

## 2. MULTITUDE



Political action aimed at transformation and liberation today can only be conducted on the basis of the multitude. To understand the concept of the multitude in its most general and abstract form, let us contrast it first with that of the people.<sup>1</sup> The people is one. The population, of course, is composed of numerous different individuals and classes, but the people synthesizes or reduces these social differences into one identity. The multitude, by contrast, is not unified but remains plural and multiple. This is why, according to the dominant tradition of political philosophy, the people can rule as a sovereign power and the multitude cannot. The multitude is composed of a set of *singularities*—and by singularity here we mean a social subject whose difference cannot be reduced to sameness, a difference that remains different. The component parts of the people are indifferent in their unity; they become an identity by negating or setting aside their differences. The plural singularities of the multitude thus stand in contrast to the undifferentiated unity of the people.

The multitude, however, although it remains multiple, is not fragmented, anarchical, or incoherent. The concept of the multitude should thus also be contrasted to a series of other concepts that designate plural

collectives, such as the crowd, the masses, and the mob. Since the different individuals or groups that make up the crowd are incoherent and recognize no common shared elements, their collection of differences remains inert and can easily appear as one indifferent aggregate. The components of the masses, the mob, and the crowd are not singularities—and this is obvious from the fact that their differences so easily collapse into the indifference of the whole. Moreover, these social subjects are fundamentally passive in the sense that they cannot act by themselves but rather must be led. The crowd or the mob or the rabble can have social effects—often horribly destructive effects—but cannot act of their own accord. That is why they are so susceptible to external manipulation. The multitude, designates an active social subject, which acts on the basis of what the singularities share in common. The multitude is an internally different, multiple social subject whose constitution and action is based not on identity or unity (or, much less, indifference) but on what it has in common.

This initial conceptual definition of the multitude poses a clear challenge to the entire tradition of sovereignty. As we will explain in part 3, one of the recurring truths of political philosophy is that only the one can rule, be it the monarch, the party, the people, or the individual; social subjects that are not unified and remain multiple cannot rule and instead must be ruled. Every sovereign power, in other words, necessarily forms a *political body* of which there is a head that commands, limbs that obey, and organs that function together to support the ruler. The concept of the multitude challenges this accepted truth of sovereignty. The multitude, although it remains multiple and internally different, is able to act in common and thus rule itself. Rather than a political body with one that commands and others that obey, the multitude is *living flesh* that rules itself. This definition of the multitude, of course, raises numerous conceptual and practical problems, which we will discuss at length in this and the next chapter, but it should be clear from the outset that the challenge of the multitude is the challenge of democracy. The multitude is the only social subject capable of realizing democracy, that is, the rule of everyone by everyone. The stakes, in other words, are extremely high.

In this chapter we will articulate the concept of the multitude primarily from a socioeconomic perspective. Multitude is also a concept of race,

gender, and sexuality differences. Our focus on economic class here should be considered in part as compensation for the relative lack of attention to class in recent years with respect to these other lines of social difference and hierarchy. As we will see the contemporary forms of production, which we will call biopolitical production, are not limited to economic phenomena but rather tend to involve all aspects of social life, including communication, knowledge, and affects. It is also useful to recognize from the beginning that something like a concept of the multitude has long been part of powerful streams of feminist and antiracist politics. When we say that we do not want a world without racial or gender difference but instead a world in which race and gender do not matter, that is, a world in which they do not determine hierarchies of power, a world in which differences express themselves freely, this is a desire for the multitude. And, of course, for the singularities that compose the multitude, in order to take away the limiting, negative, destructive character of differences and make differences our strength (gender differences, racial differences, differences of sexuality, and so forth) we must radically transform the world.<sup>2</sup>

From the socioeconomic perspective, the multitude is the common subject of labor, that is, the real flesh of postmodern production, and at the same time the object from which collective capital tries to make the body of its global development. Capital wants to make the multitude into an organic unity, just like the state wants to make it into a people. This is where, through the struggles of labor, the real productive biopolitical figure of the multitude begins to emerge. When the flesh of the multitude is imprisoned and transformed into the body of global capital, it finds itself both within and against the processes of capitalist globalization. The biopolitical production of the multitude, however, tends to mobilize what it shares in common and what it produces in common against the imperial power of global capital. In time, developing its productive figure based on the common, the multitude can move through Empire and come out the other side, to express itself autonomously and rule itself.

We should recognize from the outset the extent of capital's domain. Capital no longer rules merely over limited sites in society. As the imperial rule of capital extends throughout society well beyond the factory walls and geographically throughout the globe, capitalist command tends

to become a “non-place” or, really, an every place. There is no longer an outside to capital, nor is there an outside to the logics of biopower we described in part 1, and that correspondence is no coincidence, since capital and biopower function intimately together. The places of exploitation, by contrast, are always determinate and concrete, and therefore we need to understand exploitation on the basis of the specific sites where it is located and specific forms in which it is organized. This will allow us to articulate both a *topology* of the different figures of exploited labor and a *topography* of their spatial distribution across the globe. Such an analysis is useful because the place of exploitation is one important site where acts of refusal and exodus, resistance and struggle arise. This analysis will thus lead to the critique of the political economy of globalization based on the resistances to the formation of the body of global capital and the liberatory potentials of the common powers shared by global laboring multitude.

## 2.1 DANGEROUS CLASSES

Stalin's basic error is mistrust of the peasants.

