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Laboratory of Insecurity

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Since the 1970s a topos relating to the economic and political situation of Italy has enjoyed particular popularity: this has to do with a laboratory, a field of experimentation for the most different forces, interests and currents. The particular diversity of protest forms and differentiations of the non-parliamentary public sphere from the late 1960s to the turning point of 1977 seems to be especially susceptible to sparking romantic notions with respect to the strength of a "counter-power", a constitutive movement that does not allow itself to be coopted by representative structures.

However, in the shadow of the antagonistic movement, so to speak, a series of intellectuals soon began to dismantle the "molar" discourses of mass laborers, of class struggles, of the integration of the working class[1] through the workers' statute that was developed in the wake of the wild battles in autumn 1969, and of other discourses about possible institutional or non-institutional goals. On the basis of a strange link between exploring and accompanying social groups and movements, the proponents of the so-called "conricerca" soon found themselves faced with a differentiated image of labor forms that could not be reduced to identities of class struggle. This work commenced as early as the 1960s, as Raniero Panzieri and other authors in the "Quaderni

Rossi" analyzed union strategies, and a group affiliated with Mario Tronti (to which Toni Negri also belonged) developed the so-called "operaismo". The "Quaderni Piacentini" (Bellocchio, Fortini), who took on a reflection on the political-cultural field, also had an important function in the transition to the social movements of the 1970s and the new political subjects (feminist movement, autonomy, "postoperaismo", free media, youth movement, ...). The theses on "independent work" that is not subsumed in the dialectic of the class struggle, were formulated much later as it became more and more evident in light of the increasing precariousness of working situations that the exemplary law for the protection of workers from 1970 was less and less capable of reflecting the reality of working people.[2] The temptation of a "molar" response to the progressive deregulation of the labor market is still there. In 2003, one of the successor parties to the Communist Party, the Rifondazione Comunista, called for participation in a referendum demanding an extension of the efficient protection against dismissal as provided by the "Statuto del Lavoro"[3]. 25% of the registered voters took part in the referendum. To pass the measure, twice that many people would have had to go to the polls.

The unions were divided about taking part in the referendum. This is only one of the indications that the new conflicts – like the revolts of the 1970s that were carried primarily by the youth – cannot be solved through the traditional mechanisms of negotiation. On the contrary, an antagonism is emerging through the diverse figures of "new" labor, the subjects of which reject the representative balance of interests for various reasons. Over the course of recent months, "wild" strikes have repeatedly taken place both in Milan and other cities, in other words protest strikes that do not follow the rules determined by the unions. In the case of public transportation in Milan and other cities of the Lombardy

region, such as Brescia, this had massive consequences, since strikes in this area are normally "staggered" over time. The unions are obligated to guarantee at least limited operations during rush hours. However, some of the groups organized in basis committees decided to carry the strikes over into these periods as well[4]. Strikes that were in part not sanctioned by the union also occurred with the formerly state-owned airline Alitalia[5]; a large-scale out-sourcing of departments had led to increasingly bad working conditions for the employees and mass layoffs. In addition, four strikes took place between January and June 2004 in the area of public health services, as well as nation-wide protests against Minister Moretti's[6] school and university reforms, which propose a deterioration of employment conditions in addition to a reduction of supervised periods and a watering down of the curricula.

The atmosphere is seething, and it is increasingly obvious how fragile a public sphere is, that is marked by the regulatory measures of the social state. Manifold studies have described the turn to a new paradigm of production, which has destroyed the compensation mechanisms for a (re-) distribution of produced wealth, as we know them from Fordist-Keynesian compromise[7]. Along with the changed production conditions, central categories such as productivity, employment, the socialization of risks, etc. have entered into a serious crisis. What seems to distinguish the protest movements is that precariously employed people are gradually trying to live their situation no longer solely as a deficiency in comparison with those in "guaranteed" employment situations. The turn in production, the transition to an added value on the basis of their forms of living, awareness, knowledge and communication, turns the subjects of communication (teachers and students, researchers, people working in the fields of telecommunication, transportation, creative industries, journalists,

translators, ...) into desired beings *and* subjects of desire at the same time. To the same extent that more and more is *expected* of them, that their life is fragmented (flexibility), that people have to work for less and less money without any organizational specifications (autonomy, independence) and entirely without any statutory rights, the question arises for them, more than for those dependent on wages, where the boundaries between production and non-production or reproduction are to be found, where work starts and where it stops: what is the difference between work and not-work and consequently, what is the sense of this distinction?

