervention of La Classe arose a sharp polemic against the unions, which up to that point had been kept at a critical distance, but not openly rejected. By May workers had successfully pushed their struggle beyond the unions, which opened the door for organization from the base (Lotta Continua 1969). On the one hand, delegates from the more professional Auxiliary departments pushed the need for "workers' control" in order to transform the union while controlling the conditions of work (Ibid). Against this attempt to utilize the union, La Classe argued for the rejection of all institutional mediation as an integrating function within capitalist planning. Thus, while institutions were considered completely integrated, the autonomous class struggle, so the argument ran, needed to surpass and discard the unions in favor of the workers' direct political organization. In its lead editorial at the end of June, La Classe argued that by "eliminating the union—institutions that are only worker in appearance, capitalist in reality—it has ... destroyed the organizational articulation most functional to capitalist development and opened the process of conquest by the workers at the level of political organization" (1969d, 1-2).¹²⁰ For their part, the unions had lost control over the workers' struggles, and in Turin this was evident by the affairs of Corso Traiano in July, which marked the arrival of autonomous working class antagonism in the "social factory" as a reality of Italian class struggle.

¹²⁰ Commenting on this period of labor relations, Dina remarks: "This phase of struggle has furnished a confirmation of the vulnerability of the modern organization of capitalist work in the face of a decisive workers' refusal. It has confirmed the necessity of a workers' base organization, capable of deciding autonomously, which does not end completely in the union but carries the class conflict beyond the moment of contracts ... as a mass political movement" (1969, 149-50).

The “Battle of Turin” began as a general strike proclaimed by the unions over rent in worker’s districts, which was accompanied by student-worker manifestation in the afternoon leading to popular uprisings in the neighborhoods. In the student-worker assembly they prepared to take the previous months’ lessons of struggles and organizational advancements from the factory to the society; that is, the autonomous workers’ organizations utilized this opportunity to extend the struggle and with it to enlarge their demands in order to “make the struggle in the factory a moment of expansion of a discourse and of a general strategy of attack against capital” (quote in Foa 1975, 185). As the students and workers set off to begin their manifestation, the police, who sought to prevent the march, promptly met them with tear gas and clubs. By three o’clock in the afternoon, the march was able to find its way out of one of the streets connected to Fiat spilling over into Corso Traiano and the forces of order. The terrain turned into a “violent urban guerilla” war: workers converged from other Fiat factories (Lingotto and Rivalta); men in the neighborhoods around Fiat joined in as did the youth, and women (La Classe 1969e). Throughout the night barricades were erected on numerous streets surrounding the Fiat Mirafiori factory. The placards at each point read: *Che cosa vogliamo? Tutto!* (What do we want? Everything!). However, by midnight and with extensive use of tear gas and manpower, the police were able to gain control over the working class neighborhoods.

In their assessment of the revolt, the workers’ assembly at Fiat insisted on the continuity of their struggles and the revolt at Corso Traiano. They viewed the call of a general strike over rent to be an attempt by the unions to regain control in the factory. But the workers showed their ability to take control of the situation. Against the unions’

“symbolic strike” they emphasized the importance of the strike as a means to expand the struggle and unite the working class. For the workers’ assembly they argued: “Today in Italy an open revolutionary process is in motion that goes beyond the large significance of the French May. It is not an improvised movement, but a long struggle that tightly unites workers (*operai*), students, laborers and technicians, in a struggle that continuously upsets the capitalist’s projects” (La Classe 1969f, 1). The immediate consequence of the “Battle of Turin” was to begin the unification of the autonomous workers’ movement in Italy and to put forth objectives for a new phase of struggle.

Conclusion

With the “Battle of Turin,” the movement in Italy shifted from student-worker unity towards the establishment of a multitude of “extra-parliamentary” groups. At the end of July 1969, workers’ vanguard organization held their one and only conference. As a result of the conference, but also reflecting broader tendencies that came out of the experience of the student movement as it approached the working class, two organizations emerged on a national scale: *Potere Operaio* (born in September) and *Lotta Continua* (established in November). While these tendencies are discussed in the next chapters, it is important to note that the argument has demonstrated a loose connection between the rise of *operaismo*, its impact and appropriation within the student movement, leading to the development of autonomous forms of organization. The core aspects that bind this history are a confluence of the ideas of “autonomy,” the “social factory,” and self-generated forms of knowledge. In this chapter, I argued that the “social factory” served as a conceptual tool linking the university to the capitalist cycle of production and reproduction, a position most clearly established in the student movement at Pisa. The

introduction of this concept into the student movement was determined by broader generational configurations that emerged from culture of the “economic miracle” in both its global and existential processes. In part, the critique of the “system” as a “social factory” helped them understand their “existential ambiguity,” as a factor of capitalist planning, control, and other signifiers of authority and power. As part of the broader left culture that had developed from Morandi through the 1956 crisis, the student movement, both in its own practice and in its intervention in the factory, maintained the principle of autonomous class organizations, with their forms of decision-making and deliberation in the first person, as essential to a democratically organized class revolution. Third, the student movement had a lasting influence in the next stage of workerist thought by not only focusing on the process of capitalist reproduction, but by also raising specialized intellectual work, a theme that *operaismo*, as a theory, failed to take into account. Last, while the student movement introduced the “social factory” to include the student as part of the working class, there remained the problem of the wage relation as a determinant of class composition. The theme of the wage was central in workerist theory, and contributed its own problematic to the conceptualization of the social factory. In the next chapter, we turn to the wage as the principal claim of workers’ “material needs” during this cycle of struggle that began in the spring of 1969 and continues through 1972.

CHAPTER 6

THE “SOCIAL FACTORY” AND WORKER’S LIBERATION FROM WORK: THE “HOT AUTUMN” AND WORKING CLASS REVOLUTION

If the working class was up to this point mute, it is no longer the case. For this, to take the floor, not to manage their survival, but for self-examination and to put in discussion their proper existence, is an initial, but decisive moment of a radical transformation of life—Guido Viale, *Lotta continua*

The refusal of work is the discovery of the possibility of the construction of a society in which the free worker collectivity will produce that which is useful for living, to satisfy the fundamental needs, outside of the absurd rules of productivity, and against the rules of productivity. The refusal of work is the refusal of both capitalism and socialism as forms of production that are based on the social extraction of profit. Refusal of work is both against the State and against work—Franco Piperno, *Potere Operaio*

“War for liberation from work”—Slogan, *Potere Operaio*

“Democracy is a pistol in the back of the workers”—Slogan, *Potere Operaio*

Introduction

The revolt at Corso Traiano demonstrated the arrival of an autonomous working class movement as a social and political force that contested not only the power relations of Turin’s “social factory” but of capitalist command in general. The workers’ militancy during the spring set the stage for an offensive strategy striking the heart of Italy’s approach to postwar political and economic development. The importance of Fiat has been noted in earlier chapters. The workers’ actions of 1969, aside from the strategic and symbolic importance of Fiat, were noteworthy for their magnitude as well as the possibility they offered for a political unification of the class struggle. Not only did the workers’ movement strike at the heart of Italian capital, but they were now, at Fiat’s Mirafiori, also engaged in an offensive attack against the largest automotive factory in

Europe.¹²¹ The “hot autumn,”¹²² as the fall struggles were coined, began in earnest in June and July, and lasted until, at least, 1973. It was during this period that Italian *operaismo* brought to fruition its decade-long political work.

In this chapter, I focus on the role of intellectual work primarily inside the group *Potere Operaio*, giving particular focus to the writing of Antonio Negri. His contributions to *operaismo* are many, but emphasis here is given on theory of the State as a “Planner-State,” his formulation of the Marxian concept of “crisis,” and his insistence on the connections between production and domination as the premise of a political praxis of working class revolution (Negri 2005, xlviiii-xlix). Central to Negri’s writing was the tension that emerged between the workerist’s conceptualization of the “social factory” and “class composition.” That is, even as they saw the rise of the “mass worker” as an antagonistic force in the “hot autumn,” the struggles developed into the sphere of capitalist reproduction, ultimately, forced workerist theorists to confront their understanding of working class subjectivity. In short, during this cycle of struggle a social transformation demanded the reconsideration of the “mass worker” in lieu of the changing power dynamics of the class-capital relation in the post-hot autumn “social factory.” This chapter explains the historical trajectory of *operaismo* in terms of how

¹²¹ Aldo Cazzullo aptly depicts the magnitude of Fiat’s Mirafiori plant: “In the Spring of 1969 Mirafiori is the largest European factory, bigger than Volkswagen of Wolfsburg. Thirty-seven open doors along the perimeter of ten kilometers, three million meters squared, half covered: forty kilometers of assembly line, 223 air ducts, and thirteen underground galleries. A city in a city, protected by insurmountable walls against those who do not live there, but besieged during the hours of shift changes—five in the morning, one in the afternoon, ten at night—by young people distributing bundles of pamphlets, with police intended to watch them, and journalists to write about them. Behind the guarded doors each day fifty-five thousand people work, eighty-five percent of whom are blue-collar (*operai*)” (2006, 51).

¹²² The phrase “l’autunno caldo” (hot autumn) was first used in the business paper, *24 ore*, in its August 21, 1969 issue as a general warning of workers’ insubordination against the “principle of authority” as the basis for postwar Italian capitalism as laid out by Angelo Costa, the head of the industrial group *Confindustria*, in the immediate postwar years.

their critique of political economy began to entail both the production and reproduction of capital. The culmination of this social transformation resulted, as is discussed in the next chapter, in the displacement of “worker centrality” towards a broader configuration of working class subjectivity.

I begin this chapter with the fragmentation of the Turin student-worker assembly that gave way to the rise of the so-called “extra-parliamentary left.” Next, I turn to Antonio Negri’s formulation of the “planner-State,” his formulation of “crisis,” and his argument for a political organization of the autonomous working class. The last part of the chapter highlights the importance of Negri’s contribution to *operaismo* as the culmination of Tronti’s “strategy of refusal” in the construction of what Negri called the “workers’ party against work.” Negri’s central importance in this period resided in his formulation of the “social factory” as capitalist command over “social labor.”

The demise of the student-worker assembly

The prospects of an increasingly militant and autonomously organized working class grew throughout the summer of 1969. Sergio Garavini, who contributed to the first number of Quaderni Rossi and served in the Turin CGIL, later remarked: in the summer of 1969 “we did not control the strikes, Lotta continua did” (quoted in Punto Rosso 2009, 62). [*Lotta continua* (continuous struggle) was the moniker stamped on the pamphlets coming out of the assembly and should not be confused with the soon-to-be-formed extra-parliamentary group.] Workers’ autonomy had confronted the hierarchical organization of the industrial relations system, not only in the factories with the formation of “united base committees” and assemblies, but also with the parliamentary-oriented trade unions and political parties. Moreover, theirs was a “continuous struggle” that went

beyond the formally established and regulated contractual battles and, for the time being, had broke with the accepted mode of industrial relations (Grandi 2003, 67).

In late July, national leaders of the autonomous workers' movement came together for the first time under the auspices of the "National Convention of the Autonomous Vanguard" at the *Palazzo dello sport* in Turin. The immediate purpose of the convention was to come to terms with their recent experience as a basis for forging a united front as they prepared for the fall contractual struggles. Importantly, the workers held the order of the meeting and they alone had the opportunity to speak; the "external" forces, the student movement and other political organizations, occupied a background role. Overall, the convention was a display of opposition to the entire political and economic order. However, when it came time to discern a way forward there were palpable ideological and strategic differences that permeated the convention. On the one hand, there was the future nucleus of the national organization Workers' Power (*Potere Operaio*) as reflected in the group that made up the journal La Classe [The Classe] (Oreste Scalzone and Franco Piperno from Rome, Antonio Negri from Padua-Veneto, and Sergio Bologna and Gaiaro Daghini from Milan).¹²³ On the other hand, there was the Turin student movement, which had allied itself with *Potere Operaio of Pisa* that included personalities such as Adriano Sofri, Guido Viale, and Luigi Bobbio. During the convention these diverse personalities remained within the broader archipelago of the Turin student-worker assembly. The group from Turin and Pisa had understood the

¹²³ For a history of the formation of La Classe as one of the two journals, Contropiano (literally "Against the plan," or "Counterplan") was the other, that linked together the theory and practice of *operaismo* between the demise of Classe Operaia and the birth of Potere Operaio, see Aldo Grandi's *La generazione degli anni perduti* and Franco Berardi's *La nefasta utopia* (2003, 47-58; 1998, 76-82).

convention to be centered on the continued work of the assembly as the proper locus of workers' autonomy. However, the group from La Classe utilized the occasion to make a push for greater organization by emphasizing the necessity of systematically putting the workers' struggles and objectives into a concrete form of planning.

Aside from these differences, the conference was successful in developing a united political platform for the autumn contractual struggles. The central claims focused on pay, hours, and equality: the abolition of work categories, a reduction of the work week from 48 to 40 hours, flat salary increases, and parity of pay between blue-collar and white-collar workers. The question of organization, and the tactical direction of the struggles, was left unresolved. The convention ended with the intention to meet again at the end of August, after the summer vacation. This never occurred. The unification of the autonomous struggles, while bearing potent possibilities, was torn asunder by the all-too-familiar factional disputes and sectarian politics that, historically, have bedeviled attempts at the political organization of the working class.

Before discussing these differences more fully, it is worthwhile to point out that despite the emerging fissures, the convention operated under the shared understanding of a common nemesis, lumped under the general rubric of the "bosses," a category that included those in the centers of power within the economy and the State, and those who had the power to make decisions on the overall arrangements and purpose of the political and economic institutions. While this certainly did not reflect a coherent and clearly defined theoretical position, it did reflect a general anti-capitalist attitude that understood the struggles to be concerned with the interconnections between the factory, the state, city, and communal bodies, housing, schooling, and services. There was also a shared

understanding of “worker centrality.” This concept, which is the focus of the next chapter, signified that the actual factory worker was the relevant subject of working class political practice. That is, the paid worker, the figure of labor-power, was widely agreed upon as the central figure of working class revolution. Moreover, the nature of working class subjectivity was also located in the common worker, or the “mass worker”¹²⁴ of Fordist production. Connected to this assumption was the centrality of the factory, the point of production, as the “Archimedean point” (Panzieri) of the broader “social factory.” Last, they widely accepted the salary as the central theme of the workers’ struggle, albeit with diverse justifications.

It is important to point out that these shared assumptions were maintained for the most part even after the dissolution of the Turin student-worker assembly. Moreover, despite their differences, the two leading groups that emerged from the student-worker assembly at Turin—Workers’ Power and Continuous Struggle—shared enough in common so that they occupied similar political terrain, they often worked together, in general their members maintained amicable relations, and they were part of the same alignment of forces within the working class movement. However, often lumped together as the “extra-parliamentary left,”¹²⁵ the divisions between these two groups were substantial, both in theory and in practice.

¹²⁴ Roberto Zamarin created the figure of Gasparazzo in vignettes for the journal Lotta Continua as a symbol with two meanings: one as the mass worker, the other as an expression of cultural estrangement and oppression. This cartoon character continues to have significance in the Italian Left around worker and immigrant politics. Zamarin died on December 20, 1972 in an auto accident on his way to the North to deliver the journal for circulation (Zamarin 1972).

¹²⁵ The phrase “extra-parliamentary left” identified those groups of the “left” that were outside of the official political parties and, in general, rejected the political system of parliamentary democracy. It would be more correct to maintain, as *Lotta Continua* did, that they were not “extra-parliamentary,” but “anti-parliamentary” (quoted in Cazzullo 2006, 113). The key

We can examine the divergence and its effect along two lines of contention: organization and the contents of working class struggle. At the National Convention, the future group of *Lotta Continua* favored the continued use of the student-worker assembly. They gave priority to the act of struggle, in both the communicative and physical sense of action, and not to any specificity of claims. In general, this group privileged the role of action and its effect on raising the level of consciousness, not only of the workers, but also of a broader “proletarian” class. Following the positions of Viale, Bobbio, and Sofri, this group focused on those mechanisms designed for the “organization of consensus” and legitimacy within the social system (i.e., the family, schools, media, and such). Fundamentally, their position resided in the potential for individuals to remake themselves, to invent a new world by struggling against, and, ultimately, destroying the old.

Against this so-called “ideological” and Third World “solidarity” position, the group centered around the very short-lived journal, *La Classe*, which would go on to form *Potere Operaio*, argued that an organizational direction to the struggles was needed, and that this should take place around the workers’ “material needs” as expressed by the role of salary within state-capital planning. For those in *La Classe*, the facts of July marked a

groups that made up the constellation of the “extra-parliamentary left” were: *Avanguardia Operaia* (Workers’ Vanguard) [1968-1977]; *Lotta Continua* (Continuous struggle) [1969-1976]; *Il Manifesto* (The Manifesto) [1969- current]; *Movimenti Lavoratori per il Socialismo* (Workers’ Movement for Socialism) [1972-1976]; *Potere Operaio* (Workers’ Power) [1966/68-1973]; and the *Unione Comunisti Italiani* (Union of Italian Communists) [1969-1972]. There was, as well, an “extraparliamentary right,” with groups such as *Ordine Nuovo* (New Order); *Avanguardia Nazionale* (National Vanguard); and *Fronte Nazionale* (National Front) [Negrello 2004, 186]. Fervently anti-communist and neo-fascist, the “extra-parliamentary right” enters the story here in terms of their participation in State-led domestic counterinsurgency against the “left” (i.e., the overall working class) as part of the well-known “strategy of tension” that incorporated the military apparatus of NATO’s “stay-behind” program within the framework of “Operation Gladio” (Ganser 2005, 3-14, 63-83).

“qualitative jump” that “opened a new phase” of political work (Potere Operaio 1969, 1). In its most dramatic depiction, echoing Tronti’s rehabilitation of the party-form within *operaismo*, Franco Piperno wrote: “it is vain to insist on themes of workers’ autonomy.... [This is] by now a patrimony of the movement.” Rather, what was needed was the understanding of a “Leninism of tactics on the strategy” (1969).¹²⁶ Piperno, like his comrades in PO, invoked Lenin to put emphasis on the need for the domination of a party (or organization) over the control and direction of the movement’s “cycle of social struggles.” The problem of organization focused on the need for a permanent body to communicate and coordinate political action. The culminating feature of this turn to organization was meant to impose a workers’ “counter-plan” against the bosses that entailed the “planning of the continuity of the struggle on the social terrain under the hegemony and guide of the workers’ vanguard” (Potere Operaio 1969, 2). The basis for this was evinced in the July events, which had demonstrated a working class revolt against the “social factory” led by the “mass worker.” It began from the factory as a sight of organization and enveloped the workers’ quarters around Fiat Mirafiori. Thus, the workers’ political organization should have begun with this working class subject and be organized on the basis of the leading slogan, “*più soldi, meno lavoro*” (more money, less work). In his analysis of the Keynesian State, a year before, Antonio Negri had set forth the theoretical basis for this claim. Before turning to that important article, I want to develop the differences between PO and LC more fully with respect to their theoretical character.

¹²⁶ Oreste Scalzone, a Roman member of Workers’ Power, criticized the position of *Lotta Continua* in the following manner: “they touched on themes that made us laugh because they treated such themes as consciousness and populism, which are sentimental and less rigorously Marxian and workerist; they conquered the hearts of the children of the student movement” (Grandi 2003, 93-4).