—MAO ZEDONG

We are the poors! —PROTEST SLOGAN IN SOUTH AFRICA

### THE BECOMING COMMON OF LABOR

Multitude is a class concept. Theories about economic class are traditionally forced to choose between unity and plurality. The unity pole is usually associated with Marx and his claim that in capitalist society there tends to be a simplification of class categories such that all forms of labor tend to merge into a single subject, the proletariat, which confronts capital. The plurality pole is most clearly illustrated by liberal arguments that insist on the ineluctable multiplicity of social classes. Both of these perspectives, in fact, are true. It is true, in the first case, that capitalist society is characterized by the division between capital and labor, between those who own productive property and those who do not and, furthermore, that the conditions of labor and the conditions of life of the propertyless tend to take on common characteristics. It is equally true, in the second case, that there is a potentially infinite number of classes that comprise contemporary society based not only on economic differences but also on those of race, ethnicity, geography, gender, sexuality, and other factors.

That both of these seemingly contradictory positions are true should indicate that the alternative itself may be false.<sup>3</sup> The mandate to choose between unity and multiplicity treats class as if it were merely an empirical concept and fails to take into consideration the extent to which class itself is defined politically.

Class is determined by class struggle. There are, of course, an infinite number of ways that humans can be grouped into classes—hair color, blood type, and so forth—but the classes that matter are those defined by the lines of collective struggle. Race is just as much a political concept as economic class is in this regard. Neither ethnicity nor skin color determine race; race is determined politically by collective struggle. Some maintain that race is created by racial oppression, as Jean-Paul Sartre, for example, claims that anti-Semitism produces the Jew. This logic should be taken one step further: race arises through the collective resistance to racial oppression. Economic class is formed similarly through collective acts of resistance. An investigation of economic class, then, like an investigation of race, should not begin with a mere catalog of empirical differences but rather with the lines of collective resistance to power. Class is a political concept, in short, in that a class is and can only be a collectivity that struggles in common.

Class is also a political concept in a second respect: a theory of class not only reflects the existing lines of class struggle, it also proposes potential future lines. The task of a theory of class in this respect is to identify the existing *conditions* for potential collective struggle and express them as a political *proposition*. Class is really a constituent deployment, a project. This is clearly how one should read Marx's claim about the tendency toward a binary model of class structures in capitalist society. The empirical claim here is not that society is already characterized by a single class of labor confronted by a single class of capital. In Marx's historical writings, for example, his analysis treats separately numerous classes of labor and capital. The empirical claim of Marx's class theory is that the conditions exist that make a single class of labor possible. This claim is really part of a political proposal for the unification of the struggles of labor in the proletariat as class. This political project is what most funda-

mentally divides Marx's binary class conception from the liberal models of class pluralism.

At this point, in fact, the old distinction between economic and political struggles becomes merely an obstacle to understanding class relations. Class is really a biopolitical concept that is at once economic and political.<sup>4</sup> When we say biopolitical, furthermore, this also means that our understanding of labor cannot be limited to waged labor but must refer to human creative capacities in all their generality. The poor, as we will argue, are thus not excluded from this conception of class but central to it.

The concept of multitude, then, is meant in one respect to demonstrate that a theory of economic class need not choose between unity and plurality. A multitude is an irreducible multiplicity; the singular social differences that constitute the multitude must always be expressed and can never be flattened into sameness, unity, identity, or indifference. The multitude is not merely a fragmented and dispersed multiplicity. It is true, of course, that in our postmodern social life old identities have broken apart. We will discuss later in this chapter, for example, how the compact identities of factory workers in the dominant countries have been undermined with the rise of short-term contracts and the forced mobility of new forms of work; how migration has challenged traditional notions of national identity; how family identity has changed; and so forth. The fracturing of modern identities, however, does not prevent the singularities from acting in common. This is the definition of the multitude we started from above: singularities that act in common. The key to this definition is the fact that there is no conceptual or actual contradiction between singularity and commonality.

In a second respect the concept of multitude is meant to repropose Marx's political project of class struggle. The multitude from this perspective is based not so much on the current empirical existence of the class but rather on its conditions of possibility. The question to ask, in other words, is not "What is the multitude?" but rather "What can the multitude become?" Such a political project must clearly be grounded in an empirical analysis that demonstrates the common conditions of those who can become the multitude. Common conditions, of course, does not mean sameness or unity, but it does require that no differences of nature or kind

divide the multitude. It means, in other words, that the innumerable, specific types of labor, forms of life, and geographical location, which will always necessarily remain, do not prohibit communication and collaboration in a common political project. This possible common project, in fact, bears some similarities to that of a series of nineteenth-century poets-philosophers, from Hölderlin and Leopardi to Rimbaud, who took up the ancient notion of the human struggle against nature and transformed it into an element of solidarity of all those who revolt against exploitation. (Indeed their situation facing the crisis of Enlightenment and revolutionary thought is not so different from our own.) From the struggle against the limits, scarcity, and cruelty of nature toward the surplus and abundance of human productivity: this is the material basis of a real common project that these poet-philosophers prophetically invoked.<sup>5</sup>