The drop in productivity that the Italian economy has seen in recent years is due, among other things, to the fact that the demand for labor power comes mostly from small and micro businesses, which are not able to invest in expensive technologies or research and development. This could be regarded as an indication that the largest portion of the increase in productivity, which has occurred through developments primarily in the area of information technology, has gone quite one-sidedly to private companies in recent years. Outside the realm of regulated labor, which has to bear the main burden of the socialization of risks through the model of additional wage costs, a collective experiment is consequently taking place, which does not so much serve to "increase efficiency" as to discipline the forces that are dependent on production. All the forms and circumstances of work are found within this "laboratory" that are meanwhile associated with the term precariousness: limited term contracts, no right to worker participation in the business, hardly any pension plan or none at all, no unemployment insurance and only rudimentary health insurance[8]. A precariously employed person therefore asks: What can I want? What should I do?
Keynesianism remains "worth considering" to the extent that it has

uncovered the symbolic functions of money among the accumulation mechanisms of industrially, statistically, mathematically organized products. Its tendency to "liquefy" the segmentary, rigidified, monetary aspects of money to set socially effective processes of exchange in motion, opens up a perspective of the imaginary arrangement ("consume") and the symbolic communication ("institutions, rights") of the real that is entangled in production. From today's perspective, a "general theory of *income*"[9] would have to be considered, in order to look for strategies for finding a balance between the experience of an uncertain, fragmented, *limited-term* integration in the production process and an "unlimited" way of living. In other words, it is a matter of *turning around* the deregulation advancing in many areas of the world of work in terms of place, time and intensity, first conceptually and then practically. If it is drummed into us that there is no more security, that we have to get used to flexibility and mobility, then as the precariously employed, we counter, "All right then, and since no one can say with any certainty whether we are working right now or not, we demand – for all eventualities – an income! In case of doubt, in favor of those who are creative! I dream, therefore I work ..."

What is behind this is naturally more than an attempt to carry on the Situationist Internationale to its completion. In fact, the production process constantly makes use of social, collective, public achievements, goods and forms to create a value from them. The real question is ultimately the concept of production itself. It is not only a matter of contesting the denial of rights associated with integration in the production process, but also the lack of time periods for a public sphere grounded in *experience*. In this sense, the demand for a basic income remains in the balance[10], in between the possibility of creating free spaces outside the realm of

compulsive employment and the harassment of the repressive institutions of the social state, of *imagining* an ecologically, socially and economically sustainable order of production, and the danger of newly becoming an instrument of the exclusion of groups located outside the normality defined by the social order on which production is founded.

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[1]The Communist Party impelled the primarily male workers movement through legal initiatives and the successive integration of the unions in the institutional structures of becoming representative. In addition to a moral discourse that assailed the corruption of the institutions (the slogan *mani pulite* from the 1974 election campaign became especially famous), the Italian Communist Party under its charismatic General Secretary Enrico Berlinguer attempted to achieve a stabilization of wages. The molar solution in terms of wage policies was called scala mobile and guaranteed the adjustment of nominal wages to the inflation rate.

[2]Cf.: S. Bologna / A. Fumagalli: *Il lavoro autonomo di seconda generazione. Scenari del posfordismo in Italia*. Milano: Feltrinelli 1997. The topic of self-employment is largely ignored by the parliamentary left wing, which still focuses on the "normal" waged labor situation.

[3]It was specifically a question of expanding Article 18 of the aforementioned law, which prohibits dismissal "without reasonable grounds" for businesses with more than 15 employees. A large portion of businesses in Italy are substantially smaller and can therefore not be prosecuted in this sense by the labor courts.

[4]Inchiesta autoferrotranvieri: "Su la testa". In: *Posse. Politica Filosofia Moltidudini. Nuovi animali politici. Giugno 2004*.Roma: Manifestolibri, p. 166-171.

[5]Amoroso, Pulejo Trasciani: "Dossier Alitalia." In: *Posse. Politica Filosofia Moltidudini. Nuovi animali politici. Giugno 2004*.Roma: Manifestolibri, p. 148-165.

[6]Cristina Morini: "Di culla in computer." In: *Posse. Politica Filosofia Moltidudini. Nuovi animali politici. Giugno 2004*.Roma: Manifestolibri, p. 101-108.

[7]See for example: M. Piore/C. Sabel: *Das Ende der Massenproduktion*. Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer 1985, C. Marazzi: *Der Stammplatz der Socken*, Zürich: Seismo 1996, and ibid.: *Fetisch Geld*, Zürich: Rotpunkt Verlag, 1999, or Lorenzo Cillario: L'economia degli spettri, Roma: Manifestolibri 1996.

[8]It is estimated that in the region of Milan meanwhile 70% of all the young people entering professional life do not have an unlimited job situation.

[9]John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, first published: Macmillan Cambridge University Press, for Royal Economic Society in 1936

[10]Andrea Fumagalli: "Misure contro la precarietà esistenziale e distribuzione sociale del reddito". In: *Posse. Politica Filosofia Moltidudini. Nuovi animali politici. Giugno 2004*.Roma: Manifestolibri, p. 28-43.