The salary question

For the activists in the Turin and Pisa movements, the proper locus of organization remained the student-worker assembly. In this body, they argued, it was most possible to cultivate what they considered to be the “subjective initiative” of the working class (Viale 1973, 58). The assembly served in no small manner as a communicative body, a place for deliberation and decision-making that remained centered in the “spontaneity” of workers’ actions. At stake for this faction was the ability to maintain an existential dimension to the workers’ struggle in hopes of a rejection of capitalist social relations that focused on the cultivation of human connections. Guido Viale viewed the assembly as offering precisely this alternative: “the struggle, the assembly, and life in common, offers the possibility of having friends, of knowing them and making oneself known, of love. And this is without doubt the strongest foundation of organization as well as of the struggle” (1978, 171). For those who founded *Lotta Continua*, the transformative power of language, of the worker’s own expression, was central. Through the practice of speaking in the first person during assemblies and on the shop floor, workers were accounted for by their speech, rather than just by their physical actions, and this also established their individuality as human beings and not simply commodities understood collectively, and abstractly, as labor-power. Thus, language was a central bond that embodied the capacity for individual transformation beyond the objective categorization of political economy as part of the overall goal of achieving a “radical transformation of life” (Ibid; Bobbio 1979, 37).

The assembly served as the organizational structure best suited for the development of a revolutionary consciousness, which, in itself, provided an indicator for

the contents of class struggle. The latter could not be introduced from outside, but could only emerge from the participant's own understanding. On the importance of the workers' voice as key to the cycle of struggle, Viale noted:

If the working class was up to this point mute, it is no longer the case. For this, to take the floor, not to manage their survival, but for self-examination and to put in discussion their proper existence, is an initial, but decisive moment of a radical transformation of life (1978, 172).

The struggles that began in the spring of 1969 had destroyed the stifling silence of workers' existence in the system of neo-capitalism. The facts of July launched a struggle over the very contents of the "social factory," against the fundamental parameters of capital's control over people's daily existence. Within the awareness of such affairs, Luigi Bobbio pointed out the disjunctive potential of this rupture with neo-capitalism's "organization of consensus" and "social control." Importantly this position claimed to reject an "ideological" dimension to revolution that favored an open approach to the content of working class struggle.

For *Lotta Continua*, the class struggle hinged on the construction of a "common language." To this end, the pamphlet served as an instrument that provided the "decisive means of communication" that was part of a "revolution in language," away from the bureaucratic, party- and union-formulated slogans, toward a more common vernacular that included the use of dialect (Grandi 2003, 74). The struggles in the factory were only one component of this broader approach. The formation of tenement committees, the beginnings of a discourse on housework, and struggles centered on consumer practices (i.e., self-reduction of services) developed simultaneously with the workers' organization taking place inside of the factories. For *Lotta Continua*, the need was to extend the experiences from Fiat in the spring to a broader organization of the working class within

the reproduction of capital. However, this could only occur through discussion and dialogue among and between those in the struggle. Their emphasis on communication within the class struggle was the basis for understanding the overall class position in the “social factory” of neo-capitalism; only through dialogue in the struggle could the class forge the necessary “modifications of consciousness” that was necessary to negate capitalist control (Ibid, 90).¹²⁷ Thus, while they accepted the factory and the factory-worker as the central feature of the cycle of struggles in 1968-9, this was by no means established *a priori*. Rather, the need was to continue the “overall expansion of workers’ autonomy with respect to *all those aspects* of despotism and control by capital” (Bobbio 1979, 37 emphasis added).

The importance of the struggles at Fiat were understood in terms of their capacity to serve as the foundation for a socialization of class struggle based on a “general consciousness” that had emerged during the struggles over such things as work conditions, salary, housing, transport, immigration, education, and the overall social division of labor. Within these parameters, the focus on the salary question served to highlight the “incentive character” of the institutions in a society founded on salaried work (Viale 1978, 176). In this regard, the salary was understood in terms of its ability to force people to work, to shape their life choices around the need for money to live, and, ultimately, as a despotic control over their individual lives by forcing them to sell their labor. (It should be pointed out that the with respect to the question of consumption and its connection to the reproduction of capital, the extra-parliamentary left remained

¹²⁷ It derived from LC’s interpretation that the national convention was based on the understanding that the central indication coming out of the struggles at Mirafiori was the “abolition of each barrier between the factory struggle, between the struggle for the salary and the struggle against the *carovita* (cost of living)” [Grandi 2003, 91-2].

virtually silent, in terms of theory, until the journal Rosso [Red] introduced it in 1976). Thus, the salary question was important as an instrument of struggle in which the workers' negated themselves as labor-power, opening the way to the cultivation of their "human needs" outside the restrictive boundaries of their objective condition as workers, which could only be formulated by a "radical transformation" or "modification of consciousness" which only the workers themselves could effect.

If the analysis from *Lotta Continua* suffered from being overly "sentimental" and "less rigorously Marxian," as Oreste Scalzone pithily concluded, it had the benefit of opening the way to a socialization of the struggle that derived from an understanding of the transformative capacity of dialogue and decision-making from the bottom-up; they entrusted to the movement a self-capacity for generating the political content of its own struggles. Moreover, their respect for the actual happenings of the struggles allowed them to point out the diverse political implications of these affairs.¹²⁸ On this point, their critique of the group from La Classe was poignant. The latter made their organizational push on the basis of the workers' salary claim, understood as the political expression of the workers' "material needs." *Lotta Continua* criticized this approach as "economistic" and deprived of an actual transformative capacity.¹²⁹ According to *Lotta Continua*, the approach of La Classe reduced the pamphlet to a "list of objectives" that purported to focus on the "needs of workers." Guido Viale criticized La Classe for its overly narrow

¹²⁸ Similar sentiments were found in Raniero Panzieri's position discussed in Chapter two and confirms Sofri's widely recognized appreciation of not only Panzieri's political analysis but also his moral character. This general sentiment, we can conjecture, also accounts for the fact that *Lotta Continua* did not become a centralized organization until 1973, whereas groups such as Workers' Power took on a centralized party form in the aftermath of the "hot autumn" and the emergence of the "strategy of tension."

¹²⁹ This critique was also made by others against Tronti's introduction of the party-form in Chapter 4, and remains a problem for that particular strand of *operaismo*.

focus with the strong indictment that such an approach, at best, “renders them incapable of gathering all the political implications of a struggle of these dimension,” and, at worst, they only alluded to a quantification of salary claims with little to no actual transformation of social life or fundamental rupture with capitalist social relations (1973, 58). In short, the Turin and Pisa movement rejected the narrow focus on salary claims as precluding the possibility of an existential dimension to the struggle that could be capable of forging a collective life outside of, and against, capital’s regime of social control. However, as we have seen, *Lotta continua* accepted the role that the salary had as a component of capital’s command over labor. But they equally rejected the reductionist demand for money as incapable of producing a revolutionary transformation of society. In short, the salary struggle was only one component of a much broader struggle for the “modification of consciousness” that alone was capable of opening the way to a revolutionary transformation of the social system. Against the group that formed *Workers’ Power*, Viale polemically concluded: “I have read all of the workerists, those of State and those of the movement, and, just like Voltaire in front of the bosses of the Church, I have only one comment to make: they will pay me!” (1978, 193).

Viale’s reference to two branches of operaismo referred to the divisions that had occurred within the post-Classe Operaia journal Contropiano.¹³⁰ As the forerunner to La Classe, this journal is of importance in the historical trajectory of *operaismo* for its

¹³⁰ Contropiano was formed by two divergent tendencies within *operaismo*: those who worked within the PCI, including Massimo Cacciari, Mario Tronti, and Albert Asor Rosa; and those who sought new forms of organization and political space such as Antonio Negri and Luciano Ferrari Bravo. The journal’s main importance here was in its theoretical development of the New Deal as an expression of the “Planner-State” and in Negri’s insistence that the “party” existed solely as an organ of “rupture” for workers’ power, not for mediation as Tronti held (see Berardi 1998, 76-82).

intellectual production, particularly that of Antonio Negri and his writings on the question of salary, the State, and a critique of Keynesian political economy. Negri's discussion occurred in the context of a debate with both the reformist left and Mario Tronti's discussion of the use of salary as a claim to be made within the State-party nexus, hence the allusion to State *operaismo* above. Tronti's position, which was treated at the end of the fourth chapter, can be summarized accordingly: within advanced capitalist economies, the working class is the propulsive force of capitalist development whose "economic laws" can only be understood as "political forces." Conceptually, these forces derived from an analysis of class relations centered on the salary-profit nexus, as capital and class: the former utilizes "planning" in order to maintain economic equilibrium; the latter must organize¹³¹ for a political rupture, based on the salary, of capitalist planning. In short, the point of disagreement between figures such as Negri and Tronti resided in the formers' emphasis that, in order to overcome the relationship between salary and profit, organization had to be rooted in the movement and its organisms, not, as Tronti maintained, "within and against the party" and "within and against the state" (Tronti 1967; Tronti 1967a; Tronti 1968).

In December 1967, the workerists of the "movement" held a seminary at Padua on the New Deal in the United States, capitalist state reform, and the workers' struggle. The theoretical inspiration behind the discussion stemmed from Tronti's analysis of Keynes' "revolution of income" and developed this argument towards a theory of the State as the "planner-State" that entailed a radical rethinking of value and salary. Negri's contribution

¹³¹ The extent to which the difference over whether the class was to "organize" or "be organized" was reflected within *operaismo* and the broader left culture of autonomy. For purposes here, Tronti had laid out a specific "role" of the class organizing itself and its proper relationship with the party (see Chapter 4).

to the seminar was published in the first issue of Contropiano as “La teoria capitalistica dello stato nel’29: John M. Keynes” (The capitalist theory of the state in 1929: John M. Keynes) [1968]. In this article, Negri targeted the analysis of objective economic categories, particularly within reformist elements of the working class movement, in order to show how the “Planner-State” recognized working class autonomy and sought to control the class through the wage mechanism. Though not explicitly stated, Negri confronted Tronti’s claim that an autonomous working class, politically organized, could coexist with capitalist reformism, the “within and against” approach. The upshot of Negri’s article was that it set forth the argument for a political rupture based on an analysis of the politically determinant role of the State in economic development. In short, against Tronti et al, Negri argued for the possibility of a working class subjectivity that could be organized outside the limits imposed by capitalist development (Berardi 1998, 77).

Negri’s article began with the premise that capital, from 1917 through WWII, had been forced to recognize the working class as the only actor capable of threatening the system’s very existence. The rise of the working class, as a political force, pushed economists to go beyond theories of “natural equilibrium.” Negri wrote: “Say’s Law is no longer valid because the variables of economic and political equilibrium have changed: to them are added the autonomy of the working class” (1968, 20). A political solution was required, and, for Negri, Keynes was the first to grasp this reality by introducing the State as a productive actor as well as a guarantor of capitalist “convention” that functioned to maintain a politically determined equilibrium of income and profit accumulation.

According to Negri, the key to Keynes' *General Theory* rested on his formulation of "effective demand." Against classical economic theories of "natural equilibrium," this concept brought into the domain of economics the "political notion" of power relations between the working class and capital (Ibid, 28). The problem that Keynes posed for economics was how to gear the "aim of politics" towards the "sublimation" of the working class within capitalist development. The key determinant in this model, following Tronti's earlier analysis, centered on the salary, or on wage-units. Since "variations in the propensity to consume are essentially variations in income," salary, and by extension labor-power, Negri argued, comes to be understood as the "ultimate independent variable" of capitalist development. The policy conclusions of Keynes' attempt to come to terms with the crisis of the thirties demonstrated the actual risk inherent in a politically autonomous working class. Negri wrote:

From now on the work of political economy will be that of imposing a continuous revolution of income to sustain the propensity to consumption, overall production, investments, in order to determine the only politically possible equilibrium, which will be effective only with the acceptance of the inherent risks and precariousness of a relation of open forces. To assume the conflict between classes, to resolve it each day in a way favorable to the development of capital: this is the spirit of the theory of effective demand (Ibid, 31).

The State, according to Negri's reading of Keynes was the only actor capable of formulating and sustaining this equilibrium. Negri argued that with Keynes we were no longer living in a laissez-faire state of "rights," but now had to come to understand the State as a productive actor, an integral economic actor. Ultimately, Negri argued, "collective capital" must rely on the State's ability to extend its tentacles into society and manage a political and economic equilibrium that could hedge against the inherent "risk" of an autonomously organized political working class.

This critique of Keynesian development gave rise to a new historical form of the capitalist State, as an equivalence of the function of the state relative to the form of Keynesian development. In short, economic development required a “Planner-State” capable of applying a “series of mechanisms of equilibrium ... readjusted from time to time by a regulated phasing of the ‘incomes revolution’” (Ibid, 13). Taking stock of the working class’s “impact” on development, state intervention was considered a “technical necessity” for the preservation of the system, understood as “guaranteeing the certainty of convention” (Ibid, 25). This idea of convention was influenced by Luciano Ferrari Bravo’s focus on the juridical form of capital during the New Deal, that identified the social bases of norms and values that became identified in the “planner-state” as the “exclusive collective representative of productive capital”; that is, a state of social capital (Ferrari Bravo 1971).¹³² This tendency towards “social capital,” Negri argued, aimed for the end of the “rentier state,” so that it now becomes a “productive subject,” understood as “the prime mover of economic activity” (1968, 31). Importantly, social capital, because of the working class, had to conquer the State as a mechanism for the social organization of capital. The critique of “theories of equilibrium” uncovered the point that the need to control the inherent “risk” of the system – the politically organized working class—implied that, as Marx maintained, “the whole of society would be transformed into one gigantic factory” (Ibid, 21).

Capital’s response to working class political power was to destroy the “state of rights” in favor of the “Planner-State” as a mechanism for extending capitalist control over society. A function of this State was that it served as an integrating mechanism by

¹³² For Negri’s later reflections on the importance of Ferrari Bravo, see *Luciano Ferrari Bravo Ritratto di un Cattivo Maestro: con Alcuni Cenni Sulla Sua Epoca* (Negri 2003).

which the working class could be incorporated into a reformist framework that would include some form of working class participation in defining the form of “organization and repression” necessary for the continued development of productive forces and economic development. Negri wrote:

Capital is now obliged to move to the *social* organization of that despotism, to diffuse the organization of exploitation throughout society, in the new form of a planning-based state which – in the particular way in which it articulates organization and repression throughout society – directly reproduces the figure of the factory (Ibid, 30 emphasis in original).

Social capital reflected the tendency whereby social relations were determined by the commodity-form as the proper goal and aspiration of a class politics.

Negri’s critique went well beyond this reformist position to include a rejection of the workers’ council tradition, state socialism, trade unionism, and other working class models that limited themselves to an understanding of class relations solely in “objective” terms (i.e., labor-power, a neutral conception of technology, etc...). The polemic against these aspects of working class politics rested ultimately, as we will see below, on the conceptualization of a working class that politically focused on the negation of capitalist social relations, on the rejection of production as inherently connected to capitalist domination, rather than on any positive content. Importantly, Negri made the argument of why the state should be included as a “productive actor” and how, strategically, it should be negated, and not taken over. One consequence of this critique was that not only did those “reformist” components of left fail to produce a rupture with capital, but he also implicitly offered an explanation of why state-socialist and state-communist regimes had reproduced capitalist social relations.

The upshot of Keynes’ analysis, Negri maintained, was the introduction of the “planner-State” as a solution based on the technical management of a political and

economic equilibrium in order to guarantee a form of capital accumulation. Theoretically, Keynes' solution, at best, reflected a situation where, as Marx described, "capital becomes communist"—a social order where money would reflect nothing other than a "general symbol of equivalence between commodities produced... [And] the law of value would come to govern the entirety of development" (Ibid, 32). This ideal-type of a communistic form of capitalism would not eradicate the endemic nature of exploitation, but would merely generalize this condition into a system of control over the entire society. Exploitation was considered essential to the power relations within the productive system as expressed in the law of value. The role of the State, in turn, was to constantly correct the equilibrium, fixing the "distortions" internal to the market-based system of profit. Negri, following Tronti, argued that the wage-unit was the key "distortion," the central expression of working class rejection of the commodity and profit system. On this basis, the demand for more wages, and on an equal basis that were not linked to productivity, demonstrated that the wage was the "*truly independent function* within the process of capitalist accumulation" (Ibid, 33 emphasis added).

Negri's reading of Keynes re-affirmed the centrality of the wage as the unifying demand of the working class, as the key to developing the political power of the working class as a revolutionary force against not only the bosses of social capital, but to its true source of power, as expressed in the new function of the "planner-State." Negri critiqued the reformist position on the State by positing a general "mystification" that existed along the lines expressed by Keynesian development. His criticism went beyond their glossing over of the State's role as guarantor of convention through technical management to focus on its "increased use of violence." As guarantor of the existing order of things, the

State was forced to rely on “violence” in order to impose equilibrium in a situation of dynamic class struggle. Negri wrote:

In a situation where the relationship between the classes has become dynamic, any attempt to create a new equilibrium is bound to be insecure, and it becomes impossible to stabilize movement around a fixed point. The only option in such a situation is to place one’s faith in power, as a separate and distinct reality (Ibid, 35).¹³³

This insight into the planner-State was revealed by the end of 1969 with the onset of state-violence as part of the burgeoning “strategy of tension”—a military strategy designed to terrify the population by an exhibition of massive state power (while attributing the violence to the workers’ movement) that was intended to create disorder and assert the role of the State as the guarantor of peace and order. If Keynes had understood wage rigidity to be the weak point of capitalist development, then Negri argued that the demand for wages was the central demand capable of consolidating and unifying a working class subject.¹³⁴ And when this demand started to become a reality,

¹³³ This passage was more acutely stated by Negri in his subsequent article, “Marx on Cycle and Crisis,” where he wrote: “up until this point, the State had been seen as a guarantor of the fundamental relationship within development, as the force promoting a dynamic readjustment of its repressive mechanism. But now an absolute and decisive State power seeks to establish itself as an immanent force and to organize the process directly” (Negri 1968a).

¹³⁴ The use of the term working class is meant here as a concept distinct from the term labor-power. The wage struggle is understood here not in economic terms, but in its political component. Negri’s interpretation of Keynes had demonstrated the political determination of development, and thus of the wage. He wrote: “The ‘ultimate independent variable’ that underlies his [Keynes] thinking is ‘the wage-unit as determined by the bargains reached between employers and employed.’ It is here, around this motife, that Keynes’ theory reveals itself for what it is: it recognizes and makes use of the power of the working class, in all its autonomy. The class can be neither put down nor removed: the only option is to understand the way it moves, and regulate its revolution” (1968, 29). Negri reaffirmed this in his later discussion of class composition in “*Archaeology and Project*”: “...given a certain level of capitalist development, the concept of labor-power ... becomes dissolved. Instead of capital/labor-power there is capital/working class: the working class now constituted an *independent polarity* within capitalist development” (1982, 206, emphasis in original).

the violence of the state revealed itself with dire consequences for the autonomous workers' movement.

The workers' movement, the rise of extra-parliamentary groups, and the "hot autumn"

When the Fiat workers returned to their factories in Turin from August vacation, they confronted two diverse tendencies. On the one hand, the official union movement was in the process of forging its unity in an attempt to recapture the initiative with the factory workers. On the other hand, the student-worker assembly, which exemplified an alternative form of decision-making, was beginning to splinter into smaller extra-parliamentary groups. With regards to the former, the trade union approach to unification was based on their overall strategy to regain control over the workers' movement. During the summer, unions had "lost control" over the working class's political initiative. To counter this tendency, they adopted as their official strategy the need to "*cavalcare la tigre del movimento*" ("ride the tiger of the movement"). This approach was based on the inclusion of claims emerging out of the workers' base (which was simply worker-oriented and without union or party affiliation) into contractual struggles. The unions sought, on the one hand, to reestablish the system of representation in union organization and, on the other hand, to force the bosses into a new industrial relations system with more trade union power and recognition at the company level (Punto Rosso 2009, 66). This last maneuver, which found success through the "hot autumn" and beyond, was particularly popular in the factories; alas the workers felt as if the base had considerable control over the union bureaucracy and leadership, and that they could achieve some elementary gains—a position that was palpable in workers' contractual affairs until the end of 1971 (Barkan 1984, 75-77).