One initial approach is to conceive the multitude as all those who work under the rule of capital and thus potentially as the class of those who refuse the rule of capital. The concept of the multitude is thus very different from that of the working class, at least as that concept came to be used in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Working class is fundamentally a restricted concept based on exclusions. In its most limited conception, the working class refers only to industrial labor and thus excludes all other laboring classes. At its most broad, the working class refers to all waged laborers and thus excludes the various unwaged classes. The exclusions of other forms of labor from the working class are based on the notion that there are differences of kind between, for example, male industrial labor and female reproductive labor, between industrial labor and peasant labor, between the employed and the unemployed, between workers and the poor. The working class is thought to be the primary productive class and directly under the rule of capital, and thus the only subject that can act effectively against capital. The other exploited classes might also struggle against capital but only subordinated to the leadership of the working class. Whether or not this was the case in the past, the concept of multitude rests on the fact that it is not true today. The concept rests, in other words, on the claim that there is no political priority among the forms of labor: all forms of labor are today socially productive, they produce in

common, and share too a common potential to resist the domination of capital. Think of it as the equal opportunity of resistance. This is not to say, we should be clear, that industrial labor or the working class are not important but rather merely that they hold no political privilege with respect to other classes of labor within the multitude. In contrast to the exclusions that characterize the concept of the working class, then, the multitude is an open and expansive concept. The multitude gives the concept of the proletariat its fullest definition as all those who labor and produce under the rule of capital. In order to verify this concept of the multitude and its political project we will have to establish that indeed the differences of kind that used to divide labor no longer apply; in other words, that the conditions exist for the various types of labor to communicate, collaborate, and become common.

Before turning to figures of labor that have traditionally been excluded from the working class we should consider briefly first the general lines along which the working class itself has changed, particularly with respect to its hegemonic position in the economy. In any economic system there are numerous different forms of labor that exist side by side, but there is always one figure of labor that exerts hegemony over the others. This hegemonic figure serves as a vortex that gradually transforms other figures to adopt its central qualities. The hegemonic figure is not dominant in quantitative terms but rather in the way it exerts a power of transformation over others. Hegemony here designates a tendency.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, industrial labor was hegemonic in the global economy even though it remained a minority in quantitative terms with respect to other forms of production such as agriculture.<sup>6</sup> Industry was hegemonic insofar as it pulled other forms into its vortex: agriculture, mining, and even society itself were forced to industrialize. Not only the mechanical practices but also the rhythms of life of industrial labor and its working day gradually transformed all other social institutions, such as the family, the school, and the military. The transformed laboring practices, in fields such as industrialized agriculture, of course, always remained different from industry, but they also increasingly shared elements in common. That is the aspect of this process that interests us

most: the multiplicity of specific concrete forms of labor remain different, but it tends to accumulate an ever greater number of common elements.

In the final decades of the twentieth century, industrial labor lost its hegemony and in its stead emerged "immaterial labor," that is, labor that creates immaterial products, such as knowledge, information, communication, a relationship, or an emotional response.<sup>7</sup> Conventional terms such as *service work*, *intellectual labor*, and *cognitive labor* all refer to aspects of immaterial labor, but none of them captures its generality. As an initial approach, one can conceive immaterial labor in two principle forms. The first form refers to labor that is primarily intellectual or linguistic, such as problem solving, symbolic and analytical tasks, and linguistic expressions.<sup>8</sup> This kind of immaterial labor produces ideas, symbols, codes, texts, linguistic figures, images, and other such products. We call the other principle form of immaterial labor "affective labor." Unlike emotions, which are mental phenomena, affects refer equally to body and mind. In fact, affects, such as joy and sadness, reveal the present state of life in the entire organism, expressing a certain state of the body along with a certain mode of thinking.<sup>9</sup> Affective labor, then, is labor that produces or manipulates affects such as a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, or passion. One can recognize affective labor, for example, in the work of legal assistants, flight attendants, and fast food workers (service with a smile). One indication of the rising importance of affective labor, at least in the dominant countries, is the tendency for employers to highlight education, attitude, character, and "prosocial" behavior as the primary skills employees need.<sup>10</sup> A worker with a good attitude and social skills is another way of saying a worker adept at affective labor.

Most actual jobs involving immaterial labor combine these two forms. The creation of communication, for instance, is certainly a linguistic and intellectual operation but also inevitably has an affective component in the relationship between the communicating parties. It is common to say that journalists and the media in general not only report information but also must make the news attractive, exciting, desirable; the media must create affects and forms of life.<sup>11</sup> All forms of communication, in fact, combine the production of symbols, language, and information with the produc-

tion of affect. In addition, immaterial labor almost always mixes with material forms of labor: health care workers, for example, perform affective, cognitive, and linguistic tasks together with material ones, such as cleaning bedpans and changing bandages.

The labor involved in all immaterial production, we should emphasize, remains material—it involves our bodies and brains as all labor does. What is immaterial is *its product*. We recognize that *immaterial labor* is a very ambiguous term in this regard. It might be better to understand the new hegemonic form as "biopolitical labor," that is, labor that creates not only material goods but also relationships and ultimately social life itself. The term *biopolitical* thus indicates that the traditional distinctions between the economic, the political, the social, and the cultural become increasingly blurred. Biopolitics, however, presents numerous additional conceptual complexities, and thus in our view the notion of immateriality, despite its ambiguities, seems easier to grasp initially and better at indicating the general tendency of economic transformation.

When we claim that immaterial labor is tending toward the hegemonic position we are not saying that most of the workers in the world today are producing primarily immaterial goods. On the contrary, agricultural labor remains, as it has for centuries, dominant in quantitative terms, and industrial labor has not declined in terms of numbers globally. Immaterial labor constitutes a minority of global labor, and it is concentrated in some of the dominant regions of the globe. Our claim, rather, is that immaterial labor has become *hegemonic in qualitative terms* and has imposed a tendency on other forms of labor and society itself. Immaterial labor, in other words, is today in the same position that industrial labor was 150 years ago, when it accounted for only a small fraction of global production and was concentrated in a small part of the world but nonetheless exerted hegemony over all other forms of production. Just as in that phase all forms of labor and society itself had to industrialize, today labor and society have to informationalize, become intelligent, become communicative, become affective.