Within this framework of the push for trade union unity and the splintering apart of the autonomous movement the actual workers' movement (the base movement) found itself confronted by competing tendencies that quickly constrained the political space, and the possibilities for struggle, of the movement. (As we will see below, the revolt at Corso Traiano may have marked the emergence of the "social factory" as the basis for a new revolutionary approach to jettisoning the capitalist system. However, if so, this point seems either to have been a missed opportunity or the high point of a cycle of struggles that, in hindsight, was part of the structural demise of Fordism. If the latter was the case, as many workerists believed, then the Keynesian model of development, and the mass worker were no longer the keys to understanding working class politics.) What is interesting here were the errors of the groups coming out of the national vanguard conference and the consequences, both theoretical and practical, that their positions had on the subsequent trajectory of workers' autonomy.¹³⁵ In the end, the formation of extra-parliamentary groups was a serious setback for workers' autonomy. The tragedy, of course, was that the movement's most militant and enthusiastic proponents failed to make good on their innovations in conducting politics and shirked back from the creative aspects of the movement in order to resurrect the party-form, a model of organization that constantly reappeared within *operaismo*, but only with great difficulty and in tension with the spirit of this body of thought. Sergio Bologna, one of the founders of Workers' Power, later offered a severe critique of the decision to form the national group:

¹³⁵ Negri, while not critiquing the push towards political organization in the party form, viewed the rupture as "both an inevitable fact and an undeniably damaging fact for the whole movement" (2007, 99). His own renunciation of the party form, in subsequent years, derived from what he considered to be the "social indeterminateness of the figure of the mass worker" (1982, 212).

[...] we were mistaken to found *Potere Operaio*, we were mistaken to found an extra-parliamentary group. We needed to continue to work in the social realm, to construct alternatives there, to construct workers' centers, to construct social centers, alternative spaces, liberated spaces: we were mistaken, we were under the allure of the old idea, the old ambition of conquering power.... The history of the extra-parliamentary groups was in large part a history of shit, because they wanted to reproduce traditional politics, the party dynamic (2001, 8).

The error of reproducing the party dynamic within the autonomous workers' movement also included with it the same type of "political" fractions that the workers' themselves had already rejected in their solidarity and cooperation in the form of assemblies and in their organizations within the factory. When the workers at Fiat returned from vacation, and by late August when the faction of *Workers' Power* returned to Fiat, they were confused and bewildered to be receiving two competing pamphlets, one from the Turin and Pisa movement, the other from *Workers' Power*.

Initially this had little effect on the workers' commitment to struggle, but it had more profound implications in terms of workers' organization and the trade unions' strategy for recapturing their position in the factories. For example, in early September the struggle at Mirafiori renewed with intensity as three thousand workers in the 32nd office conducted a wildcat strike. Fiat promptly responded by suspending and laying-off the most militant workers and those who participated in the action. General Secretary of the Metal-mechanics union, Bruno Trentin, asserted: "this was retribution for the strikes of July" (in Grandi 2003, 101). The affair marked a continuation in the cycle of struggles leading to the autumn contractual affairs. The unions responded by calling a general strike among all categories of workers. Fiat rescinded the lay-offs. The balance of power had changed in favor of the working class. But with competing sects forming in the student-worker assembly there was little in the way of an autonomous political organization of the workers. In its place, workers began forming more substantive

representative bodies in the workplace. The delegate system that had been formed in May began spreading throughout Italian industry giving rise to the new figure of the worker-delegate as a representative of a relatively homogenous sector of workers in departments and offices within the workplace. Thus, even before the autumn contracts, workers had resorted back to representative forms of democracy and tied their organization to the factory, a strategic move that benefited the unions' position against the more general, "political" aims of the movement.

As part of their overall strategy of "riding the tiger" of the movement, the unions accepted the delegate structure. Unlike the existing Internal Commissions,¹³⁶ which were based on electoral votes along party and trade union lines, the new delegate structure was open to all workers, displaying a unity from the base that the union officials were frantically trying to emulate at the vertexes of their organizations. Within the burgeoning extra-parliamentary left, both *Lotta Continua* and *Potere Operaio* rejected the delegate structure. The latter, with its focus centered on the political organization of the working class, rejected the delegate structure as serving the union's demand of "more power in the factory" (Grandi 2003, 102). For the militants in *Potere Operaio*, the point of the September struggles was not for an increase in power within the factory; rather, the factory was seen as a place for political organization against capital and the launching of

¹³⁶ In terms of the system of representation, at its peak, the Internal Commission at Mirafiori consisted of 21 members that represented 56,000 workers (Partridge 1996, 89). At its peak in 1965, in the metallurgical industry, the Internal Commission had 1,023 members who represented 552,148 workers. The IC was composed along party and union lines. Voting was deeply politicized, as discussed in Chapter 2. By contrast, the delegates arose as a way to take control in the workplace against foremen, the union's bureaucratic presence, and to force employers to implement contractual provisions. Delegates were elected by secret ballot. There was no list for nominees; each worker simply wrote down a choice for delegate. Each delegate was immediately recallable. The ratio of worker to delegate initially was approximately 60 to 50 delegates per worker (Ibid, 81).

a “general political conflict” (1969, 4). Their objective was to “politicize all the workers,” to move from the phase of the “political recomposition of the working class to the political organization of the workers” (1969a, 2). *Lotta Continua*, for its part, rejected the delegate structure with the slogan “*Siamo tutti delegati!*” (We are all delegates!). In principle, their refusal of bureaucracy, combined with the advocacy of direct democracy and autonomy, exemplified in the assembly, provided the justification for their refusal of institutional mediation and reforms. Moreover, like those in *Potere Operaio*, LC saw in the formation of permanent delegates the union strategy to regain control over the workers’ base movement.

The rejection of the workers’ delegate structure demonstrated a limitation in the workerist’s approach to the actual affairs of the working class. This was based primarily on more abstract conceptual matters, such as their interpretation of working class subjectivity in terms of the “mass worker,” but it also was the result of a virtually complete abandonment of the practice of workers’ inquiry or “co-research.” *Lotta continua*, for its part, tended to mythologize “Gasparazzo” and imbued him with such potency that revolution seemed inevitable. These abstract conceptions of working class life seemed to scarcely resonate with the workers, especially with their own opinion of the new delegate structure. For example, in recounting the September agitations, Dino Antonioni, a worker in office 32, described the importance of the affair for the workers’ sense of power and their ability to overcome their fear and temerity:

Each delegate, when he was presented to the head of the office, had with him his roll of paper with the signatures of the workers that delegated him. This was something because they had all overcome their own fear: the workers, by signing for the delegate, felt themselves as representatives of a real movement.... we had directly managed everything—the strikes, the marches, and the assemblies—overcoming the union (Polo 1989, 84-5).

The difficulty for the workers of this office was not necessarily in their lack of political organization or lack of direct democracy and rejection of bureaucracy, but in their capacity (or lack thereof) to generalize their office struggle to other offices; that is, they were unable at this point to overcome the segmentation of the workforce (i.e., division of labor) within the factory. In spite of the competing interests and tendencies within the workers' movement, the delegate structures provided an organizational form, controlled by all the workers who participated, that could be used to prepare the upcoming contractual struggles. In fact, the workers at the base level maintained the initiative in designing their demands, with the external actors (the trade unions, parties, and extra-parliamentary groups) adjusting themselves to try and capture the workers' initiative and direct it towards their own ends. The example of the metal-mechanics contractual struggle demonstrates this point.

The contractual demands of the metal and mechanical unions reflected the participatory spirit of the rank and file, the force of the so-called "mass worker" in the Fordist model of production, and offered a coherent expression of the workers' desires stemming from the militant actions of the past year. Their demand for participation was evident from the fact that leading up to the contract proposal some three hundred thousand workers debated the platform in 2,300 assemblies around the country (Drago et al 1971, 122). Moreover, they equally expressed the desire to control their own time and pace of work by demanding the right to assemble and hold meetings in the factory during work time. Reflecting the general desire to assert more control over their lives, both inside and outside the factory, the contractual demands included: equal salary raises for all, a reduction of the work week to 40 hours for all categories, movement towards

normative parity between *operai* (blue-collar workers) and *impiegati* (white-collar workers), equalization of salary for those under twenty years old, and the right of assembly and meetings in the factory (Ibid; Foa 1975, 185).

These demands struck at the core of the capitalist organization of production in postwar Italy. Workers had expressed a rejection of the deadening pace of work, the continued hazardous conditions, the arbitrarily designed category system, the division of labor, and the power of the foremen on the shop floor. In short, the southern migrant had given vitality, in the expression of the “mass worker,” which represented the core of an autonomously organized working class against labor in general. In particular, they rejected the older generation’s conception of work ethic that understood work as an activity done with pride and dedication. Now, with the enervating effects of the production line, the spiritual basis for this appraisal of labor and the work ethic no longer held. This “refusal of work,” as *Potere Operaio* theorized, was particularly evident from the forms of struggle that workers engaged in throughout the fall as a tactical approach to forcing their power in the contractual negotiations.

During the fall, workers’ actions within the workplace and in communities were limited in nature but specifically directed at capitalist control. To a much less extent did they engage in general strikes, which reflected the strength of their unity and power at the base, but also their general weakness, organizationally, at the national level (and this quickly became evident with regards to the South). In order to control the pace of work, and to continue the struggles beyond the contractual negotiations, workers conducted internal strikes such as the *sciopero a scacchiera* (checkerboard strikes), the *sciopero a*

singhiozzo (hiccup strike), and the *salto della scocca* (skipping pieces).¹³⁷ As a complement to these tactics, workers frequently engaged in internal strikes that, by design, gave expression to their power and control over the factory. It was during these actions that the use of violence became readily accepted within the movement. Often directed against foremen, white-collar workers, and management, internal strikes were occasions to force recalcitrant workers to become political, to take a stand and make a choice between friend and foe. Both *Lotta Continua* and *Potere Operaio* exalted this role of violence. A pamphlet from the former was standard. The priority was to control the political climate in the workplace, to disrupt the work activity and then the workers could move beyond the factory as a site of struggle:

The march cannot leave the factory if it has not, after conducting a procession in the various offices and having thrown out all the scabs (*i crumiri*).

In the moments of struggle such as next Tuesday, we need to begin to strike them. In the assemblies, in the marches, when we are all united we need to spit on them and ridicule them. We need to identify them by first and last name, beginning with the dirtiest rat (*carogne*) and threaten to make him pay dearly (Cazzullo 2006, 69).

In no small sense these actions within the factory took on the image of guerrilla warfare, of class struggle as low-intensity conflict, where violent actions within the factory were seen, as most actions were, as moments for increasing workers' power within the factory. To these ends, in 1969, Fiat workers registered 20 million strike hours, production declined by 3.3 percent, and they destroyed 277,000 vehicles (Ibid, 75-6). But it is important that violence here was not viewed as having any particular role outside of its

¹³⁷ A checkerboard strike consisted of an internal strike whereby one group or department of workers stopped working for a period of time, passing throughout the factory. A hiccup strike signified a very brief factory-wide stoppage of work continued in successive moments during the workday. And skipping pieces on the line involved workers—welders, for example, skipping every few pieces that moved down the production line.

instrumental value in expanding workers' power through the enforcement of a rigid form of workers' unity.

In the fall of 1969, *Potere Operaio* produced articles on the question of violence—“Sì alla violenza operaia” [Yes to workers' violence], “Fiat—La violenza operaia come strumento di lotta” [Fiat—workers' violence as an instrument of struggle], and “1960-1970 Dalla guerriglia di fabbrica alla lotta per il potere” [1960-1970 From the factory guerrilla to the struggle for power]—that emphasized its instrumental use towards organization and the generalization of the struggle (1969b; 1969c; 1969d). The role of violence was accepted as a component of the overall expansion and “radicalization of the struggle” (1969c). During this phase, the importance of an autonomous organization derived from the factory struggles that aimed at extending and radicalizing those struggles throughout society and against the State. With the metal and mechanics strike in late November, which followed a general strike two weeks earlier, the movement seemed to be gathering the type of unity and intensity that *Potere Operaio* had sought to harness into an organized force.

As the contractual deadline approached the trade unions called a nationwide general strike. An estimated 20 million Italians joined the strike. And, at the end of November, the metal and mechanical workers marched and picketed in Rome (Barkan 1984, 76). For *Potere Operaio* the class conflict had reached a “mass level,” that is, the contract battles were seen as one part of a broader continuous struggle against capital that extended through housing and the refusal to pay rent, the student struggle for a guaranteed income, workers in the South, against price increases, et cetera. Against the reformists, they argued that there could be no distinction within these spheres of class

conflict; they were inextricably intertwined in the process of capitalist production and reproduction. Based on worker centrality, it was the purpose of the working class to make “use” of the contractual struggles as a basis to extend the class conflict to society in the name of the “workers’ interests” (Potere Operaio 1969e). The class war, of which contractual struggles served a particular role, was between two diametrically opposed enemies: the goal of the struggles was to ignite a working class war against capitalist control “in all of its articulations” (Comitato Operaio di Porto Marghera 1970). Within the “social factory” no institution was outside the “form” of capital. In November, Potere Operaio expressed the overall nature of class revolt in the social factory:

The workers’ use of these claims consists ... in making them function as an extension to all of society from the struggles and from the factory organization.... The refusal to pay rent, to pay at canteens and for transport can be identified as moments of establishing ties [*collegamento*] between factory and factory ... in the mode of bringing together and developing the attack ... on capitalist society (1969e).

Thus, if the factory was the central “social terrain,” as “the place where class struggle converges,” the “salary relation” was the “terrain of struggle” capable of cementing a unified class struggle against the “overall mechanism of development of the social system” (Comitato Operaio di Porto Marghera 1970; Potere Operaio 1969g). The centrality of the factory was intended to serve as an organizational model that was extended to social struggles based on money through the practice of self-reduction of prices. Within the factory this organizational push was based on the conceptualization of the working class’s “refusal of work” as well as the salary question. On the basis of these claims, Potere Operaio sought a worker’s organization as a counter-power and negation of the “planner-State” (Negri 2007, 105).

The conceptualization of the “refusal of work” embodied the force of a working class subjectivity that rejected capitalist despotism in the overall process of production.

Within *Potere Operaio*, the slogan came to be understood by Franco Piperno as a direct rejection of the principle of productivity. “The refusal of work,” he wrote,

is the discovery of the possibility of the construction of a society in which the free worker collectivity will produce that which is useful for living, to satisfy the fundamental needs, outside of the absurd rules of productivity, and against the rules of productivity. The refusal of work is the refusal of both capitalism and socialism as forms of production that are based on the social extraction of profit. Refusal of work is both against the State and against work (*Potere Operaio* 1969f, 3).

Worker’s revolution was viewed as a negation of capitalist development, as a politically determined mechanism of capitalist despotism over the working class. To this extent, *Potere Operaio* was in open conflict with the historic left. Their frustration with the “reformists” was a recurring affair throughout the decade that now had considerable importance as the trade unions had undertaken a policy of unification and had recognized the workplace delegate structures.¹³⁸ Conceptually, the unions and the parties of the workers movement were seen as operating within a capitalist framework: they accepted the worker as a variable of capital defined through the concept labor-power. At best, *Potere Operaio* believed, the union sought to transform the class’s political expression into a form of economic power: from the self-management of the struggles to self-management of the relations of production, of labor. However, for those in *Potere Operaio*, worker demands made during a contractual struggle were “polemical,” in Tronti’s sense. They were not based on any recognition of “labor value,” which was the open position of the CGIL leadership,¹³⁹ but on the ability of the class to take control over the social wealth. At a minimum, *Potere Operaio* argued, it was impossible to speak

¹³⁸ For a discussion of trade union unity during the autumn 1969 contracts, see *Movimento Sindacale e Contrattazione Collettiva* (Drago et al. 1971, 121-131).

¹³⁹ The official position was presented by Luciano Lama, who became the national secretary of the CGIL in 1970: “the basis for retribution needs to continue to be the value of labor” (*Potere Operaio* 1969g, 3).

of “labor value” without accepting the already existing social hierarchy, an order based on the existence and domination of capital. The working class’s political expression was needed in order to impose a new social order, with new values around time, rules, and methods. In short, the political expression of the working class had to assume a rejection of the factory (and with it a rejection of the concepts inherited from an “objectivist” approach to the working class—labor power, labor value, variable capital, et cetera), a negation of productivity as the ruling norm, and a negation of the commodity form as the basis for social relations, of social organization.

Given their instrumental approach to the contract, and their rejection of institutional mediation as irretrievably bound up with capitalist despotism, it was expected that, when the metal and mechanical workers contract was signed in December, *Potere Operaio* decried it as the first “rip-off” (*bidone*) [Potere Operaio 1969h]. The unions, for their part, while not being able to win all of the workers’ demands, had achieved significant gains that included: a reduction of the work week to 40 hours within a three year span; equal salary increases across the board; limits on overtime; increases in vacation time; the right of assembly; and guarantees against disciplinary abuse (Foa 1975, 187). The unions’ ability to organize and fight for these gains marked a turning point in the workers’ struggles, and in the relations between the trade unions and rank-and-file workers. The newly formed extra-parliamentary groups, subsequently, would find it that much more difficult to organize general support among the workers. After all, for those not affiliated with a particular group there was always the workplace delegate structure, and the unions. And with the latter’s organizational capacity to achieve real

gains, the “hot autumn” turned towards a renewal of trade-unionism to the detriment of the wider alignment of the autonomous workers’ movement (Punto Rosso 2009, 65-8).

The question of institutional mediation was a shortcoming for the workerist’s analysis of the “social factory” in terms of its functional use and as a mechanism for making people’s lives easier while also continuing to expand and generalize the working class struggle against capitalist despotism. Thus, while they correctly identified the need to “jealously defend” the autonomy of the assembly, they did not extend this logic to the defense of gains that, despite emanating from the workers’ base, had been seemingly tainted by the reformist unions. Thus, in spite of the fact that the contract met 90% of the workers’ demands, *Potere Operaio* lashed out against the union’s declaration of “victory.” They wrote: “it is in the measure in which the Union cries victory that the working class, another time betrayed, recognizes how the union is an institution functional to capitalist development and not to the workers’ existence” (Comitato Operaio di Porto Marghera 1970, 53). It is this position, the rigid rejection of institutional mediation, and their failure to recognize the delegate structures, that was partly responsible for the ability of the trade unions to win support from those workers who did not identify with the extra-parliamentary groups or with their critique of unionism along with the overall validity of syndicalism and libertarian left ideas. However, this does not mean that the metal and mechanical workers contract was a defeat for *Potere Operaio* or for *Lotta Continua*. But, as we see below, the implications for both groups’ political direction were intimately connected to this general lack of presence within the factory.

As 1969 came to a close the register of Italian labor conflict affirmed that Italy was a country of class struggle. During the year over five and a half million workers went

on strike with a total of more than 520 million worker-hours occupied by worker disobedience and protest. And following on the general momentum that climaxed in July at Corso Traiano, the gains won during the contracts were viewed as “just the beginning” (Barkan 1984, 77). But the workers’ movement, and the Italian populace, was in for a rude awakening as occult forces in the State and in the extra-parliamentary right were hell-bent on preventing the rise of workers’ power. Indeed, in his epic film, *Novecento*, Bertolucci drove home the central meaning of post-Fascist Italy: the bosses remained and they still had power. If workers’ autonomy had correctly analyzed the “social factory” as the proper locus of working class revolution, and had successfully developed this strategy from the militancy of the mass worker of the Fordist factory, it was the reactionary forces that unleashed a terroristic counter-insurgency operation against the workers’ movement. On the morrow of the “hot autumn” the willingness of the State to resort to violence against its own citizens was revealed with horrifying consequences.