In some respects, the classes subordinated in the period of industrial hegemony provide the key to understanding the principle characteristics of the hegemony of immaterial labor. Agriculturists, on one hand,

have always used the knowledge, intelligence, and innovation typical of immaterial labor. Certainly agricultural work is extraordinarily strenuous physically—the earth is low, as anyone who has worked in the fields will tell you—but agriculture is also a science. Every agriculturist is a chemist, matching soil types with the right crops, transforming fruit and milk into wine and cheese; a genetic biologist, selecting the best seeds to improve plant varieties; and a meteorologist, watching the skies. The agriculturist must know the earth and work with it, according to its rhythms. Determining the exact best day to plant or harvest a crop is a complex calculation. This is not a spontaneous act of intuition or a rote repetition of the past but a decision based on traditional knowledges in relation to observed present conditions, constantly renovated through intelligence and experimentation. (In a similar way many agriculturists also have to be financial brokers, reading the constant fluctuation of markets for the best time to sell their products.) This kind of open science typical of agriculture that moves with the unpredictable changes of nature suggests the types of knowledge central to immaterial labor rather than the mechanistic sciences of the factory.

Another form of labor subordinated under the industrial hegemony, on the other hand, what has been traditionally called “women’s work,” particularly reproductive labor in the home, demonstrates not only that same kind of open science of knowledges and intelligence closely tied to nature but also the affective labor central to immaterial production. Socialist feminist scholars have described this affective labor using terms such as *kin work*, *caring labor*, and *maternal work*.<sup>12</sup> Certainly domestic labor does require such repetitive material tasks as cleaning and cooking, but it also involves producing affects, relationships, and forms of communication and cooperation among children, in the family, and in the community. Affective labor is biopolitical production in that it directly produces social relationships and forms of life.

The affective labor that feminists have recognized and the knowledges and intelligence typical of agricultural labor both provide important keys to understanding the characteristics of the immaterial paradigm, but this does not mean that agriculturists or women are better off under the hegemony of immaterial labor. On the one hand, agriculturists, for all their in-

telligence and knowledges, remain tied to the soil and, as we will see shortly, suffer ever more brutal forms of exploitation in the global economy. On the other hand, when affective labor becomes central to many productive tasks under the hegemony of immaterial labor it is still most often performed by women in subordinate positions. Indeed labor with a high affective component is generally feminized, given less authority, and paid less. Women employed as paralegals and nurses, for example, not only do the affective labor of constructing relationships with patients and clients and that of managing office dynamics, but they are also caregivers for their bosses, the lawyers and doctors, who are largely male. (The strikes and demonstrations of nurses in France in the early 1990s illustrated well the gender basis of the exploitation of affective and material labor.<sup>13</sup>) Furthermore, when affective production becomes part of waged labor it can be experienced as extremely alienating: I am selling my ability to make human relationships, something extremely intimate, at the command of the client and the boss.<sup>14</sup> Alienation was always a poor concept for understanding the exploitation of factory workers, but here in a realm that many still do not want to consider labor—affective labor, as well as knowledge production and symbolic production—alienation does provide a useful conceptual key for understanding exploitation.

The hegemony of immaterial labor, then, does not make all work pleasant or rewarding, nor does it lessen the hierarchy and command in the workplace or the polarization of the labor market. Our notion of immaterial labor should not be confused with the utopian dreams in the 1990s of a “new economy” that, largely through technological innovations, globalization, and rising stock markets, was thought by some to have made all work interesting and satisfying, democratized wealth, and banished recessions to the past.<sup>15</sup> The hegemony of immaterial labor does, though, tend to change the conditions of work. Consider, for example, the transformation of the working day in the immaterial paradigm, that is, the increasingly indefinite division between work time and leisure time. In the industrial paradigm workers produced almost exclusively during the hours in the factory. When production is aimed at solving a problem, however, or creating an idea or a relationship, work time tends to expand to the entire time of life. An idea or an image comes to you not only in the



office but also in the shower or in your dreams. Once again, the traditional characteristics of agriculture and domestic labor can help us understand this shift. Agricultural labor, of course, traditionally has no time clocks in the fields: the working day stretches from dawn to dusk when necessary. Traditional arrangements of women's domestic labor even more clearly destroy the divisions of the working day and expand to fill all of life.

Some economists also use the terms *Fordism* and *post-Fordism* to mark the shift from an economy characterized by the stable long-term employment typical of factory workers to one marked by flexible, mobile, and precarious labor relations: *flexible* because workers have to adapt to different tasks, *mobile* because workers have to move frequently between jobs, and *precarious* because no contracts guarantee stable, long-term employment.<sup>16</sup> Whereas economic modernization, which developed Fordist labor relations, centered on the economies of scale and large systems of production and exchange, economic postmodernization, with its post-Fordist labor relations, develops smaller-scale, flexible systems. The basic economic ideology that runs throughout postmodernization is based on the notion that efficiency is hindered by monolithic systems of production and mass exchange and enhanced instead by production systems that respond rapidly and differentiated market schemes that target specialized strategies. An emerging post-Fordist form of agricultural production, for example, is characterized by such technological shifts. Agricultural modernization relied heavily on mechanical technologies, from the Soviet tractor to the California irrigation systems, but agricultural postmodernization develops biological and biochemical innovations, along with specialized systems of production, such as greenhouses, artificial lighting, and soilless agriculture.<sup>17</sup> These new techniques and technologies tend to move agricultural production away from large-scale production and allow for more specialized, small-scale operations. Furthermore, in the same way that postmodern industrial production is being informationalized, through the integration, for instance, of communication technologies into existing industrial processes, agriculture too is being informationalized, most clearly at the level of the seed. One of the most interesting struggles in agriculture, for example, which we will discuss in more detail later, is over who owns plant germplasm, that is, the genetic information encased in the seed. Seed cor-