Piazza Fontana and the origins of the “strategy of tension”

The intensification and expansion of the workers’ movement, including the rise of the student movement and various organizational advancements in society against the accumulation of capital, was met by a continued escalation of tension and violence by forces opposed to the working class movement. In the fall of 1969 these opaque forces gained national attention with the bombing of December 12th at the *Banca Nazionale della Agricoltura* (National Bank of Agriculture) in Milan’s Piazza Fontana. The square, tucked under the towering presence of the city’s *duomo*, is located in the heart of Milan. Significantly, across the street from the bank’s entrance was the former *Hotel Commercio*, which was occupied by student-workers the year before, becoming Milan’s

first “social center” (Balestrini and Moroni 1988, 258-61).¹⁴⁰ The bombs were set to explode at 4:30 on a Friday afternoon. The timing was designed to coincide with closing of the bank—it was the only bank operating with such late hours, the others having already closed. The attack was also directed at the farmers and small proprietors in the peripheral area of Milan who came to the city on Fridays to conduct their transactions. Within minutes of the bank’s doors closing, and with the clients still inside conducting their affairs, a small bag on the floor exploded tearing apart the bank’s interior and those in it.¹⁴¹ At the same time an unexploded ordinance was found in Milan’s *Piazza della Scala*—about a kilometer diagonal from Piazza Fontana. Within an hour three bombs exploded in Rome, though with much less devastation. At the National Bank of Agriculture sixteen customers died and forty-five were injured. Overall, the December 12th bombings produced sixteen deaths and at least one hundred and fifty persons injured.

In the preceding months there had been mounting repression by the State apparatus in response to, as both *Lotta continua* and *Potere Operaio* believed, the

¹⁴⁰ The former *Hotel Commercio* was occupied by “student-workers” (those who both went to school and worked) on November 28, 1968. The occupation was viewed as constructing an “urban comune” in the midst of the city’s center understood as the “control room of the bourgeois paradise.” The occupier’s graffitied the external walls as if they were its political journal. Among their writings was that they were “a fist in the heart of the capitalist city,” with a new “house” that “is at the service of the disadvantaged students, workers, immigrants, and exploited” (Balestrini and Moroni 1988, 261). The occupation was destroyed by police agents in July 1969, incidentally the high point of militancy in Turin, and the hotel was later demolished.

¹⁴¹ For an excellent photographic-historical account, see *1969-1972 dalla Strage alle Elezioni*, Milan: Sapere Edizioni (Magrone and Rocchi 1972). Among the vast literature on the Piazza Fontana affair, the most thorough and recent account is Paolo Cucchiarelli’s *Il segreto di Piazza Fontana*, Milano: Adriano Salani Editore (2009).

“initiative of the uncontrolled struggle” (Viale 1978, 206).¹⁴² It is sufficient to highlight a series of events in order to depict the political character that violence assumed as the State began conducting its “strategy of tension.” Of significant consequences for the subsequent development of the autonomous workers’ movement was that, beginning in the “hot autumn,” violence became a more widely practiced tactic and its significance moved beyond the symbolic and metaphoric, as well as instrumental purposes, to embody its sacrificial and deadly reality. Moreover, this marks the period when tensions between the movement and the State developed into an open conflict.

While this tension had been latent and fairly restricted, events in the fall evinced an increasingly violent intensification of class conflict. At Pisa, on October 25th a teargas canister launched by police during a protest killed a militant. Two weeks later a police agent, Antonio Annarumma, was killed during a manifestation at *Teatro Lirico* in Milan. *Lotta continua* responded to the first by introducing its emblem of the closed red fist and to the latter by exalting “workers’ violence.” Their lead editorial after Annarumma’s murder called on workers’ to engage in violence “from the factory to the street” (Lotta Continua 1969a). For the militants in *Lotta Continua*, it was not a question of violence, but of class conflict: “In a conflict between the proletariat and the police, right is not on the side of he who has “died”; right always remains on the side of the workers” (Ibid).

¹⁴² The autonomous, and hence “uncontrolled,” struggle may have been the impetus for the repression, but the right-wing forces behind the attacks had a more general and widespread attack against the political expression of “workers’ power.” For them this was perceived both in the unitary movement of the unions, the continued attempt by the PCI to be accepted into government, as well as the construction of extra-parliamentary groups, and workers’ base committees, and community organizations (Francovich 1992).

Lotta Continua's tactical acceptance of violence led the PCI and other left forces to denounce the group as "adventurist." From the State apparatus, the President of the Republic, Giuseppe Saragat, had openly accused the extra-parliamentary left for the murder of Annarumma. In this climate of small-scale "tit-for-tat" retaliatory political violence, the State began clamping down on the autonomous movement's journals: Piergiorgio Bellocchio, the editor and director responsible for *Lotta Continua*, was first arrested. Two weeks later, Francesco Tolin, director of *Potere Operaio*, was arrested on the grounds of "instigating the Italian workers to revolt against the State" and that "he contributed in all the ways to create a pre-revolutionary climate" in Italy (*Potere Operaio* 1969i, 3). As a result of these incidents, the antagonism that came to dominate the 1970s, between the State and the autonomist workers' movement, increased in intensity. For its part, *Potere Operaio* retorted with the claim that they were the targets of an "ideological terror campaign" designed to create a climate suitable to open state repression (Ibid). In his defense, Tolin pointed to the role of the journal, but also of its indeterminate position with respect to the workers' autonomous struggle: "Our journal has made a chronicle of the violence. We sustain that the working class is looking for new methods of struggle against the bosses. It is necessary that the working class be strong. Workers' violence does not depend on me: it has its autonomous forms" (Ibid).

The direct repression of the extra-parliamentary left was only one consequence of Piazza Fontana. More poignantly, the affair marked the beginning of the State's "strategy of tension." For most of 1969 there had occurred small violent actions that had been attributed to the extra-parliamentary left that, in actuality, had been staged by right wing,

neo-fascist groups.¹⁴³ None of these had achieved the type of magnitude needed to blemish the workers movement in the public eye, at least at the national level. And they were, moreover, practice runs for a more serious terror campaign. The bombing of Piazza Fontana was intended primarily to discredit the workers' movement, as a premise for the ascension of a "law and order" state that could put an end to the class struggles of 1968-69, perhaps along the lines of the Greek example. Judge Felice Casson, the magistrate who led the state investigation into "Operation Gladio" in the early 1990s, described this strategy as aiming to "create tension within the country to promote conservative, reactionary social and political tendencies" (Francovich 1992). Vincenzo Vinciguerra, who, as a member of the right-wing group *Ordine Nuovo* [New Order], took part in various terror attacks, gave a more powerful depiction. Speaking openly for the BBC Documentary "Operation Gladio," he described the use of terror with stark precision:

You had to attack civilians, the people, women, children, innocent people, unknown people far removed from any political game. For one simple reason: they were supposed to force these people, the Italian public, to turn to the State, to turn to the regime and ask for greater security. This was the role of the right in Italy. It placed itself at the service of the State, which created a strategy... aptly called the "strategy of tension".... So, people would willingly trade part of their freedom for the security [to go about their daily lives] (Ganser 2005, 7; Francovich 1992).

The bombing at Piazza Fontana was the first national symbol that the "hot autumn" had turned deadly. It marked the acceleration of street violence that continued throughout the 1970s. The more sensational acts followed the script of public bombings targeting the general population, such as the train bombing at Bologna in August 1974, and then a

¹⁴³ For example, Guido Viale recounts: "Before Piazza Fontana, in the middle of summer, the fascist cell (in reality SID [*Servizio Informazione Difesa*, the Italian secret service]) of [Franco] Freda and [Giovanni] Ventura made their general rehearsal with an explosion of bombs simultaneously on eight trains. Still before, in the spring, a bomb in the hall at Fiat in Milan allowed the commissioner, Calabresi, of opening the hunt against a group of anarchists.... The future protagonists of the strategy of tension had learned their trade, manipulation of bombings combined with judicial inquiry" against the workers' movement (1978, 220).

second time in August 1980. However, less publicized was the fact that neo-fascist forces targeted the entire working class—all cultural and organizational aspects of working class politics were attacked in a similar vein to Mussolini’s fascist raids of the 1920s.

The consequences of Piazza Fontana on the extra-parliamentary left and within the broader workers’ movement were many. First, the militant groups interpreted the affair as a devastating moment, a crucial passage, and a decisive change in the course of the movement. In terms of its cultural significance, Luigi Manconi and Adriano Sofri, both leaders in *Lotta continua*, interpreted that the affair marked the “loss of innocence” (*la perdita dell’innocenza*), a veritable rupture of the norms and mores that bound their political contestation. Manconi captured it thus: “We had believed in the class struggle, a bitter and violent conflict. But we considered it also a battle of the piazza that was within certain rules of play, a sort of accepted ceremonial war between both contenders” (in Cazzullo 2006, 90). Commenting along similar lines, Marco Revelli noted that Piazza Fontana signified a loss of the creative, anti-authoritarian spirit of ’68: “In the grand theater of 1968 the violence was mimicked, ritualized, and virtual” (Ibid, 91). Violence was no longer mere spectacle; as Negri had theorized, violence was the stark reality of a system based on the need to sublimate workers’ autonomy within capital.

The second significant consequence of Piazza Fontana was that the revolutionary left now held the State to be, if not its direct nemesis, an open enemy of the movement. *Lotta continua* and *Potere Operaio* both believed that the State was responsible for the bombing. When Giuseppe Pinelli, an anarchist that the police had arrested for the bombing, fell four stories to his death from a window in the Police station, militants in *Lotta continua* launched an open campaign against the commissioner, Luigi Calabresi.

The culmination of their investigations resulted not only in the birth of the practice of counter-information (*controinformazione*), but also in the first comprehensive examination of the affair—*La strage di state* (the State massacre), which sold one hundred thousand copies in six months.¹⁴⁴ The condemnation of the State also marked the definitive rupture with the parties, unions, and institutions connected to the State. Thus, the pretext for the entrance of the PCI into government with the “historic compromise,” as part of the political control over the autonomous movement, became a central concern in this period (yet not coming to fruition until the critical year of 1973). This antagonism to the State was captured by Franco Piperno’s sobering remarks: “comrades, you cannot pretend to make the revolution and to maintain a clean criminal record” (quoted in Grandi 2003, 112). The revolution required “illegality” of one form or another; the State and its juridical form was the antithesis of the workers’ autonomous movement. For leaders of *Lotta Continua*, like Guido Viale, this was decisive: “There is nothing obscure. It is all clear. To confront the force of the workers’ initiative, the State descends into the field with instruments that are irreducibly its own: terrorism, the secret services, the agent provocateurs, the commissioners who are beyond suspicion, the printing of information with their press releases, [and] the magistrates” (1978, 218).

The onset of right wing terror and open State repression was only one of the boss’s responses to the “hot autumn.” And while this may have been the most dramatic response, strategically the fall struggles demonstrated the inability of the mass worker to make the passage from contractual, factory-centered struggles into an open political

¹⁴⁴ A militant from *Lotta Continua* assassinated Calabresi in May 1972. The Pinelli assassination proved highly successful in galvanizing militants, and became a centerpiece of the movement’s culture. For example, the affair was the basis for Dario Fo’s play *The Accidental Death of an Anarchist*; the anarchist movement generated the widely sung Pinelli’s Ballad [La Ballata del Pinelli], which was released on record in 1970 by Joe Fallisi.

struggle. *Potere Operaio*'s grim assessment of the "mass worker" led the group to reflect on the crisis of class composition, and to begin the process of rethinking the composition of working class revolt in the West. Given the need to confront the question of working class subjectivity, workerist theory was compelled to revisit their critique of political economy as the "social factory." It was at this point that Antonio Negri's work demonstrated a certain maturation of *operaismo*, and it is useful to consider his framing of the issues, which take part within the particular discussions in *Workers' Power* and, more generally, in the broader autonomist workers' movement. Negri's analysis, following his 1968 critique of Keynesian political economy, was developed in the early 1970s around a theory of the State, the working class subject identified as the "mass worker" and the crisis of this category, an analysis of capital's response to the hot autumn, and the consequences for working class strategy via the slogan [*parole d'ordine*] "the refusal of work." Through inquiry on these conceptual matters, Negri theorized the "social factory" in its most mature expression within *operaismo*, moving beyond the hegemony of the worker in the direct production of labor-power to include the reproduction of labor.¹⁴⁵ The "social factory," for Negri, was understood in terms of domination and control of the working class by capital, when the norms governing the factory began to dominate wage labor in its "general sociality" (Negri 2005, 4).

¹⁴⁵ In Marxian terms this is understood as the transformation whereby the society moves from being under a condition of formal subsumption within capital to a real subsumption. Michael Hardt has interpreted Negri's use of these concepts in the following manner: "formal subsumption" is understood in terms of the existence of non-capitalist forms of social production within capitalism. That is, "certain pre-capitalist and autonomous forms of production and social cooperation persist external to capital and they are merely formally subsumed within the global framework of capitalist rule." In contrast, "real subsumption" occurs when "labor-power and capitalist relations of production are extended horizontally throughout society; labor and production are purely social determinations and hence the 'social factory' is absolutely diffuse. Real subsumption, in short, is defined by the direct rule of capital over society" (Hardt 2005, 20).

Specifically, Negri theorized the “social factory” through an analysis of the role of money as “pure domination” with the “enterprise” as the particular form of command over the *general sociality* of work and labor. We cannot, however, separate Negri’s theoretical development without an understanding of the discussion that was occurring within *Potere Operaio*; his work must be understood as a contribution to a collective discussion (Hardt 2005, 9).

In the midst of a confused period of state repression, diminished funding for the journal, and the ending of the metal mechanics contract, *Potere Operaio* held their first national conference at Florence [January 9-11, 1970] in order to assess the impact of the “hot autumn” on the class movement. The central point of the conference focused on the contention that a centralized organization was necessary and that the group’s propaganda had to extend beyond the factory, while holding it as a central place in class analysis, to themes and political claims in the realm of capital’s reproduction of labor. There were three relations to the conference that paralleled previous discussions of organization within *operaismo*. The analysis of 1969 was read diversely as: 1) a moment of political unification and material conquest that was the beginning of a cultural process of class composition, or what was referred to in previous chapters as the “compositionist” understanding of organization¹⁴⁶; 2) the hot autumn was compared to Russia in 1905, a direct reflection on the position set forth by Tronti’s “1905 in Italia” several years earlier (1964d; see chapter. 4). According to this position, a party was necessary to exercise foresight and increase militancy in the movement while also executing the general function of direction, what *Potere Operaio* had begun to call a “party of insurrection.”

¹⁴⁶ This point was made by Sergio Bologna in his relation to the conference, “Classe e capital dopo l’autunno,” and is later developed in his seminal article, “La tribù delle talpe” (The tribe of moles), in the journal *Primo Maggio* (May First).

These two opposing viewpoints persisted in the national conference casting a shadow over the third relation that focused on the productive role of science and technical organization of work, a position that occupied a more foundational basis in *operaismo* than the concern for organization as expressed in Panzieri's seminal article in Quaderni Rossi. (This latter relation to the convention occupied a mediating position insofar as the structural determinants of dead labor, in technology and fixed capital, had a direct relationship with the workers who were more available to control the tendency of social transformation.) The debate on organization was not settled at the convention, but was played out in the pages of *Potere Operaio* throughout the year. For those in favor of a form of "Leninization" of the group, there remained the necessity to construct, "at all costs," a "rigid and lucid organizational will" (*Potere Operaio* 1969f, 3). Members from Rome, Padua, Florence, Milan, and from the South, in general, lent their favor to a disciplined and militant organizational form; opposing them were some members from Bologna and the *Comitato Operaio di Porto Marghera* (Workers' committee from Porto Marghera). What is interesting is that the push for organization can be read as a general response not only to the state violence of the previous months, but also as a direct response to the shortcomings of the workerist reliance on the mass worker as the revolutionary agent of working class subjectivity.

The failings of the "mass worker" as a concept for understanding working class subjectivity were captured by Negri's comments that this category was incapable of making the "decisive pass" towards revolution. Instead, a strong and clear political organization with a hierarchical structure that connected to the working class through a vanguard structure internal to the workplace was deemed necessary. What Steve Wright

identified as *Potere Operaio*'s "crisis of class composition" in the post-hot autumn period became an opening to further organizational rigidity and traditional party-form system that workerist thought had consistently, through the concept of autonomy, *distinguished* [distanced] itself from (2002, 133). Like the earlier split in *Classe Operaia*, it was demanded that organization take over the reigns of strategy, and that class composition was not necessarily the central realm for its development, positions which led to divisions between Negri, on the one side, and, on the other, Piperno and Oreste Scalzone.

In the midst of debating the future structure of *Potere Operaio*, the group came to forge an alliance with breakaway members of the PCI who, in the fall of 1969, had pushed for a more councilist position within the party only to leave the PCI and form the group *Il Manifesto*. The fruit of this alliance occurred in the formation of the *comitati politici*, the political committees as a move to ensure the group's political power within the factory. For *Potere Operaio*, the decision to join forces with the *Il Manifesto* group bore with it the contradictions of their own trajectory as moving toward a more centralized and militarized form of political action; *Il Manifesto*, in comparison, was a much more moderate and traditional political group.

The formation of the *comitati politici* (political committees) was based on the observation of a few distinct trends that persisted from the hot autumn throughout 1970. First, it was recognition of the potential for worker agitation and antagonism (*potenziale di combattività*) with respect to the capitalist organization of work. This was based on the fact that, in contractual struggles throughout the year, gains made by the metal and mechanical workers were extended throughout major economic sectors (Barkan 1984, 77). Second, the committees were viewed as taking on the role of factory vanguards that

were necessary to fill in the perceived organizational void. This vanguard role served two functions: on the one hand, they were a bulwark against the rise of “new unionism” and concurrent legislative changes that demonstrated the success of the unions’ “riding the tiger” of the movement. Thus, the committees performed a vanguard function against what Workers’ Power perceived to be the new union strategy of integrating the workers’ initiative into a reformist position. Importantly, the Workers’ Statute¹⁴⁷ of May 1970 had provided the legal basis for recognition of factory councils¹⁴⁸ and other forms (i.e., coordinating organisms) of union presence within the factory (Art. 19). The ability of the three unions to achieve legislative and contractual gains won them support among the workforce, as evinced by the increase in union membership in the post-hot autumn period (Foa 1975, 198-203).

The role of the political committees also served a positive function as the central force of the movement leading to the potential formation of a new workers’ party. In this manner, *Potere Operaio* and *Il Manifesto* sought to maintain the offensive character of the workers’ movement. The committees were, in essence, an attempt to bring an alternative organizational presence to the working class. The lack of which was demonstrated in the hot autumn, but then driven home in the August struggles at Porto Marghera (Sacchetto and Sbrogiò 2009, 54-57). Theoretically, the debate on the political committees spanned the course of a year with conferences in September 1970, January 1971, and September 1971. In the course of these debates between two quite diverse

¹⁴⁷ “Lo statuto dei lavoratori” (Workers’ Statute), public law number 300, became law on May 20, 1970. The law has been reproduced on a CGIL webpage at: <http://www.lomb.cgil.it/leggi/legge300.htm>.

¹⁴⁸ In the summer of 1970 the unions began constructing councils allowing only for workers’ delegates to hold positions in them. Within three years, Confindustria, Italy’s central industrial trade group, estimated that 1/3rd of factories had such councils.

groups, a vision of workers' organization was set forth. While the debates are interesting for a number of reasons, I want to focus here on the divergences between the two groups in order to emphasize how *Potere Operaio's* view of the "social factory" determined their understanding of the committees as the nuclei of a national network that went beyond the factory to encompass a host of social struggles and to bring them under the rubric of class struggle.

Before their alliance was forged, *Potere Operaio* had lamented that *Il Manifesto* group lacked a "rigorous economic and political analysis on the national and international situation" (Potere Operaio 1971, 4). In particular, the former's conception of the working class was tied to the structure of production and to the sale of labor-power, a position that workerist theory had long discredited. The differences between the two were the result of their understanding of political economy and their conceptualization of the working class, with implications for the role of the committees. *Potere Operaio* understood the latter as playing a more expansive role and was broader in scope than *Il Manifesto's* viewpoint. For Workers' Power the committees represented "instruments of permanent organization of the vanguards who are present in the factory, in the quarters, in the zones, as instruments of bringing together [*collegamento*] all these situations," which would ultimately lead to a common strategy and to a new revolutionary party (Ibid, 10). For its part, *Il Manifesto* was weary of a direct confrontation with the state and the endless conflicts that occurred in the *piazza* (Grandi 2003, 152-3). They preferred to deepen their presence within the factory at a time when *Potere Operaio* was seeking to turn an economic crisis into a revolutionary crisis—an acceleration and push towards organization and increased militancy, an extension of the struggles beyond the factory

and organized directly against the state.¹⁴⁹ In a polemic directed at *Il Manifesto* this point was driven home: “When we decided to call ourselves “Potere Operaio” ... we believed that grand possibilities ... are open to this class on the terrain of the social factory and against the State—so again—and more than before—POTERE OPERAIO!” (Potere Operaio 1971a, 38).

Toni Negri: the “social factory” as capitalist command

Theoretically, this polemic was most comprehensively treated by Negri, who set forth his understanding of the changing composition of the working class through an expanded conception of the social factory that reflected the transformations underway within capitalist political economy. In short, for the first time in workerist theory the social factory went beyond production to include the realm of capitalist reproduction. In order to make this argument, Negri used Marx’s discussion of “crisis” and “tendency” in the *Grundrisse* and showed how these concepts could be applied to the destruction of “value” that was occurring in the global monetary system. Thus, Negri’s contribution to the third Conference of *Potere Operaio*, published as *The Crisis of the Planner State*,¹⁵⁰ opened new analysis within *operaismo* to the questions of the State, the social factory, class composition, and the production of value (Negri 1971; Hardt 2005, 11).

¹⁴⁹ On acceleration of the conflict from the perspective within *Potere Operaio* the following is emblematic: “if ten years before the problem was how to determine the political crisis, now it is a matter of understanding how to transform the capitalist crisis into a revolutionary crisis” (Potere Operaio 1971, 6).

¹⁵⁰ Crisis of the Planner-State was completed on September 25, 1971 and was used as an opening pamphlet for the third national conference of Workers’ Power. The pamphlet was reproduced as a supplement to a special issue on the crisis of the monetary system in *Potere Operaio* (Negri 1971). It was published in paperback form by Feltrinelli in 1974, as well as reproduced in the collection of pamphlets written by Negri in the 1970s in the book *I Libri del Rogo* (Castelvecchi 1997; DerriveApprodi 2005). For purposes here I will cite the English translation of this latter work, *Books for Burning* (2005).

In terms of the “social factory” it is useful to recall that the two early proponents of the concept, Panzieri and Tronti, differed in their understanding of how capitalist relations occurred beyond the factory proper. In the former’s version, the relation was based on the planning capacity of capital around the extraction of surplus value. For Tronti, the social factory was a form of social organization that generalized capitalist production to society. It is my argument that Negri synthesized these approaches in order to move beyond them and thus construct a new basis for working class composition. That is, in examining the relationship between the production of value and the formation of legitimacy within the social order, Negri utilized Panzieri’s focus on the planning capacity of capital and its power dimensions understood as capitalist “despotism” and Tronti’s focus on social organization understood as the construction of regimes of legitimacy. In this manner, Negri defined the “social factory” as a regime of domination exercised by capital over the entirety of the working class.

This understanding reflected the transformations in the class-capital relations following the hot autumn. In order to investigate these changes, Negri utilized Marx’s development of “tendency” and “crisis” in the *Grundrisse*. The concept of “tendency” was not conceived as a panacea or as an “inevitable law”; rather it was understood as an “adventure of reason” that pointed the way towards a

general schema that takes as its starting point an analysis of the elements that make up a given historical situation. On the basis of that analysis, it defines a method, an orientation, a direction for mass political action (2005, 27).¹⁵¹

The tendency served as a means to understand the “objective recomposition” that was occurring in the relations of production and the consequences of that for political practice.

¹⁵¹ See Marx’s *Grundrisse* (1973, 422-3, 442-6, 747-50).

In part, the “historical situation” was defined in terms of “crisis.” However, the concept of crisis was not understood as catastrophic or apocalyptic; it was understood in terms of power within specific social relations of production, “relations which are determinate and have an immediate prehistory” (Negri 2005, 14). The militants of *Potere Operaio* understood the crisis as initiated by capital as a direct response to the unification and intensity of the “mass worker’s” struggles; crisis was understood as a tactical choice by capital to weaken society’s productive forces. Negri wrote:

[c]risis in Marx is seen as a necessity for capital, a means of putting the brakes on development, a limit to the expansion of the productive forces when these begin to upset a certain specificity and proportionality in the relations of force (2005, 9).

Inflation, restructuring, unemployment, plant closings, political turmoil, and, importantly, the liberalization of money, were all seen as a tactical move by capital to end a particular form of development—Keynesianism—because the productive forces in that particular form (the working class) had begun to exercise a certain amount of control over the political development of capital, over its planning capacity.

Negri focused on Marx’s “Chapter on Money” in order to examine how capital utilized this factor to upset Keynesian planning. This argument was central to his expanded conception of the social factory. His analysis sought to explain how money operated as a basic contradiction within the movement of the tendency: on the one hand, money represented a measure of equivalence in commodity exchange; on the other hand, it exists as a tool for capital’s domination over social production (2005, 2). For Negri, the end of the gold standard, and with it the Bretton Woods monetary system that had governed the post-WWII order, was proof that the wage struggles of the previous years had compelled the “abstract totality” of money to “emancipate itself” away from the value of labor toward control over what Marx called “external conditions” that are

governed by “matters of chance” (Marx 1973, 148).¹⁵² That is, within money the tendency pointed towards a productive role for money outside of and against the production of value. In short, the “tendency” that emerged out of the hot autumn struggles, included the role of money as a general “antagonism” to the Keynesian form of development, as an attack on industrial development in favor of exercising its domination over the “dimensions of general sociality” (Ibid). Money had abandoned the factory because of the intensity and militancy of the mass workers’ political struggles within the factory. Thus, Negri understood the “tendency” to point the way to a new form of class composition that reflected the needs of money in its productive role, and as an attempt to reconfigure the relations of power between the classes in favor of capital (Ibid, 22). Since the “mass worker” demonstrated an “obdurate refusal ... to become the subject” of capitalist development, capital was forced to attack these productive forces as inimical to its general command function (2005, 7, 23). Capital and class now related in direct antagonism, the “totality of power of capital [and] totality of a recomposed proletariat” (Ibid, 10).

With money as direct antagonism to labor its command function extended beyond the direct production of commodities to all of social labor in order to determine exchange value. Negri’s analysis of money’s productive role as antagonism forced him to

¹⁵² For Marx’s analysis of money’s independence in circulation, the following passage from Notebook 1, “The Chapter on Money,” is exemplary: “The need for exchange and for the transformation of the product into a pure exchange value progresses in step with the division of labour, i.e. with the increasingly social character of production. But as the latter grows, so grows the power of *money*, i.e. the exchange relationship establishes itself as a power external to and independent of the producers.... As the producers become more dependent on exchange, exchange appears to become more independent of them, and the gap between the product as product and the product as exchange value appears to widen. Money does not create the antitheses and contradictions; it is, rather the development of these contradictions and antitheses which creates the seemingly transcendental power of money” (1973, 146).

move beyond the “mass worker” in an attempt to understand the new class composition and beyond the focus on the factory in terms of the Fordist-Taylorist model towards something more fluid and diffuse. In this analysis the term “factory” expressed the enterprise as the new “form of capital’s domination over production” (2005, 24-5). For its part, the enterprise form contained its own “norms of command” that covered “factory labor” and “all social labor” (Ibid, 25). In order to determine exchange value, money had to exercise its domination within the overall process of social production understood as the “general sociality” of labor, or the processes of the reproduction of labor. The emancipation of capital meant that its form of domination and control had to be extended to include all of society; money’s productive function now resided in its ability to control the “external conditions” of the law of value. Negri’s “social factory” was defined by the domination of society by capital, as an attack by money on the producing class that was made possible by the autonomy of finance, which he viewed as an expression of the failure of Keynesianism to control the “independent variable”—the working class.

The “social factory” for Negri was the product of the unyielding power of money, and its attempt to control the contradiction between the increasingly social character of production and the need for exchange and exchange value. Strategically, this critique of political economy led to the demand for a political wage as an attempt to break capital’s attempt to control society by denying its ability to establish exchange value. For the first time, workerist theory had openly moved beyond the factory as the locus of working class politics; the attack on value that was taking place within the tendency of the monetary system provided the objective criterion for moving beyond the factory proper. Indeed, for *Potere Operaio*, the factory was now understood as a “straightjacket”

that limited the potential for “new forms of struggle on new terrains of conflict for the new objective of the political salary” (1971b, 13).¹⁵³ Any attempt to remain wedded to the factory, as exemplified by the group *Il Manifesto*, smacked of “fabbrichismo” (factoryism)—as an attempt to co-manage worker’s domination as a subject of capital (1971c, 21-22). The proper locus for a revolutionary working class politics transcended the walls of the factory and was centered on the refusal of work understood through the demand for a political income, a guaranteed income.

As a continuation of the demands made during the 1960s that separated income from labor, the demand for a political income was intended to break the connection between income and work. Within the environment of restructuring and unemployment, the demand for a political income was not intended as a palliative for the consequences of capitalist crisis; poverty and unemployment were not the causes for the demand of a political income. For *Potere Operaio*, the political salary was intended as allowing the “capacity to create a space of struggle against the capitalist mode of production and its overall system of work” (Ibid, 21). That is, demand for a political salary was the basis for offering the material resources for worker organization in the struggle against work. Importantly, the slogan adopted by *Potere Operaio* in the fall of 1971 was “guerra di liberazione dal lavoro!” (war of liberation from work!) [1971d]. The expansion of capitalist command to the terrain of exchange value and command over social labor necessitated the final departure from the factory proper (and with it any attempt to struggle for the “liberation of work” or democratization of work), introducing the struggle for appropriation as the direct expression of political salary.

¹⁵³ This opinion also prevailed in *Potere Operaio*’s disagreements with *Il Manifesto*. Writing a “response” to the latter group, they noted that “in the current situation, within the crisis, the factory struggle is nailed shut” (*Potere Operaio* 1971a, 38).

The end of factory-centered politics, which paralleled the demise of value and exchange value centered on labor, had two important consequences for workerist political practice: the introduction of appropriation and insurrection as strategic factors. The transition to appropriation was part of an understanding that the demand for a “political salary” was qualitatively different and expressed the working class’s conscious understanding that they were the “producers of every social good and of not understanding salary as a measure of salary as purchasing power, but as an arm which imposes the struggle for the appropriation of produced goods” (1971e, 4). The struggle for appropriation reflected the rejection of money as mechanism for control and expression of capitalist command. However, it also expressed the rejection of value, circumventing the need to measure value in favor of the understanding that producers had made the material goods but only partly enjoyed them; appropriation of produced goods was intended to enjoy and consume the material richness of the world that producers had been denied by capitalist command. This focus on consumption of goods rather than on the fact that labor was a commodity, which Marxism had long pointed out, tended to obfuscate the commodity nature of capitalist society. By focusing on the consumptive needs of the proletariat, Negri focused solely on the need for enjoyment (*godimento*) of social goods; the refusal of labor as appropriation was conceived in a world without labor, that is, to the detriment of theoretical considerations on the role of labor in a communist society. Rather, as Costanzo Preve noted: Negri “makes the refusal of work the existential and metaphysical place of every creativity and felicity.” Echoing *Lotta Continua*’s earlier critique of the focus on money, Preve charged that Negri’s conception of communism was simply “capitalism without work” (1984, 72-3). Thus, part of the

“social factory” as capitalist command outside the factory entailed a moving beyond labor and production as central elements of working class theory to a focus on the consumptive enjoyment of the material needs of the working class. Appropriation, as direct action, was the expression of this theoretical turn. By itself, however, it was insufficient. The practice of insurrection against the State was intimately connected to the material practice of appropriation.

The introduction of insurrection as a theme for working class politics followed the mass uprising in Reggio Calabria in late 1970. Despite lacking an overall presence in the South, *Potere Operaio* viewed the event as demonstrating the proletariat’s behavior as anti-institutional (Wright 2002, 137). Moreover, if appropriation was the strategic choice of working class politics as a replacement to the demand for wages or more traditional factory-centered demands (even if polemical), then the practice of insurrection was seen as the demand for power against the command of capital over all of social labor. Both appropriation and insurrection were strategically important during the crisis of the early 1970s as factory struggles were increasingly under the control of unions, and capital’s restructuring moved apace. These latter factors were the cause of *Potere Operaio*’s increasing marginalization within the factory, despite its formation of the political committees. Understood as the crisis of class composition, the group attempted to come to terms with the new composition of the working class, but in doing so they relied on inadequate tools, having long ago abandoned the practice of workers’ inquiry and *conricerca* (co-research).

Insurrection and appropriation were intimately connected to the militarization of the movement as part of the broader difficulty in determining the changing

composition of the working class. As we have seen, throughout the period the practice of self-reduction of prices (*autoriduzione*) was fairly widespread throughout the autonomous left. This appropriation of social services was accompanied by “mass illegality” in appropriating social goods, the self-reduction of work hours and the unilateral control over work life in the factory—all of which was understood as the management of power in daily situations by the working class for its own material needs. *Potere Operaio* sought to harness these practices into an organizational form by establishing “red bases”—as an extension of the political committees—that were considered as serving a vanguard function. The direct purpose of the latter was to constantly push the envelope of the struggle: “the problem is to force the movement beginning from the terrain of appropriation towards an insurrectional path” (*Potere Operaio* 1972a, 36). That is, the extension of the “social factory” analysis to include the production and reproduction of capital included with it the practical result of a militarization of the movement as the preeminent behavior of working class antagonism to capital.

Insurrection became the identifying behavioral feature of the new working class composition as well as the leading tactic for organization towards what *Potere Operaio* began calling “the party of insurrection” (1971e). As part of a broader acceptance of violence as a political tool in the post-Piazza Fontana environment, *Potere Operaio* distinguished itself by establishing that violence was only acceptable if it was open, organized, and at a mass level (*Ibid*, 1972). In this regard, they rejected the so-called “third world” model as inadequate to the advanced capitalist countries as well as “exemplary” acts of terrorism that were emerging from clandestine groups such as the

Gruppi di Azione Patriotica (Patriotic Action Group, or GAP) and the *Brigate Rosse* (Red Brigades). Against the notion that the construction of small nuclei of armed proletarian groups was a proper strategy of insurrection, *Potere Operaio* put forth its understanding of the armed struggle as derived from the workers' movement:

To reconnect the proposal of the passage from the armed struggle to the class offensive as it is found in these years in Europe and above all in Italy is the node of the question. Because ... [it is] only from the material movements of the class, only from the communist program of the refusal of work that the workers in these years have expressed in the capitalist metropolises can a specific process of the construction of armed struggle develop itself (1972, 3).

The advocacy of an armed struggle was only legitimate if it was connected with the contents of the mass movement as a “general offensive against the capitalist system, [as] a communist capacity of destruction of the commodity system and salaried work” (Ibid). Clandestine groups had rejected the need for connecting to the mass movement; that is, they had rejected the theory of armed struggle that would lead to an organization of the struggle. Increasingly wary of a fascist coup in Italy, especially after the Pinochet coup in Chile, but also in conjunction with the Greek example earlier, sectors of the workers movement resurrected the idea of a “New Resistance” whose focus, in general, rested on the need to eliminate fascist elements among the leading sectors of state and private power. Thus, the armed struggle had its clandestine elements, which *Potere Operaio* rejected, that targeted centers of bourgeois power in order to ward off an imminent fascist coup.

The differentiation between the ideas of insurrection and armed struggle that *Potere Operaia* advocated and the clandestine armed struggle of GAP and *Brigate Rosse* was rooted in its connection to appropriation. For *Potere Operaio*, the two were intimately connected and signaled the way to new forms of organization by “social

labor,” a new and still uncertain form of class composition that was emerging out of the crisis of the early 1970s. In contrast, GAP and to a lesser extent BR focused primarily on armed attacks against the capitalist power. The case of Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, whose long-time support of workers’ movements in Europe and guerrilla movements in the global South, most dramatically exemplified this distinction. On the morning of March 15, 1972 Feltrinelli’s body was found under the pylon of an electrical grid in the periphery of Milan. The editor and propagator of revolutionary ideas ostensibly died while attempting to attach explosives that would have eliminated the electrical supply to the city. Given his stature, Feltrinelli’s death symbolized a fragmentation of the extra-parliamentary left between those who looked for a more traditional approach to politics (i.e., elections, parties, voting, referendums, etc...) and those who began to close themselves deeper into clandestine armed struggle. This fragmentation was the effect of many other factors, both internal and external to the movement. The upshot was that coming out of the most militant period of worker politics—the hot autumn broadly dated as 1969-1973—the extra-parliamentary left was increasingly marginalized within the actual workers’ movement. Militarization, insurrection, a focus on violence, the decline of the mass worker, the inability to solve the question of organization, the resurrection of old, staid conception of the party-form, and a constant focus on capital to the detriment of workers’ inquiry all were fundamental in the weakening of the extra-parliamentary left.

Importantly, throughout this period the conceptualization of the “social factory” that pointed the way to working class revolution as a political action by both those members of the class who directly produced and reproduced capital began to take form in practice. Moreover, this aspect of the movement was partially interpreted by Toni Negri

and others in *Potere Operaio* and incorporated into a richer theoretical understanding of capitalist political economy. The “social factory,” after a decade’s worth of theoretical interpretation and practice, began to come to its full fruition by moving beyond the factory gates to incorporate the broader working class into the orbit of a working class revolutionary theory. As we see in the next chapter, this was not without serious limitations and shortcomings. For example, the women’s movement was initially almost entirely understood by the men in *Potere Operaio* through the lens of male factory workers. That is, now that the critique of political economy had been emancipated from the factory, it would take serious theoretical reflection and debate in order to develop a coherent approach to working class revolution. No longer would revolution appear to be communities of women and children rallying to the cry of factory workers as had occurred during the affair of Corso Traiano, but there began to emerge the idea of parity between a variety of struggles. During the 1970s the Italian extra-parliamentary left understood this in terms of the question of worker centrality. To what extent did the factory worker retain a privileged, central focus within a revolutionary theory of working class politics?