porations patent the new plant varieties they create, often today through genetic engineering, but farmers have long discovered, conserved, and improved plant genetic resources without any comparable legal claim to ownership. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has thus proposed the concept of Farmers' Rights to plant genetic resources that is meant to balance the Plant Breeders' Rights.<sup>18</sup> Our aim here is not to praise or condemn these practices—some scientific interventions in agriculture are beneficial and others detrimental. Our primary point is simply that the process of agricultural change and the struggle over rights are increasingly dependent on the control and production of information, specifically plant genetic information. That is one way in which agriculture is being informationalized.

In general, the hegemony of immaterial labor tends to transform the organization of production from the linear relationships of the assembly line to the innumerable and indeterminate relationships of distributed networks. Information, communication, and cooperation become the norms of production, and the network becomes its dominant form of organization. The technical systems of production therefore correspond closely to its social composition: on one side the technological networks and on the other the cooperation of social subjects put to work. This correspondence defines the new topology of labor and also characterizes the new practices and structures of exploitation. We will argue below in excursus 1 that exploitation under the hegemony of immaterial labor is no longer primarily the expropriation of value measured by individual or collective labor time but rather the capture of value that is produced by cooperative labor and that becomes increasingly common through its circulation in social networks. The central forms of productive cooperation are no longer created by the capitalist as part of the project to organize labor but rather emerge from the productive energies of labor itself. This is indeed the key characteristic of immaterial labor: to produce communication, social relations, and cooperation.

The hegemony of immaterial labor creates common relationships and common social forms in a way more pronounced than ever before. Every hegemonic form of labor, of course, creates common elements: just as economic modernization and the hegemony of industrial labor brought

agriculture and all other sectors in line with the technologies, practices, and basic economic relations of industry, economic postmodernization and the hegemony of immaterial labor have similarly common transformative effects, as we have said. In part this is a matter of newly created bases of commonality and in part it is that we can recognize more clearly today bases of commonality that have long existed, such as the role of information and scientific knowledges in agriculture. The difference of immaterial labor, however, is that its products are themselves, in many respects, immediately social and common. Producing communication, affective relationships, and knowledges, in contrast to cars and typewriters, can directly expand the realm of what we share in common. This is not to say, we repeat, that the conditions of labor and production are becoming *the same* throughout the world or throughout the different sectors of the economy. The claim rather is that the many singular instances of labor processes, productive conditions, local situations, and lived experiences coexist with a "becoming common," at a different level of abstraction, of the forms of labor and the general relations of production and exchange—and that there is no contradiction between this singularity and commonality. This becoming common, which tends to reduce the qualitative divisions within labor, is the biopolitical condition of the multitude.

Reality check: what evidence do we have to substantiate our claim of a hegemony of immaterial labor? We have already said that since this claim involves a tendency it is not a question of immaterial labor being dominant today in quantitative terms. The first and most concrete evidence we have are the trends in employment. In the dominant countries, immaterial labor is central to most of what statistics show are the fastest-growing occupations, such as food servers, salespersons, computer engineers, teachers, and health workers.<sup>19</sup> There is a corresponding trend for many forms of material production, such as industry and agriculture, to be transferred to subordinate parts of the world. These employment trends show that the hegemony of immaterial labor is emerging in coordination with the existing global divisions of labor and power. A second type of evidence, which has to be viewed in more qualitative terms, is that other forms of labor and production are adopting the characteristics of immaterial production.

Not only have computers been integrated into all kinds of production but more generally communication mechanisms, information, knowledges, and affect are transforming traditional productive practices, the way control of information in seeds, for example, is affecting agriculture. Third, the centrality of immaterial labor is reflected in the growing importance of the immaterial forms of property that it produces. We will analyze later the complex legal issues raised with regard to patents, copyright, and various immaterial goods that have recently become eligible to be protected as private property. Finally, the most abstract and most general evidence is that the distributed network form that is typical of immaterial production is springing up throughout social life as the way to understand everything from neural functions to terrorist organizations. This is the ultimate role of a hegemonic form of production: to transform all of society in its image, a tendency that no statistics can capture. The real demonstration of this tendency, in fact, is the becoming biopolitical of production.

## THE TWILIGHT OF THE PEASANT WORLD

The figure of the peasant may pose the greatest challenge for the concept of the multitude because there is such an enormous weight of economic, cultural, and political history that positions it as outside of and qualitatively different from the industrial working class and other laboring classes. It is a commonplace, in fact, to conceive of peasants and village life as unchanged for centuries and even millennia.<sup>20</sup> What could be more eternal and basic to humanity than the figure of the peasant in close interaction with the earth, working the soil and producing food? We should be clear that not all agriculturists are peasants; the peasant is a historical figure that designates a certain way of working the soil and producing within a specific set of social relationships. The peasantry came into being and will eventually cease to exist. This does not mean that there will no longer be agricultural production or rural life or the like. It means rather that the conditions of agricultural production change, and specifically, we will

argue, that they become common to those of mining, industry, immaterial production, and other forms of labor in such a way that agriculture communicates with other forms of production and no longer poses a qualitatively different, isolated form of production and life. Agriculture, along with all other sectors, becomes increasingly biopolitical. This becoming common, as we said, is one condition that makes possible the existence of the multitude.