CHAPTER 7

THE SOCIAL FACTORY AND THE QUESTION OF “WORKER CENTRALITY”

The challenge for the women’s movement is to find modes of struggle, which, while they liberate women from the home, at the same time avoid on the one hand a double slavery, and on the other prevent another degree of capitalistic control and regimentation. *This ultimately is the dividing line between reformism and revolutionary politics within the women’s movement.*—Mariarosa Dalla Costa, *The power of women and the subversion of the community*

When capitalist relations of production infiltrate all the pores of society, when the interest of social life becomes subsumed within the process of the production of value, then the workers’ refusal to submit to the rhythm of work implies an immediate political potency (*potenza*)—Franco (Bifo) Berardi, *genesis e significato del termine “autonomia”*

The fundamental thesis on which all the theory of operaismo is constructed is, if you will, that of a successive abstraction of work that runs in parallel to its socialization”—Antonio Negri, *Dall’eclisse dell’operaio massa alla centralità dell’operaio sociale*

Introduction

The understanding of the “social factory” put forth thus far has as its basis the Panzerian and Trontian configurations. Uniting their conceptualizations is “worker centrality”—the idea that the salaried worker is the central social subject of working class revolution within advanced capitalist society. Against the orthodox Marxist viewpoint that locates this subject as the productive force leading society into a post-capitalist and communist future, the critique put forth by *operaismo* highlighted the figure of the mass worker as a political, rather than economic or productive force constructing a new society for itself. That is, rather than celebrating the productive role of labor as its emancipatory feature, *operaismo* looked toward the working class in order to discover new forms of liberation via the “refusal of work” and “liberation from work.” Yet, key to these “new forms” was an understanding of the “social factory,” to the affects of capital’s extension into the social realm, and how this was being negated by a politically composed working class. Panzieri’s conception relied on the “law of concentration” with capitalist planning

expanding outward, despotically, to control society from the factory proper. Hence, his conception remained within the factory with the worker as the privileged revolutionary actor. Tronti, for his part, argued that the salaried worker was the key agent of working class revolution and that this social subject was the central actor within the increasing proletarian character of advanced capitalist society. That is, to the extent that capitalist society took on the commodity form in its social relations, the working class, as a social subject, was generalized to society but still limited by the figure of the paid worker. In short, his depiction of the social factory neglected the sphere of reproduction. Toni Negri's singular contribution to the social factory analysis resided in his extension of capitalist command over society. Yet, his analysis was hindered by the necessity for overcoming the problem of organization and a weakness in the understanding of class composition in times of capitalist crisis and transformation following the hot autumn. At times, and despite the promise of an overarching critique of political economy that would unite diverse social groups (i.e., the student movement and the burgeoning women's movement) within a class analysis, Negri relied on the notion that the factory worker was the vanguard and central feature of working class politics. This was most evident in his analysis of the affairs of Fiat's Mirafiori and Rivalta plants in March 1973, but then later rescinded in part by his development of the *operaia sociale* (social worker) as a new form of class composition [see below]. Despite the difficulties that *operaismo* had as a political project in moving beyond the factory worker as the central category of working class antagonism and/or revolution, by the early 1970s a considerable amount of political activity had pushed the social factory analysis to incorporate those aspects of working class life that went well beyond the direct point of production to begin, incorporating

those aspects that penetrated the reproduction of labor. The impact of this politics resulted in questioning the privileged notion of the worker as central to class politics. In short, worker centrality was the key theoretical debate within the Italian left of the 1970s and it emerged because of the critique of political economy that has been investigated thus far under the rubric of the “social factory.”

It is the purpose of this chapter to demonstrate how the social factory analysis laid the foundations for this critique. As we have already treated the subject of students in chapter 5, this chapter begins with the women’s movement, the rise of a feminist critique of housework, of capitalist despotism in the home and, particularly, in the lives of housewives and in the community. The second part of this chapter elaborates on the “end of the parliamentary groups” and the birth of *autonomia* as a direct response to the organizational failures of the “mass worker” and worker centrality. That is, *autonomia* emerged as the organizational expression of an acceptance of the “social factory” as the proper critique of political economy. As will be seen, this was by no means *prima facie*; there existed a considerable amount of contradictions and limitations. The last part of the chapter is concerned with Negri’s conceptualization of the “social worker” as an expression of class composition within the “social factory” that sought to introduce within a class politics the theoretical and practical possibility of unity within diversity. As a matter of periodization, it is well accepted that the theoretical configurations introduced by *operaismo* experienced a rupture in the movement of ’77.¹⁵⁴ This chapter does not get

¹⁵⁴ For a discussion from the perspective of those who were integral to the development of *operaismo*, see Enda Brophy’s “Italian Operaismo Face to Face: A Report on the “Operaismo a Convegno” Conference 1-2 June 2002 – Rialto Occupato, Rome, Italy (2004, 277-298). The major text addressing the history of class composition and how to understand the “movement of ’77” that was most visible in university protests in February-March is Sergio Bologna’s “Tribe of Moles” (1978, 7-81). For the connection between *Autonomia* and its relationship with the culture

into this historical question; rather, what is of interest here is understanding the practical culmination of the “social factory” as a critique of political economy that was open and fluid, and created the theoretical possibility for the incorporation of diverse segments of the working class into its ambit of antagonism to capitalist command and working class revolution.

Wages for housework and the rise of Italian feminism

For much of the history of *operaismo*, conceptualizations of society followed Mario Tronti’s judgment that only those at the immediate point of production could generate antagonism towards capital. Women, insofar as they existed outside the workforce, and outside of the definition of working class, were, at best, given secondary consideration. This position was consistent with the history of orthodox Marxism and was embodied within what we have called the “historic left”—the parties, trade unions, and civic associations: women’s issues were relegated to “personal” issues that had little to do with private property and the economic structure of capitalism. In her introduction to one of the first collection of documents on the Italian feminist movement, Rosalba Spagnoletti aptly noted that the “parity of sexes” was traditionally considered in terms of economic development and the redefinition of gender roles: “the fundamental element that remains is the insertion of woman in the productive process, a strategic objective as part of an alliance with political, union, and party forces bearing with it implications of a general character” (1974, 22). In this worldview, the direct process of production was the privileged site of working class analysis; working class politics was wedded to the factory, encapsulated by the internal happenings of the factory life. The genesis of

that informs the “movement of ’77,” see the third and final volume of *Gli Autonomi* (eds. Bianchi and Caminiti 2008). For testimonials and autobiographical reconstructions of 1977 movements, see *Millenovecentosettantasette* (Manifestolibri 1997).

autonomist Marxism and, particularly, the culture of *operaismo* contained, in its roots, the negation of this worldview. Panzieri's intellectual contribution, which carried into a good portion of Quaderni Rossi and beyond, was to bring into the class analysis the forces of capital within the broader framework of social relations in postwar neo-capitalism, against the focus on ownership of property and the formalization of working class politics that followed from that perspective. Thus, by the mid-1960s, Italian *operaismo* had affected a shift in the discourse within Italian Marxism by focusing on capitalism as a social relation and extending their critique of political economy to include the entire circulation of capital in determining its exploitative aspects (i.e., extraction of surplus value). The fundamental moment for the "new women's movement" in Italy (and, parenthetically, not too different from women's movements throughout the industrial world) derived from the student movement from 1967 on and worker politics in the "hot autumn." The basic lesson that women drew from this experience, with regard to Marxism, focused on the need to work outside of the official left; that is, the need to make politics outside of the traditional avenues. In practice, this meant a complete rejection of the postwar Union of Italian Women (Unione delle Donne Italiane)¹⁵⁵ and numerous critical assessments of Togliatti's postwar "Discourse on Women" (1965; Ibid, 20-1).

Much like the discussion of the student movement, the discussion here of the feminist movement is limited to those segments that relate to a class analysis and, more particularly, to *operaismo* and the "social factory." The Italian movement contained

¹⁵⁵ The PCI established the UDI in 1944 around women's issues related to the end of the war: voting rights, pacifism, parity of salary, childcare centers, and pensions for housewives among others. The slogan of their second conference in 1947 was: "For a happy family, for peace, and for work" (Ginsborg 1990, 85).

within it what British feminist Selma James noted as a binary distinction between those women who focused on “caste not class” and those who focused on “class not caste”—more than a matter of emphasis this distinction had real consequences for political practice and the overall movement of the late 1960s (1972, 4).¹⁵⁶ Within the new women’s movement the emphasis oscillated between “caste” and “class” depending on the particular group’s focus.¹⁵⁷ For purposes here, two groups are worth noting: *Lotta Femminista* (Feminist Struggle) and *Rivolta Femminile* (Women’s Revolt). The latter was formed in the summer of 1970 as a collective of autonomous groups that represented the first theoretical expression of the conditions—individually as well as politico-economic, cultural, and sexual—of women’s oppression. From their initial discussions emerged the seminal document of Italian feminism, “Sputiamo su Hegel. La Donna Clitoridea e La Donna Vaginale” (We spit on Hegel: the clitoral and vaginal woman) [Lonzi 1974].¹⁵⁸ Their central import resided in emphatically separating women’s liberation as subjectively distinct and different from male identity and from class politics.

¹⁵⁶ Within the extra-parliamentary left the women’s movement was greeted with hostility and skepticism by the male-dominated leadership of groups like *Lotta continua* and *Potere operaio*. The former, which remained as an organization longer than Workers’ Power, and became more centralized and traditionally oriented as the 1970s went on, infamously attacked the first major public manifestation of women on December 6, 1975. Men from *Lotta continua* deemed unacceptable to the movement a “women’s only” march (Ginsborg 1990, 369; Negrello 2004, 185). For its part, *Potere Operaio* dismissed the women’s movement and claims for civil rights and equality sardonically claiming that “[c]apital has already “equalized” women at Mirafiori, assigning them to the assembly lines” (n.d., 53).

¹⁵⁷ For an excellent discussion of the nuances between the two positions within the early development of Italian feminism in the late 1960s and early 1970s see the interview with Alisa Del Re in *Futuro Anteriore* (Borio et al 2002).

¹⁵⁸ Originally written as the “Manifesto di Rivolta Femminile,” “Sputiamo su Hegel” was published in 1974 by the group as part of a collection of its writings (Lonzi 1974). It has also been reprinted in Spagnoletti (1974, 95-124) with an abridged text in Balestrini and Moroni (1988, 473-477). The text is also available on the internet in [Italian](#) and [English](#) (accessed July 3, 2013).

For *Rivolta Femminile*, the “myth of complementarity” between the sexes was an ideological justification mystifying men’s power over women.¹⁵⁹ This was fundamental. Women’s liberation could not be located within the class struggle alone; it was essentially an issue of sexual roles. For them, the history of philosophy exemplified men’s domination with Marxism being one part that “sold us the hypothetical revolution” (in Balestrini and Moroni 1988, 476). Ultimately, their rejection of being subsumed within the class struggle, as women, stemmed from their rejection of Hegelian metaphysics, which, they believed, was solely concerned with the affairs of men: “the class struggle, as a revolutionary theory developed by the master-slave dialectic, equally excludes women” (Ibid). From these considerations, *Woman’s Revolt* concluded that women’s liberation could only be an affair of women, of their capturing of consciousness as a separate social subject, and their expression in society. To that end, they negated the potentiality of analyzing women’s connection with the theoretical conception of class; they failed to treat the innovations that had occurred within Italian Marxism and its development of sociology and discussion of the social factory as a critique of power within the social relations of neo-capitalism. In short, they favored an analysis that emphasized women as a subject against the conception of women within a particular social order.

This lacuna within the feminist movement was most thoroughly treated by *Lotta Femminista* (LF, Women’s Struggle). The most prominent of the women’s groups that had a Marxist formation, the membership of *Lotta Femminista* derived from Padua and Ferrara, where workerist ideas had a strong and dynamic presence. The group was

¹⁵⁹ The notion of “complementarity” or parity was embedded in the postwar Constitution in Article 3, which begins: “All citizens have equal social dignity and are equal before the law, without distinction of sex....” (Costituzione della Repubblica Italiana).

formed at the beginning of 1971, at the same time that *Potere Operaio* was becoming a more centralized organization under the leadership of Oreste Scalzone and the group from Rome. In their initial platform, LF called for a reduction of the workweek to 20 hours for all, self-management of the body, nurseries, and, importantly, a salary for domestic work (Negrello 2004, 185). While *Potere Operaio* was skeptical, if not hostile, of the women's movement and what they perceived as its tendencies towards "separatism," they were content to pick up on the demand of wages for housework.¹⁶⁰ Almost fanatically obsessed with the question of organization, class composition, and the functions of capital, *Potere Operaio* was more interested in *Lotta Femminista* in terms of strategy rather than integrating their theoretical import into a more fully developed conception of the social factory (Potere Operaio 1971f, 32-33). Importantly, however, *Potere Operaio* argued for the need to connect the struggle of the housewife to the factory worker, not merely as a secondary question that would "fall with the revolution," but as "a determinant link in the chain of capitalist power on all of society" (Ibid). This fell short for those in *Lotta Femminista* who argued that *Potere Operaio* still operated within a conception of class politics that was informed solely by a "male definition" (James 1972, 5). The central importance of the women's movement, thus, resided in their attempt to put forth a solution to women's liberation in their relation to capital that was equally important to all aspects of working class liberation.

In her seminal article, *The power of women and the subversion of the community*, Mariarosa Dalla Costa expanded the workerist understanding of class by incorporating

¹⁶⁰ *Lotta Femminista*, in 1972, along with groups from England, the United States, and France gave birth to the International Woman's Collective. Selma James was the most prominent and well-known member from this collective who founded the "wages for housework" campaign on the international stage (Malos 1980).

the realm of capitalist reproduction into the analysis of the social factory. The initial problem taken up by *Lotta Femminista* was how to understand the relationship between women and capital as a question for class analysis. *Operaismo* had opened the door to analyzing capital as a social relation and, early on, included the entirety of capitalist circulation as the basis for accumulation and exploitation of the working class. The theoretical import of Dalla Costa's article derived from this aspect of workerist thought as she incorporated domestic work into the creation of surplus value. In this sense, her contribution to the understanding of the social factory was to introduce a new social subject, the housewife, as a central agent, challenging the notion of worker centrality of the factory worker, or the "mass worker." In doing such, she broadened the theoretical basis for a working class attack on capital to include the community and the home. Years later, reflecting on the founding of *Lotta Femminista* and their theoretical contribution, Dalla Costa, wrote:

In the Fordist society of those years, we had revealed that production roughly revolved around two poles: the factory and the house; and that woman, because her work produced the fundamental commodity for capitalism, labor power, had a fundamental lever of social power in her hands: she could refuse to produce. In this, she constituted the central figure of 'social subversion' ... (2002).

Women's relation to capital ultimately centered on the housewife as a producer of labor power; the basis of the community resided in the figure of the housewife, the capitalist family, and the broader social services that reproduced the working class. Ultimately, Dalla Costa provided a theoretical justification for the inclusion of woman within a class analysis that broadened working class antagonism away from the historically privileged site of the factory and those at the immediate point of production to include women's relation to capital.

The demand of "wages for housework" espoused by *Lotta Femminista* needs to be

qualified. It was not a claim for equality to wage labor, that the housewife should be recognized by capital as a figure containing a “saleable commodity”—labor power. Against the idea that liberation meant turning housewives into labor power, or wage earners, Dalla Costa wrote: “the independence of the wage earner means only being a “free individual” for capital, no less for women than for men.... Slavery to an assembly line is not a liberation from slavery to a kitchen sink” (1972, 33). The integration of women into society could not proceed along the lines dictated by capital. Any understanding of women’s liberation had to have as its basis the shattering of the role of the housewife as a contributor to social production. Importantly, this position was quite aware of the need to not lend itself to capital’s power over the class, i.e., a recomposition of the class. The demand was part of the recognition of women’s “level of social power” in refusing to contribute to capitalist accumulation (Federici 2000, 1-3).¹⁶¹ For Dalla Costa, recognition of this position could never be considered liberating, as “woman is the slave of a wage slave, and her slavery ensures the slavery of her man” (1972, 39).

Wages were considered to represent a form of power, of economic independence for the housewife, not only from her husband but also as a means to establish an identity in society through the establishment of a “new degree of social power” (Ibid, 34-5).¹⁶²

Wages were considered as a mechanism to be utilized in order to alter their social

¹⁶¹ Silvia Federici, in her contribution to the first international conference of the committee on the salary, emphasized this point: “It needs to be clear, still, that when we struggle for the salary we are not struggling to enter into the relations of capitalist production because we were never outside of them. Instead, we struggle *to destroy the plan of capital on women*, which is an essential movement of the division of labor and of social power internal to the working class, a division through which capital has been able to maintain its power” (1974, 127-8, emphasis added).

¹⁶² For further discussion of the practical needs of the women’s movement and its relation to the demand for wages see Del Re’s interview in *Futuro Anteriore* (2000, 2).

standing as created by capital through the family and wage labor. In Dalla Costa's argument, capital had created a regime of "separation and exclusion" in which the family was segmented in its social relations through temporal, spatial, psychological and emotional components. The call for wages was akin to the mass worker's demand for higher wages: as a strategic demand designed to increase their size of power as understood by the central role of the wage within capital.

Lotta Femminista was in a polemical discussion with those that the workerists identified as "reformist" (read: socialist, or the planning function of capital) as contrasted with revolutionary. Just like the demands of the "mass worker" for "more wages, less work," the women's movement demand wages for housework so that they could control their contribution to social production. For Dalla Costa and *Lotta Femminista*:

The challenge to the women's movement is to find modes of struggle that, while they liberate women from the home, at the same time avoid on the one hand a double slavery and on the other prevent another degree of capitalistic control and regimentation. *This ultimately is the dividing line between reformism and revolutionary politics within the women's movement* (Ibid, 48, italics in original).

The new women's movement was expressed as inherently incorporated into the overall class struggle: the rejection of capitalist work ethic, of the logic of productivity, of discipline. Liberation could only occur through the "refusal of work" for both the housewife and the factory worker as a negation of capitalist despotism and as creating new forms of social control by the working class. Importantly, much of their alternative was based on overcoming the exclusionary features of capitalist society that also entailed certain forms of dependency. This required, however, an autonomous understanding of women and their relation of capital. It was the women's movement and their capacity for claiming a form of separation, analytically, that made possible the expansion of the "social factory" to theoretically incorporate the household and community within

considerations of class composition on its own terms and not subservient to the factory worker, or wage labor.¹⁶³ As a movement of the excluded, Dalla Costa wrote, we “are taking the initiative in this struggle so that all other excluded people, the children, the old and ill, can re-appropriate the social wealth; to be re-integrated with us and all of us with men, not as dependents but autonomously, as we women want for ourselves” (1972, 38). The role of the housewife was fundamental, as part of the social factory, and was as central to class politics as the wage laborer. *Lotta Femminista* had put forth a coherent explanation of how the social factory included both production and reproduction within the circulation of capital accumulation.

The extra-parliamentary left had difficulty incorporating the contribution of the women’s movement into their analysis. That is, perhaps the most dynamic feature of the Italian left was virtually neglected by the movements that emerged out of the “hot autumn.” With the end of *Potere Operaio*, which is discussed immediately below, and the rise of *autonomia*, the dynamism generated by the women’s movement was mostly lost. Sergio Bianchi, in the opening essay of the series on *The Autonomists* by DerriveAprode, accurately noted:

For a certain period, some sectors of feminism looked with attention and curiosity towards the experimentation of the area of autonomy around the themes of liberation, sexual difference, desires, and happiness. But it would be a brief relation because the components of organized *Autonomia* did not know how to comprehend the fundamental valence of the revolutionary contents in the proposal of the feminist revolt (2007, 18).

For those within *Potere Operaio*, it was clear that they had not registered the importance of *Lotta Femminista*. Writing in the last issue on the demise of the group, they maintained the traditional notion of the factory worker liberating all of society from

¹⁶³ Years later Negri recognized this in his letters from prison. Speaking of the feminist movement he wrote: “the processes of liberation were moving forward according to a singular cultural trajectory, the first sign of which was separation” (1983, 127).

capitalist control (albeit not through its productive prowess, but because of its understanding of liberation via the “refusal of work”): “the conflict with the state is born in the factory and extends to society carrying the entire force of the proletariat against the institutions” (1973, 6).¹⁶⁴ They had not forgotten the importance of the community struggles, but had certainly overlooked the role of housewives. Perhaps this was a result of their weakness within the factory as unions had witnessed a renewed stronghold between 1971-1973, but within the community they were wedded to “worker centrality”: “the worker’s attack on income is developed more outside than within the factory” through a “generality of behaviors that a small nucleus attack work with actions that reflect on all of the productive structures”—i.e., absenteeism, refusal to pay for services and such (Ibid, 7).

By the middle of 1973 these sentiments expressed the practical reality that the extra-parliamentary groups had exhausted themselves and that the turn towards centralization was at odds with the base of the workers’ movement.¹⁶⁵ For its part, *Potere Operaio* was internally rift by dissension over the questions of centralization, class behavior, and organization (Wright 2002, 151; Negri 2007, 111-2; Borio et al 2002, *in passim*). Not without irony, their dissolution was influenced by the occupation of Mirafiori in 1973 in which a new generation of workers demonstrated the superfluity of

¹⁶⁴ Toni Negri, in *Partito operaio contro il lavoro* (Workers’ party against work) [June 1, 1973], adhered to the factory-centered logic, despite his later turn of hand. He wrote: “the privileged site of both the refusal of labor and the attack upon the rate of profit” remains the factory (2005, 77).

¹⁶⁵ Internal to *Potere Operaio*, a damning critique came from Franco Berardi who later wrote: “Potere operaio was looking for the Promethean conflict, the possibility of a heroic stand out of the revolutionary will based on an undifferentiated view of daily life” (1998, 122).

the extra-parliamentary groups (Balestrini and Moroni 1988, 436-7).¹⁶⁶ In his interpretation of the affair, Franco Berardi wrote:

In the workers' protest not only was there the will to impose on the bosses better work and pay conditions, but there was also the sentiment of a radical refusal of the workers' condition and of its industrial form...

The new workers of Mirafiori were in good part young people who participated in the upheaval of '68.... And in the explosion at Turin of March '73 the claim of time for life [*tempo di vita*] from the trappings of productivity means also a consciousness of a maturity in social and technological knowledge that was sufficient to place liberty from work as the order of the day in terms of history and politics (2007, 53).

For Negri and his following within *Potere Operaio* the lesson was clear: the struggle remained entirely within the workers' initiative and expressed a capacity for mass action that demonstrated an exercise of workers' power by a new strata of workers who demonstrated the behavior of the new working class (Negri 1973a). Beyond its significance for pointing out the superfluity of *Potere Operaio*, the "party of Mirafiori," for Negri, reaffirmed the notion that offensive actions served a "unifying function" as the basis of organization. We will return to this later with the concept of the "social worker," but it remains important here to point out that Negri was being consistent in his reduction of value to the question of power that we discussed earlier in his "*Crisis of the planner-state*" (Wright 2002, 154-8). In the middle of 1973 *Potere Operaio* dissolved itself as a political group. For most of the members—whether they adhered to what has been called the Negrian faction and the Scalzone or Roman faction—within a relatively short period they would be part of the burgeoning "Area of Autonomy," yet few others, most notably Massimo Cacciari, would follow Tronti's decision years earlier and join the PCI in hopes of finding space to radicalize the party as it made a push into government as part of the

¹⁶⁶ For documentation of the struggle at Fiat between autumn 1972 and march 1973, see the journal "Controinformazione", n. 0, Milano, October 1973.

well-known “Historic Compromise” (see below).

The “Area of Autonomy” and working class revolt against the “social factory”

The rise of *Autonomia*¹⁶⁷ was not a linear process that derived from the dissolution of groups like *Potere Operaio* and, shortly after, *Gruppo Gramsci*. In terms of continuity with the tradition of workerism or autonomous Marxism, the rise of *autonomia* occurred within the same milieu (i.e, the factory struggles of the late 1960s and local base committees) but also consisted of a different composition. Without getting into the differences of periodization and historiography, and as the previous chapter discussed, *Autonomia* was partly the product of the crisis of class composition and organization that was occurring within groups such as *Potere Operaio* (Bologna 1978; Cuninghame 1995). In the same sense, it was also a response to the increasing centralization within the extra-parliamentary left as an overarching whole (Alfa Romeo 1974, 134). In addition, *Autonomia* emerged as a response to the historical situation of the class movement in that particular moment, the key characteristics of which were: restructuration, increased unemployment, the oil crisis, inflation, austerity, the ascent of political and labor leaders

¹⁶⁷ The literature on *Autonomia* is in its initial stages within Italy and is virtually absent from the Anglophone world. What exists is largely memorialistic, autobiographical, and testimonial. For the most part, research has focused on the “hot autumn” which dates from 1969-1973 and then focuses on the “movement of ’77.” Yet, it is the intermediary years that are important for the theoretical and practical transformations within the Italian working class movement. Patrick Cuninghame’s unpublished dissertation is the lone exception (2002). In Italy, this lacuna has begun to get some attention with the multi-volume series published by DerriveApprodi that treats the theory, struggles, and history of *autonomia* (2007, 2007a, 2008). Equally important and somewhat overlooked was the experience of *Rosso*, one of the more theoretically dynamic and experimental journals within workers’ autonomy (Guizzardi et al 2008). *Rosso* had a more direct lineage of classic *operaismo* and was constituted by former members of *Lotta continua* and *Potere operaio* in Milan and members from *Potere operaio* who were in agreement with Negri in Padua (Bianchi and Caminiti 2007a, 59). In his 1978 interviews, Negri commented that this period—’73-’77—was a “very felicitous situation from a theoretical point of view,” and that the role of *Rosso* was on par with the importance of *Quaderni Rossi* a generation earlier (2007, 127). This unexplored material awaits more extensive research and academic consideration (Funaro 2007).

within the state and factory, and State terror (Bianchi 2007, 68-72). Yet the movement as a whole—if it can generically be described as such—demonstrated in theory and practice a patronage to workerist thought around the categories of “refusal of work” (Castellano 1980), a critique of capitalist technology, and a rejection of a productivist ethics (Balestrini and Moroni 1988). The main point of this section is to demonstrate how the incorporation of the “social factory” as a critique of political economy, informed the theory and practice of *Autonomia*, and how the concept was given new meaning around the thematic of needs and the consequent understanding of working class liberation.

Autonomia emerged as a response to the organizational, social, economic, and political factors present in the workers’ struggles following the “hot autumn.” Yet, what is intended by the term *Autonomia*? Throughout this work the word “autonomy,” or the phrase “workers’ autonomy,” has been used to express a few different meanings. Its most common usage within the Marxist left had been associated with the idea of trade union independence from the political parties. This was evident up through the founding of *Quaderni Rossi*. Within the latter the term also began taking on the theoretical importance of the working class as a distinct and independent category of analysis. Following Tronti and, later Negri, working class autonomy was embedded within the class-capital dynamic with a working class unto itself. Lastly, we saw immediately above, the women’s movement introduced the concept as a term of separation, both practical and analytic, to distinguish the role of women in the relation to capital and introduce the household and community as part of working class composition. The theoretical import of what, in the section, is the rise of the “area of autonomy” or the movement of *Autonomia*, is discussed below.

In discussing “autonomia” first and foremost is the importance of understanding that it was a loose network of workplace and social collectives (Cunningham 1995). It follows from this localism that there was a wide array of political ideologies, beliefs, and practices depending on the particular group and its immediate history (Bianchi and Caminiti 2007; 2007a). Thus, there is no “autonomia” but rather the plural “autonomie.” Patrick Cunningham, in his unpublished dissertation, located *autonomia* in five separate categories that reflect the chronology of the movement as well: 1) a network of workplace collectives based in the factory; 2) regional groups within what was known as the “Area of Autonomy”; 3) localized social collectives that focused on social services and the appropriation of social goods; 4) “creative” groups who worked on community radio and “free radio” forms of militant communication; 5) a dispersed formation of clandestine groups who formerly were derived from the self-defense formations [*servize d’ordine*] of the extra-parliamentary groups (Cunningham 2002).¹⁶⁸ Within this diverse collection of groups—what has been roughly grouped as an “autonomy of the social” and “workers’ autonomy”—there remained an intersection of political activity and a core of shared beliefs, which demonstrates the influence of workerist thought as a form of the continuity of ideas. In his introduction to the history and documentation of “Organized Autonomy,” Luciano Castellano identified these in terms of: the refusal of labor; thematic of needs against production and capital; an understanding of capital as a social relation; and the reading of the “state-form” (1980, 7-21; Wright 2005). While it would

¹⁶⁸ Sergio Bianchi explains the historical origins of *autonomia* as deriving, initially, from *operaismo*, and a diverse set of groups with leanings towards Marxist-Leninist, anarcho-syndicalist, libertarian, and radicals. The movement would later develop along elements that were counter-cultural, feminist, and ecological (2007, 10-11). A large part of the theoretical work in these years concerned this development within *autonomia* as an attempt to understand the new behaviors and attitudes of the changes occurring within the composition of the working class.

be misleading to lump these groups together and slide into the Calogero Theorem¹⁶⁹ and the persecution of the autonomists around the April 7, 1979 arrests, there was a consistent set of ideas that brought the group together. It is important to stress this point here in lieu of the lurid history associated with the popular mystifications of the movement that was intimately tied into the climate of terror in 1970s Italy.¹⁷⁰ What I want to emphasize is that the “area of autonomy” shared a set of beliefs and ideas, that these derived to some extent from workerist theory, and that the theoretical adherence and political practice of these ideas was determined by quite specific local histories.

In order to frame the theoretical cohesiveness of *Autonomia* it is useful to begin with Franco Berardi’s synthesis where he identified multiple ideas uniting the general Area (2007). The first two points that he identified—*im-mediatezza* and *de-regolazione*—relate to the movement’s origins within the immediate point of production and allude to the workerist influence on the early formation. The first concept, immediacy, was understood as the “affirmation of a particular interest”—the workers’ interest as understood through the slogan “liberation from work”—against the general interest of capitalist society (Ibid, 41). Since Tronti’s “Copernican revolution,” the working class had been given analytical priority and autonomy. Its claim for itself as a particular interest rendered the working class as a political subject, removed from the subordinate

¹⁶⁹ Named after the Paduan prosecutor Pietro Calogero, this “theorem” asserted that there existed a line of continuity between the “red terror” of the Red Brigades and the autonomous movement. The result was the criminalization of the movement most well known for the April 7, 1979 mass arrests of Negri and his colleagues at the Institution of Political Science at the University of Padua (Negri 2005, ix-xxii).

¹⁷⁰ The renewed interest in *autonomia* in the last decade, sparked mostly from the publishing house DeriveApprodi in Rome, and was reflected by the interest of the younger generations who were and are part of the global justice movement, the occupy movement, and the “disobedient” and “indignant” movements, has, *inter alia*, sought to rectify the epithets and accusations surrounding *autonomia operaia*.

position as labor-power under the command of capital. On the heels of the “hot autumn,” demands such as “more money less work” reflected not only the need for less hours of work, but also for the expansion of time spent not working. The Roman section—or Volsci as they were known, because of the location of their office—noted that the demand for the reduction of work hours entailed “the affirmation of a new will of the liberation of man at this stage of his evolution and of a new asset of work and of socially useful production” (Comitati Autonomi Operai 1976, 35).¹⁷¹ The potency of this understanding of time liberated from capitalist work took on an increasing importance within the social factory: “when the interests of social life becomes subsumed within the process of producing value, there is an implicit and immediate political power in the workers’ refusal to put themselves under this mode of work” (Berardi 2007, 42). It is important to bear in mind that this understanding united not only the early components, which were more factory-centered, but also by the mid-1970s the counter-cultural movement which sought to “appropriate” cultural activity (i.e., music, radio, food, cinema, technology, intellectuals, etc...) and strip it of capital’s logic of production (Bianchi and Caminiti 2008 *in passim*). Thus, the notion of immediacy, in the sense of asserting a political subjectivity, united the broad movement against the expansion of capital’s tentacles within the broader social factory, loosely understood in terms of interests and needs of the working class and the consciousness of this that was exemplified in practice, or “social life.”

¹⁷¹ Toni Negri introduced the conception of time in his attempt to formulate a new class composition based on social labor (1982, 219-224). Time, as an expressed “need” within the working class struggle, was perhaps first discussed within workerism by Mariarosa Dalla Costa and *Lotta Femminista* (see above).

The second unifying concept identified by Berardi was “de-regolazione,” or a breaking of the rules or principles of capitalist production, including institutional mediation. In the early 1970s this was intended within *Autonomia* as a critique of the capitalist organization of work, and was intimately connected to the understanding and practice of the “refusal of work.” Lucio Castellano highlighted the importance of this concept as demonstrating continuity between the workers’ base committees that were forming in 1968 and *autonomia*. Providing a broad understanding of the concept, Castellano wrote:

...the history of “autonomia” is constituted by an arch of articulated and differing political experiences that cover the whole arch of the 1970s and which their identity centers around the forceful idea of the “refusal of work.” It is not only an ideology of emancipation, but a way of reading capitalist society, of its protagonists, of the way power is distributed in it, of the dynamic of its development and of its end, that constitutes their scheme of orientation and the hegemonic connective fiber that covers ten years of political confrontation with the organized workers’ movement (1980, 8).

The refusal of work signified the capacity of worker’s power to alter the power relationships in the daily practice of exploitation and resistance to the production of surplus value. In practical terms, this alluded to the introduction of new forms of technology and a general restructuring of the production process as well as the formation of new regulations that respond to the spirit of individualism that underpins the rejection of rules. But the concept also pointed the way towards liberation from work that included a reduction of work time and a general flexibility of labor. [It is worthwhile to point out that this aspect of *Autonomia* anticipated the neo-liberal configuration of deregulation of enterprises and liberty from the state along with the privatization of social services and social safety net programs.] However, while this capitalist aspect shares the liberating theme of deregulation, this was more a response to the workers’ movement and it took place after a certain shift in the balance of power between the two classes in favor of

capital by the late 1970s. Similarly, the push for flexibility of labor shifted from the working class goal that intended to break capitalist discipline—and in fact celebrated precarious labor with *precario è bello* (precarious is beautiful), a slogan of the movement—and with a shift in power relations between class and capital it produced an anxiety-laden conception of precariousness. Pointing to the defeat of *Autonomia* on these matters, Berardi wrote: “perhaps the more profound indication and more melancholic of the political and cultural defeat of *autonomia* remains in the fact that” at the turn of the millennium “the request that is pressing from the youth movement is that of a guaranteed post of dependent work, the request of a fair relation of exploitation and subordination” (Berardi 2007, 44).

The third and fourth concepts uniting the “area of autonomy” deal with the conception of history and historical processes and the consequences of this within juridical, political, and economic rules. With regard to history, the movement based itself on Marx’s dictum on communism as the “real movement that abolishes the present state of things” (1998, 57). This was not understood in a totalizing fashion where history was conceived as a continuous historical progress with revolution as a clean break ridding the new society of past forms. Rather, the “present state of things” was understood as the form of exploitation under the existing form of capitalist social relations. Moreover, with the expanse of class analysis and the widening definition of class composition to include new social formations, there emerged the understanding that social formations were not present as totalities—that the mass worker still existed even while it was being superseded by a new, dominant, class composition. In this sense, the historical process was seen as “a differentiated overlap of stratifications, of the survival and intertwining of

forms that appear to have declined, but never disappear from the living memory of society” (Berardi 2007, 45).

With the rejection of a teleological and dialectic understanding of historical processes it followed that the rules governing the social order were recognized as arbitrary, rather than following a rational progression. Within the historical context and the overall transformations in the production process, in part derived from the end of the Bretton Woods order of fixed exchange rates tied to the United States dollar, there emerged the recognition that the productive rules and regulation of value was also arbitrary and capable of being transgressed or challenged and that it was possible to affirm new values. The novelty for *Autonomia* resided in the recognition that the law of value was arbitrary and in the rejection of the command exercised by capital via the function of money and the wage. They started from Marx’s depiction of the classical form of industrial capitalism that identified the time of socially necessary labor and the determination of value as the key variables determining prices, salary, and profit. But technological innovations in microelectronics and robotics challenged this depiction, bringing Marx’s analysis “beyond Marx” (Negri 1991; Negri 1982, 224). Negri depicted this transformation as establishing a situation where the “conditions for the extraction of surplus value now exist only in the form of a general social relation” and that it completely “eliminates the idea that a “natural rate” can exist between” profit and wage (1982, 224-5) Echoing the sentiments expressed in his earlier work, *Crisis of the Planner-State*, the conclusion derived from this “uncertainty of value” by *Autonomia* was quite similar: the uncertainty within the conception of value was stabilized “with violence, deception, and falsehood” (Berardi 2007, 48).

This theoretical unity gave expression to a general configuration of political practice: workers autonomy existed for itself as an independent political force that sought to impose its own values on the production process. Two aspects in which this position was challenged occurred around inflation and rising unemployment, especially among the youth. The first was a direct challenge to the wage gains of the “hot autumn”—in Italy, wage costs per unit produced rose 47.1 percent from 1968-1973 (Barkan 1984, 93-4). The second moved throughout the 1970s developing a labor force that was divided between “guaranteed” and “non-guaranteed” labor, part of what Asor Rosa described in his book *La Due Società* (The two societies) [1977, 63-68]. These two components produced within *Autonomia* a debate around the question of a “guaranteed salary.” First, the demand for a guaranteed salary demonstrated the offensive nature that the movement had developed coming out of the hot autumn; this demand went well beyond the traditional claim for “bread and work,” as a content wage-slave. Second, the demand for a guaranteed wage was viewed as the refusal to pay for the crisis, that the working class would not buckle under a regime of austerity, price increases, and wage reduction. Third, it was a demand for the emancipation from the capitalist cycle. Last, it was not a defense of a salary; rather, it was viewed as a unifying aspect of the class in its political recomposition as a means for demonstrating what they called proletarian power. In short, the guaranteed salary was seen as constructing a form of space outside of the logic of capitalist production, by which the proletariat could satisfy its own “needs,” the extension of which speaks to their understanding of the “social factory,” understood as the capacity of capital to penetrate the “pores” of society (Comitati Autonomi Operai 1974, 110-112).

Within this strategy for a “guaranteed salary” the fissures of class composition were evident, with various sectors of the working class providing a different understanding of who composed the class, and, specifically, the relationship of class to the factory, or the immediate point of production. As part of the view that “politics is personal,” that part of the women’s movement understood that the demand for a salary for domestic work was part of the liberation of their existence—mentally, bodily, and emotionally—from the “specific function” that capitalist society had imposed on women (Federici 1974, 128). Theoretically, the autonomous workers’ assembly at Alfa Romeo in Rome understood this in a similar fashion, in that they understood the significance of a “guaranteed salary” as permitting the ability

...to unleash in this society the workers’ condition of work, as an egalitarian thematic of remuneration according to needs: communist refusal of tying life to a determinant activity, naturally alienated, that is called salaried work (1974, 131).

In practice, however, the conception of class politics at Alfa Romeo was more centered on the workplace, with the position that class-consciousness had to be connected to the overcoming of alienated labor, or salaried work, and that it could only stem from labor-power. For example, while outside of the factory/workplace, groups were practicing direct re-appropriation according to their perceived needs, from the first acts of organized “proletariat shopping”—where groups would select groceries that they wanted and then pay what they thought they should—to all sorts of practices of *autoriduzione* (self-reduction) and occupations (i.e., the birth of social centers and other “liberated spaces”), the assembly at Alfa Romeo did see the importance of struggles in the social terrain, but they subordinated these to the factory worker as the subject who must exercise “direction and control” of the overall movement (Ibid, 134). Thus, the debate over the “guaranteed salary” revealed a shared understanding of capital’s extension into

society with a broadened conception of the class struggle. At the same time, however, traditional claims of the factory worker, or the workerist's "mass worker," remained within the movement, privileging this social subject as more important in class composition than those members of the working class in the social terrain.