Peasantry is primarily an economic concept that denotes a specific position within the relations of production and exchange. Peasants can be defined in a first approximation as those who labor on the land, produce primarily for their own consumption, are partially integrated and subordinated within a larger economic system, and either own or have access to the necessary land and equipment.<sup>21</sup> The two central axes of the definition, then, have to do with property ownership and market relations. It is worth emphasizing to avoid confusion that peasant communities are not isolated economically as were some traditional forms of agricultural production; nor are they integrated fully into national or global markets as are capitalist farmers. They stand in a middle position of partial integration in which their production is primarily but not exclusively oriented toward their own consumption.<sup>22</sup>

Peasantry, however, by this commonly accepted definition, is not yet precise enough because it does not differentiate sufficiently with respect to property. Mao Zedong, for one, recognized during his early investigations of the Chinese peasantry that to make sense of the economic term politically he had to divide the peasantry according to land ownership into three categories: rich peasants, who own extensive land and equipment and hire others to help them work the land; middle peasants, who own sufficient land and equipment and rely primarily on the labor of their own family; and poor peasants, who rent land or sharecrop and often have to sell some of their labor to others.<sup>23</sup> The fundamental division in Mao's analysis between the peasants who own property and those who do not creates a centrifugal tendency at each end of the classification: at the top the rich peasants are very close to the landlords because they own sufficient property to employ others, and at the bottom the poor peasants are little different than agricultural workers because they own no property or insufficient property.

The so-called middle peasants stand out in this analysis as the most discrete and independent category, conceptually and socially. Perhaps for this reason middle peasants define the concept of peasantry as a whole in many common formulations, so that peasants are understood in economic terms as self-sufficient, small-holding agricultural producers. The historical tendency of the changes in class composition of the peasantry through the modern era reduces dramatically the numbers of the middle peasantry, corresponding to the centrifugal conceptual tendency in Mao's analysis. At the top end a few rich peasants manage to gain more land and become indistinguishable from landowners, and at the bottom most poor peasants tend to be excluded from their traditional forms of land tenure (such as sharecropping) and become simple agricultural laborers. Middle peasants all but vanished in the process, being forced to fall one way or the other along the general cleavage of ownership.

This centrifugal historical tendency corresponds to the processes of modernization in both its capitalist and socialist forms. When Stalin launched the program of collectivization, the Soviet regime thought the strategy would boost agricultural production through economies of scale and facilitate the use of more advanced equipment and technologies: collectivization, in short, would bring tractors to the farm.<sup>24</sup> The cruel process of collectivization was clearly understood from the beginning—not only by the leaders but also by the peasants themselves—as a war not simply against the rich peasants, the *kulaks*, who were accused of hoarding grain, but against all the peasants who owned property, and really against the entire peasantry as a class. In the short term the process of collectivization was certainly not a success in terms of agricultural productivity and efficiency (the fierce resistance of the peasants guaranteed that failure<sup>25</sup>), and it may not have succeeded in realizing the economies of scale either in the long term—that is a matter of debate that was long clouded by cold war propaganda. Our primary point here is that the socialist modernization of agriculture, which the Chinese to a large extent adopted and repeated,<sup>26</sup> not only brought tractors to the countryside but, more important, irreversibly transformed the agricultural relations of production and exchange, ultimately eliminating the peasantry as an economic class. It makes little sense to continue to use the term *peasant* to

name the agricultural worker on a massive collective or state farm who owns no property and produces food to be distributed on a national scale. Nor does it make sense to continue to call "peasants" the populations that have left the fields to work in the factories. Furthermore, subsequent processes of decollectivization of agricultural production in the post-Soviet and post-Mao eras have in various degrees reestablished private ownership of the land but they have not reconstructed the relations of exchange that define the peasantry, that is, production primarily for the family's own consumption and partial integration into larger markets. The transformation of state and collective property toward forms of private property is not a return to the peasantry and the way things were but the creation of a new condition linked to the global capitalist relations of production and exchange.<sup>27</sup>

The transformation of agricultural relations of production in the capitalist countries took a different route, or really several different routes, but arrived at a similar conclusion. In the United States, for example, the capitalist market (and ultimately the banks) declared small-holding agricultural production to be unviable in the early twentieth century and provoked a massive population shift from rural to urban and semiurban areas. The radical consolidation of property in large farms and ultimately in the hands of huge agribusiness corporations was accompanied by a great leap forward in productivity through water management, mechanization, chemical treatment, and so forth. The family farm and all independent, small-scale agricultural producers quickly disappeared.<sup>28</sup> Like the Joad family in John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, farmers were forced from the land and compelled to pack up and make out the best they could. In Europe the process was more varied and took place over a longer period. In England, for example, agricultural land was consolidated into large estates in the early modern period, whereas small-scale ownership long remained in France. There was also a significant difference between the continuing serfdom in eastern Europe and the relative freedom of agricultural labor in western Europe.<sup>29</sup> By the end of the twentieth century, however, even the small agricultural ownership that remained was so embedded in the national and global relations of exchange that it could no longer be considered peasant.<sup>30</sup>