In part, this adherence to the "mass worker," and privileging of the immediate point of production as normatively and existentially more connected to the concept of class composition fed into the strategy of the historic left, particularly the PCI. By the fall of 1973—within the context of the Pinochet coup in Chile in September, and increasing violence, state and para-state—the Communist Party made its case for entrance into the government as part of the "historic compromise" (Ginsborg 1990, 354-8, 388-90; Negri 1976, 19-23). As an attempt to overcome the crisis of governance that was afflicting Italy, Enrico Berlinguer, the recently elected party secretary, proposed the historic compromise in which the PCI, PSI, and the DC would govern the country, laying the foundations for "economic development, social renewal, and democratic progress" (in Ginsborg 1990, 356). Within the official workers' movement the "historic compromise" entailed a rigid disciplining of the workforce based on a program of austerity and sacrifice—a vision of a working class that was cemented in the centers of production posed against the new ethic of consumer capitalism. The trade union, in this program, was utilized to ensure a "guaranteed salary" that was intimately connected to the job and the contract, representing the traditional view of labor-power as the working class, as an economic category. The Autonomous movement had an overall hostile view of the PCI, as a party bound up with the institutions of state capitalism; part of the broader currents that came out of 1968 in what has been called the "anti-communist" left. Within Italy,

Negri accurately characterized the historic compromise as “terrorism of social democracy” in which the PCI would control the working class in order to participate in the economic development of capital (1976, 15). Its sense of “worker centrality” was wedded to the factory and the immediate point of production, and, as Asor Rosa argued, viewed the social sector as problematic and in antagonism to labor-power (1977, 64).

The question of “worker centrality” arose from the PCI’s “historic compromise” and signified the capacity of state institutions and labor unions to ensure or guarantee a contracted salary. In 1977 the Gramsci Institute held a seminar on “*Operaismo e centralità operaia*” (Workerism and worker centrality) [1978]. In large measure the contribution of the convention was a reiteration of themes derived from Togliatti’s unfolding of the “Italian way to socialism” in the immediate postwar period. The workerist critique, despite the inclusion of such intellectuals as Mario Tronti, Massimo Cacciari, and Albert Asor Rosa, remained bound within the party as the political organ of the class. Practically, the debate emerged as recognition of the declining power of the factory worker, or “mass worker,” as an antagonistic subject in the class struggle. That is, after the contracts of 1972-3, factory worker’s relative power in social struggles declined. Whereas the workerists who moved into the “area of autonomy” focused on the shifting class composition, those who went into the PCI bemoaned the turn away from the factory, as an intellectual betrayal and abandonment (Tronti 1978, 18-19). In short, the PCI remained wedded to the factory worker as one of the components in its push into government.

Yet, the question of “worker centrality” was bound up with the conceptualization of the “social factory,” and its importance not only as a critique of political economy, but

also as a basis for discerning class composition. Writing in the journal Primo Maggio, Marco Revelli and Marcello Messeri argued in favor of an episodic explanation of the importance of the social terrain as part of capitalist transition and command over labor:

The current intertwinement between the sphere of reproduction and of immediate production, with an apparent preeminence of the first on the second, that seems to lead to the drowning of the factory in the magmatic complex of the social structure, offers a glimpse of a characteristic that has appeared in all of the phases of capitalist transition from a given level of command on labor power, to pass to a qualitatively new level of subsumption of labor to capital, this is assisted by a massive mobilization and an open use of the social terrain external to the factory... (1978, 61).

For Revelli and Messeri, the expanse into the realm of reproduction by capital was an ephemeral and epiphenomenal occurrence within capitalism connected to the technical recomposition of labor-power in order to maintain capital's command function within an overall set of social relations. The question of "worker centrality," in this view could be reduced to the position that the "factory constitutes the workers' universe ... even in the process of social reproduction" (Ibid, 43). Yet, there was something afoot in *Autonomia* that suggested the social terrain was taking on its own importance, outside, or antagonistic to, the play of capital, where social subjects were emerging within a new working class composition. For example, the review A/traverso published its first issue in May 1975, from the autonomous movement in Bologna, as an attempt to overcome barriers between political militants, diverse subjectivities, and social language (the group from Bologna also founded Radio Alice as a "free radio station" the following year).¹⁷² The official press in Italy, around the same time, began speaking of "creative autonomy" and the "desiring movement" (*movimento desiderante*). Franco Berardi aptly noted the importance and novelty of this turn in the movement for the concept of class: "The

¹⁷² For an introduction to Radio Alice, see the existent webpage at <http://www.radioalice.org/> (last visited May 25, 2013).

concept of class became rethought beginning from the irreducible multiplicity of existential practices: drugs, irregular sexuality, absenteeism from work, produced a continuous recomposition of the subjective horizon of *autonomia*” (2007a, 291). Within the autonomous movement the question of “worker centrality” was only of importance insofar as the concept of class expanded to the social terrain. For those who shared the patrimony of *operaismo* and its basic theoretical foundations, Toni Negri put forth the most ambitious attempt to understand the new class composition as the *operaio sociale* (social worker). It is to his argument, and, importantly, to the basis of class composition, in his understanding of the social factory, that we now turn to.

Antonio Negri’s “operaio sociale” and the “fabbrica diffusa”

Toni Negri, long in polemic with Tronti and the “autonomy of the political,” was quick to point out the basic contradiction put forth by those in the PCI who were introducing a debate on the conception of “worker centrality”:

The thing that seems rather strange is that, the same folks who today are bringing up “worker centrality,” in the 1960s [they] recognized that fundamentally the productive nature of work was immediately social; also, the fundamental thesis, on which is constructed all of the theory of *operaismo*, is, if you will, that of a successive abstraction of work, that runs in parallel to its socialization (2007, 19).

That is, the “social factory” as the “successive abstraction of work” was the fundamental thesis of *operaismo* based on its understanding of political economy in terms of power and social relations. Given this tendency toward socialization and abstraction of work, Negri argued that “worker centrality” was nothing more than mere tautology: that all of the conditions which reproduced the factory worker extended to society merely recognized the point that capital was “hegemonic and commands those conditions” (Ibid). Against this usage of “worker centrality” he asserted an “effective worker centrality” where the characteristics of “abstract labor,” such as “social mobility” were the

centerpieces of the socially extended process of class recomposition and were capable of “representing the generality of exploited labor” (Ibid, 20). Yet, it was unclear what this subject was or how it could be identified. Negri attempted to provide an answer, the *operaio sociale*, in his important book *Proletari e Stato* (Proletarians and the State) [1976].¹⁷³

The central importance of this work in Negri’s contribution to the social factory resided in his analysis of crisis and restructuration as driving forth the proletarian nature of society; that is, the bosses’ response to the hot autumn—the analysis of which was treated in his *Crisis of the planner-state*—brought into material actuality the proletarian character of society and this subject revealed itself by its daily practice of antagonism to the command of capital. His reading of the social factory is therefore intimately bound up in his treatment of restructuration and the recomposition of the working class within capital’s falling rate of profit. In short, the central problem of the crisis was the fall of the rate of profit; this could only be overcome by increasing the process of the socialization of living labor; and, as capital extended into society, the process of worker antagonism grew leading toward the “intensification of the potentially revolutionary unity of living labor” (2005, 125). Thus, following the mass workers’ antagonism during the 1960s, capital, Negri wrote, was “faced with modifications imposed and provoked—or in the process of being brought about—by restructuring,” and as a result “the body of the working class expands and articulates itself into the body of the social class, into the proletariat” (Ibid, 126). Importantly, Negri brought the concept of class composition in line with the concept of the “social factory” for the first time within *operaismo*. However,

¹⁷³ *Proletarians and the State* was completed on August 1, 1975 and published by Feltrinelli publishing in March 1976. The second edition is now reproduced in English in *Books for Burning* (Verso, 2005). All citations will be from the latter, English edition.

it is necessary to look more closely at the argument and then place it within some historical context in order to understand more fully the significance of his resurrection of the proletariat as the proper class composition within the political economy of the “social factory.”

Negri’s understanding of the “social factory” within the crisis and process of restructuring contained within its original configurations. In the first instance, the expansion of capital into society was the direct result of socialization of labor as a component of the process of restructuring and reorganization of industry. Thus, unlike Panzieri, Tronti, and to go a bit further, Gramsci—who had set forth the concept of “rational demographic composition”—this understanding was not connected to a particular industry, such as the highest development of capitalism—the Fordist-taylorist model with Fiat’s automobile production as the staple of much of *operaismo*’s analysis. Rather, Negri’s depiction was broad in nature, encapsulating the entirety of living labor, which lacked the material homogeneity of the mass worker, but still offered a “network of class interests”—albeit abstract—that revealed a “unitary potential of struggle” (Negri 2005, 145). Moreover, the function of command was not tied to the concentration of capital in industry, or to the immediate process of production, but occurred two-fold: “*as mediation between the function of productive restructuring (energy, automation) and the function of political reorganization (social democracy, terrorism)*” [Ibid, 132 emphasis in original; Wright 2002, 162-66]. Last, and perhaps most importantly, the wage was not the centerpiece of the social factory. Going against what Steve Wright accurately identified as “one of the central workerist categories,” Negri, following the demands of the movement, called for the valorization of the proletariat’s “needs” as distinct from the

logic of capital, including the demand for a wage; that is, to a new form of needs distinct from those of the mass worker.

Whereas the “needs” of the mass worker were identified with the wage as, in Tronti’s terms, a polemical demand the “social worker” embodied more concrete demands such as the liberation of “life-time” from capitalist production. For the new class composition, their consciousness arose not, as the workers’ assembly at Alfa Romeo believed, from the experience of wage labor, but from the demand for liberation from capitalist work (Negri 2005, 146). Within this, Negri found the constructive aspect of the new working class as a moment of “invention,” as the creativity and productive expression of productivity outside the demands of capitalist production and reproduction. The “refusal of work” as a strategy of working class resistance for the mass worker became a project of liberation towards a new society. In this sense, the subversion of capitalist needs became paramount. This is not to deny that within capitalist social relations needs cannot be met. Derived from Marx’s analysis in the *Grundrisse*, even capital allows—“when business is good”—for the cultural advancement of the proletariat (Marx 1973, 287). Such was his interpretation of the 150-hour program achieved by the struggles of the hot autumn. However, with the rise of consumer society, this wealth was identified as the proletariat’s wealth: “the greater extent to which historic needs—needs created by production itself, social needs—needs which are themselves the offspring of social production and intercourse, are posited as *necessary*, the higher the level to which real wealth has become developed” (Ibid, 527 emphasis in original). This explains the demand of the burgeoning counter-cultural movement that sought to free cultural expression from the commodity nature of capitalist society and to appropriate it towards

their own use and understanding. Negri understood this as the rejection of capitalist use value, as the “refusal of work and the development of labor’s own creative value” (Ibid, 151).

For Negri, however, the discourse around needs was intimately bound up with capitalism’s category of use value via exchange value. Against this he argued for the supersession of such categories by the social worker’s “system of struggles” (Ibid, 154-5). Given his reduction of money into its dualistic command function he asserted the proletariat’s need to re-appropriate the social wealth as the basis for a communist program. Against the traditional workerist focus on the wage, he wrote:

the general prospect of the revolutionary passage can no longer be envisioned except from within the advance of proletarian power, from within the struggles and moments of the re-appropriation of social wealth and the productive forces. To imagine a different passage is pure illusion, it risks defeat, when it is not simply mystification and betrayal (Ibid, 158).

In this perspective, the new formation of working class liberation occurred through the practice of labor as a “pure creative force of production and invention” (Ibid, 151). Liberated spaces, against the institutional structures of capitalism, and, importantly, the state, were the basis of the liberation of living labor, the edifice of a new, post-capitalist society. In this practice—and this would become even more important with the rise of intellectual labor and what much later would be termed as “immaterial labor”—the contribution of the social worker to a new form of social needs outside the dictates of capitalist production and reproduction formed the basis of working class liberation within the social factory of money/state command.

Yet, if direct appropriation was the “essence” of the communist program, as Negri maintained, what was its connection to the material reality (Ibid, 157)? His conceptualization of the “social worker” was met with considerable skepticism. First, this

new class composition contained a great deal of abstraction that, despite Negri's claim to empirical verification, bore scant traces within the actual workers' movement (Wright 2002, 167). Roberto Battaglia, writing within Primo Maggio, pointed out the futility of trying to connect the "social worker" to the "mass worker," as the former lacked the "material homogeneity" of the latter (1980-1, 74). Even more, the "physical components [of the social worker] are not tied either to the material condition of exploitation or to immediate political objectives" (Ibid, 75). For Battaglia, lacking was the connection between the material conditions and the political behaviors of the class (Ibid, 74). Yet others were even less impressed. Sergio Bologna noted that Negri seemed obsessed with theoretical unity and the need for synthesis rather than explaining or understanding the "disarray and confusion" within the workers' movement as the result of the capitalist offensive following the hot autumn (1976, 27). At the moment when the mass worker was under attack, Negri chose to focus on constructing a new theoretical basis for class composition as a way to move forward and find a working class antagonism within the capitalist crisis.

More poignant, given the diversity of such an abstract category as the "social worker," was Negri's attempt to locate a "unity within diversity" of such a heterogeneous figure as the social worker. If capitalist restructuring had propelled political economy to entail the social realm, and the social realm had fought back—i.e., the woman's movement, student's movement, and counter-cultural movement—his argument reduced this diversity to an abstract conception of labor without regard to the concerns that other sectors of the autonomous movement had introduced. At best, he recognized this in a theoretically abstract manner, acknowledging that contradictions were part and parcel of

working class theory: “it needed to be recovered, beyond all the ideologies, including worker centrality, the courage of living with contradictions, and of living with them as real contradictions, and to verify whether or not these real contradictions could become antagonistic.... A one-dimensional solution of the revolutionary process never gives [that] (Negri 2007, 102-3).

Concluding remarks

To such heavens did the journey of the social factory bring working class theory; it established the framework with a unitary basis for an overall proletarian struggle against capitalist social relations. The Italian “orthodoxy” with its focus on property relations was overturned within a generation that experienced post-fascism and the “economic miracle” bringing the awareness of workers’ power as an antagonistic subject to produce a sustained movement longer than any other experience in the industrial west during the 1960s and 1970s. This story ends with the “social worker” as the culminating working class subjectivity within the social factory. Within Italy, this political practice found a new and distinct trajectory in the “movement of ‘77” of which the “social worker” was only anticipatory. To the merit of Negri’s abstraction, his analysis of the “social factory” pointed to the power of capital to utilize the state—what he later termed the “enterprise-state”—in order to command the social production and reproduction of capital, and to the micro, or “molecular” struggles waged against it. That Italy was brought to the brink of civil war in the 1970s is important, but that experience entails much more than what the analysis of the social factory permits us to delve into. Importantly, after almost twenty years of re-examining Italian Marxism, the analysis brought forth by *operaismo* highlighted the political and conceptual autonomy of the

working class and armed this subject with the theoretical tools to capture its liberation for itself in terms of political power in order to remake itself according to its own needs and desires. Freed from the entrapments of productivity and the category labor-power, work could now be conceived in terms of human being's creative and inventive aspects. Whether this movement "succeeded" or won is not the point, as should be clear from the analytical framing of class relations that Tronti and Panzieri introduced. More to the point was that the working class, in its antagonism—via the refusal of work—expressed the need for liberation from capitalist work as the basis for the material passages to a post-capitalist and communist future. The end of this story occurs in the midst of the abolition of the "present state of things." That the story does not end there is only evidence to the merits of capitalism as a relation of power and its formation of social relations. The continuity of that story is still present in contemporary society, as are the legacies of autonomous Marxism and the need to liberate the working class from capitalist despotism. The "social factory" introduced us to a heuristic device to be utilized in furthering the struggles of working class liberation from within that particular social formation.

CONCLUSION

The traditional understanding of capitalist political economy has long been shaped by the classical political economist's focus on private property and the relations that are derivative of this juridical principle. Within the history of Western Marxism this focus lent itself to the neglect of understanding capitalist social relations beyond the juridical form (whether or not these derive from the property relation are beside the point). The central contribution of postwar Marxism stems from the understanding of Marxism as sociology. As part of this impulse, the "sociology from the base"—workers' inquiry, *conricerca*, and what is now called "militant research"—had the impact of meeting a group of young socialist and communist intellectual-activists who were looking for a new, more democratic and worker-centered politics. The birth of Quaderni Rossi was central to this development and remains so until at least the journal Rosso, which is not discussed in this dissertation, but marks the next point in the story, leading to the movement of '77. In this milieu of searching for a more democratic and anti-authoritarian left, and in conjunction with the radical upheaval that was part of the generation of the "economic miracle," the "social factory" as a critique of political economy was central.

This dissertation has reconstructed the principle individuals, groups, and journals around which the "social factory" influenced or shaped the viewpoint of Italian neo-capitalism. The three central individuals who developed the social factory were Raniero Panzieri, Mario Tronti, and Antonio Negri; others, such as, Mariarosa Dalla Costa, and Guido Viale, extended previous definitions of the concept. Raniero Panzieri and Mario Tronti were the early exponents of the "social factory" and offered two different understandings of the term: the former examined the effects of the law of concentration

on capital's ability to extend its tentacles into society as a controlling and despotic force; the latter understood it in terms of the increased proletarian character of society. Yet, both of these formulations established the foundations for rethinking class composition, organization, the goals and object of working class liberation, technology and "dead labor," social capital, and the "refusal of labor."

The dissertation proceeded chronologically in order to tell a story that sought to capture the dynamics of workerist thought as well as highlight the heterogeneous nature of its participants. The experience of Classe Operaia was pivotal, but only insofar as Tronti's influence remained dominant. The experience between CO and PO was telling and it gave rise to a myriad of formations. Out of this situation, focus was placed on the journal La Classe and the student movement. In this period, the "social factory" began to be appropriated by new actors who broadened the concept to include education and put it forward in political practice (recall that Panzieri had included educational institutions in his view of the term). It was the student movement that gave real credence to include the reproduction of capital as part of the "social factory" and that this should have consideration within a definition of "class composition." The explosion of the "hot autumn" rendered the workers' struggles dominant in the period. Ironically, at the moment where there was massive experimentation and militancy, there emerged a return to the party-form and centralization within what was called the "extra-parliamentary left."

The discussion of the "hot autumn" and the student movement was essential insofar as it invoked crisis and restructuring as the bosses' counteroffensive aimed at controlling the class movement. The last two chapters capture the radical rupture within the social relations of neo-capitalism. In this regard, Toni Negri formulated the "social

factory” in a system without a theory of value and based on power: capitalist command and working class antagonism. At the same time, he theorized a proletariat that encapsulated both production and reproduction in the circulation of capital. The “social factory,” Negri argued, had taken on the actuality of the abstraction of work theorized by Marx in the *Grundrisse*. In the last chapter, the important experiences of the “new women’s movement” and the movement of *Autonomia*, respectively, shed light on the position of women in relation to capital, and on the political practice of the new working class within the social factory. Both of these movements remain of central importance for current political theory and working class politics. I chose to treat both movements only in terms of their contribution to the “social factory” without developing their political practice beyond that. Such an endeavor would have brought this work too close to another movement, one which is beyond the scope of this dissertation, yet it lurks around the corner: the movement of ’77.

If both the Italian women’s movement and the movement of *Autonomia* have pertinence in today’s political practice, then this dissertation and exegesis of the “social factory” should remain useful as a form or method of approaching contemporary critiques of political economy. On the other hand, I hope to have shed light on a concept that was created within a laboratory of radical politics in the transition from one form of production to another, offering a glimpse into the enduring class struggles that constitute capitalist social relations.

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