The history of the peasantry and agricultural production in the subordinated capitalist countries is much more complex. One should keep in mind, first of all, that in many areas peasant relations of production and exchange are a relatively recent phenomenon created by the European colonizers. Before the colonial intrusion agricultural property was in most cases owned collectively and the communities were almost completely self-sufficient and isolated economically.<sup>31</sup> The colonial powers destroyed the systems of collective ownership, introduced capitalist private property, and integrated local agricultural production partially into much larger economic markets—thereby creating conditions that resembled what in Europe was known as peasant production and exchange.<sup>32</sup> A very small portion of the rural population in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, however, have ever fit comfortably into the ideologically central category of middle peasant—independent, small-holding farmers who produce primarily for their own consumption. Latin American agriculture, for example, has been dominated at least since the nineteenth century by an extreme polarization of land ownership, with at one end huge *latifundio* estates that employ numerous families and at the other landless workers or farmers with holdings too small and infertile to support themselves. Land reform, which was a liberal and revolutionary battle cry in Latin America throughout the twentieth century, from Zapata's ragged troops to guerrilla revolutionaries in Nicaragua and El Salvador, held something like the figure of the middle peasant as its goal. Aside from a few brief exceptions, most notably in Mexico and Bolivia, the tendency in Latin America has constantly moved in the opposite direction, exacerbating the polarization of land tenure and ownership.<sup>33</sup>

Throughout the subordinated capitalist world small-holding agricultural producers are systematically deprived of land rights as property is gradually consolidated into large holdings, controlled either by national landowners or mammoth foreign corporations.<sup>34</sup> This process may appear as a haphazard and undirected movement carried out by an extended and disunited series of agents, including national governments, foreign governments, multinational and transnational agribusiness corporations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and many others. At a more abstract and fundamental level, as we will see in chapter 2.2,

“De Corpore,” these various agents are united by a common ideology, which spans from capitalist modernization to neoliberalism and global economic integration. According to this economic ideology, small-holding subsistence agriculture is economically backward and inefficient, not only because of its technological and mechanical limitations but also and more importantly because of its relations of exchange. In a globally integrated market, according to this view, an economic actor in agriculture or any other sector can survive only by focusing productive energies on a single commodity it can produce better than others and distribute on a wide scale. The resulting export-oriented single-crop agriculture inevitably mandates large-scale production and the concentration of ownership. Capitalist collectivization has thus tended toward creating a virtual monopoly of the soil with huge units of agricultural production employing armies of agricultural workers that produce for the world market.<sup>35</sup> Outside of this is left a growing rural poor that owns either no land or insufficient land for survival.

The figure of the peasant has thus throughout the world faded into the background of the economic landscape of agriculture, which tends to be populated now by huge corporations, agricultural workers, and an increasingly desperate rural poor. The great movement of modernization in both its socialist and capitalist forms has been one of general convergence. Since the 1970s some authors have emphasized the growing similarities between agriculturists and the industrial working class, that is, the proletarianization of agricultural labor and the creation of “factories in the fields.”<sup>36</sup> One should be careful, however, not to conceive of this as a process of the homogenization of productive practices and forms of life. Agriculturists have not become the *same* as the industrial working class. Agricultural labor is still utterly different from mining, industrial labor, service labor, and other forms of labor. Agricultural life has a unique relationship to the earth and develops a symbiotic relationship with the life of the elements—soil, water, sunshine, air. (And here we can recognize clearly the potential for agriculture to become biopolitical.) Agriculture is and will always remain a singular form of production and life, and yet—this has been our primary point—the processes of modernization have

created common relations of production and exchange that agriculture and other forms of production share.

This disappearance of the figure of the peasant, which we have described in economic terms, can also be recognized from a cultural standpoint. This gives us another perspective on the same process. Much of modern European literature up to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, for example, centered on the peasant world—not so much on the peasantry as a social class but more often on all the complementary social formations it made possible, such as the knowable community of country manor houses, the urban aristocratic circuit of salons and leisure, and the limited horizons of village life.<sup>37</sup> In fact the peasants themselves were not as important in European literature as was the traditional rural life in which the peasants, like the land, played the role of natural and stable backdrop. This peasant world was linked to the innocence and naturalness of traditional social arrangements—class divisions, relations of property and production, and so forth—that were really, of course, neither innocent nor natural. First in England and then throughout Europe, however, there was a growing recognition that this happy rural peasant world had disappeared or was fast in the process of disappearing. And yet long after it had disappeared in reality the peasant world remained in European literature in the form of nostalgia for times gone by, for a corresponding traditional structure of feeling, set of values, or form of life.<sup>38</sup> This European cultural figure of the traditional peasant world, and even the nostalgia for it, eventually came to an end. One explanation of the passage from realism to modernism, a common trope in European literary studies and art history, points to the end of the peasant world: when the proximate past of the peasant world is no longer accessible, many European authors and artists shift to the more archaic past of the primitive and the mythical. The birth of modernism, in other words, according to this conception, is the discovery of an ancient, immemorial past, a kind of eternal primitive of the psyche or myth or instinct. D. H. Lawrence, T. S. Eliot, and Michel Leiris, along with Paul Gauguin, Henri Matisse, and Pablo Picasso, to cite only some of the most obvious examples, adopt figures of primitive existence and being as elements in their aesthetic constructions. This tension

between primitivism and constructedness is indeed one characteristic that defines modernism.<sup>39</sup>

Whereas in modern European literature and art we can trace a cultural movement from the peasant to the primitive, the history of anthropology moves in the opposite direction, from the primitive to the peasant.<sup>40</sup> Classical anthropology was born in the late nineteenth century on the basis of the binary division between the European self and the primitive other, but in the middle of the twentieth century this was displaced by a different binary couple, European self-peasant other, which served as the foundation of much of modern anthropology. One important aspect of the shift from primitive to peasant is a new conception of otherness: whereas the anthropological fascination with the primitive poses a relationship of extreme difference and strangeness, the peasant is a familiar and proximate figure, and with this shift the degree of otherness is reduced. Eventually, as the economic figure of the peasant, which always stood on a tenuous footing outside of Europe, loses validity in the final decades of the twentieth century, the anthropological paradigm of the peasant too goes into crisis. The field of anthropology today at the beginning of the twenty-first century is moving beyond its modern paradigm and developing a new conception of difference, which we will return to later.

Finally, in addition to its economic and cultural aspects, the peasant is also a political figure or, rather, in many conceptions, a nonpolitical figure, disqualified from politics.<sup>41</sup> This does not mean that peasants do not rebel against their own subordination and exploitation, because indeed modern history is punctuated by massive explosions of peasant rebellion and marked too by a continuous stream of small-scale peasant resistances. It does not mean either that the peasantry does not play an important political role. It means that the peasantry is fundamentally conservative, isolated, and capable only of reaction, not of any autonomous political action of its own. As we saw in part I, peasant wars, according to this view, at least since the sixteenth century, have been primarily telluric, tied to the defense of the soil and aimed at preserving tradition.

Marx claimed that the political passivity of the peasantry is due to its lack of both communication and large-scale circuits of social cooperation. The French small-holding peasant communities that Marx studied in the

mid-nineteenth century were dispersed in the countryside and remained separate and isolated. Their inability to communicate is why Marx believed that the peasants cannot represent themselves (and must therefore be represented).<sup>42</sup> In Marx's view, political subjectivity requires of a class not only self-representation but first and most fundamentally internal communication. Communication, in this sense, is the key to the political significance of the traditional division between city and country and the political prejudice for urban political actors that followed from the nineteenth century into the twentieth. Not so much idiocy but incommunicability defined rural life. The circuits of communication that gave the urban working class a great political advantage over the rural peasantry were also due to the conditions of work. The industrial labor force, working in teams around a common machine, is defined by cooperation and communication, which allows it to become active and emerge as a political subject.

There was indeed a rich debate among socialists and communists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries on the "agrarian question" and the role of the peasants in revolutionary politics. Marx himself proposed at one point basing a communist political project on the Russian peasant communes.<sup>43</sup> The major lines of Marxist and socialist thought, however, conceived of the peasantry as a class that could have revolutionary potential only by following the urban industrial proletariat—an unequal partnership in which the proletariat played the active, leading agent and the peasantry the passive body.<sup>44</sup> When the industrial proletariat has led and spoken for the peasantry, however, it has certainly not always been in the peasants' interest. This tragic history has taught us, once again, the injustice and dire consequences of one subject speaking for a subordinated other, even when that other is unable to speak for itself.<sup>45</sup>

It may seem that Mao Zedong is the figure that most clearly breaks with this Marxian line, but his declarations too, from the days of his early political activity through the period of revolutionary struggle, remain faithful to the two basic tenets of Marx's thinking on the political role of the peasantry: the peasantry is fundamentally passive and must be allied with and led by the only properly political revolutionary subject, the industrial proletariat.<sup>46</sup> The twentieth-century Chinese peasantry is no less

isolated and no more communicative than the peasants Marx studied in nineteenth-century France. Mao recognized that in the context of Chinese society, with such a small industrial proletariat and such a large peasantry, the political engagement of the peasantry had to be much more extensive than elsewhere—and indeed that the Chinese revolution would have to invent a peasant form of communist revolution. The role of the peasantry in China up to this point is really only quantitatively different from its role in previous communist revolutionary struggles. The Chinese revolution itself was really a revolution conducted *with* the peasantry, not a revolution *by* the peasantry. The qualitative difference emerged only later. During the revolutionary struggle and increasingly during the periods of the Great Leap and the Cultural Revolution, Mao's political focus turned toward the peasantry—not toward the peasants *as they were* but toward the peasants *as they could be*.<sup>47</sup> The essence of the Maoist project was the effort to transform the peasants *politically*. The peasants, through the long revolutionary process in its various phases, overcome the passivity and isolation that Marx had recognized; the peasants become communicative, cooperative, and articulate as an active collective subject. This is the primary sense in which the Maoist project is applicable throughout the world: wars and struggles of peasants should no longer be oriented toward the defense of the soil in a strictly conservative relationship. They should instead become biopolitical struggles aimed at transforming social life in its entirety. As the peasantry becomes communicative and active it ceases to exist as a separate political category, causing a decline in the political significance of the division between town and country.<sup>48</sup> Paradoxically, *the final victory of the peasant revolution is the end of the peasantry* (as a separate political category). In other words, the ultimate political goal of the peasantry is its own destruction as a class.<sup>49</sup>

The figure of the peasant that emerges from its passive and isolated state, like a butterfly emerging from its chrysalis, discovers itself to be part of the multitude, one of numerous singular figures of labor and forms of life that despite their differences share common conditions of existence. The tendency of the figure of the peasant, then, to become a less separate and distinct category today is indicative of the more general trend of the

socialization of all the figures of labor. In the same way that the figure of the peasant tends to disappear, so too does the figure of the industrial worker, the service industry worker, and all other separate categories. And in turn the struggles of each sector tend to become the struggle of all. The most innovative struggles of agriculturists today, for example, such as those of the *Confédération paysanne* in France or the *Movimento sem terra* in Brazil, are not closed struggles limited to a single sector of the population. They open new perspectives for everyone on questions of ecology, poverty, sustainable economies, and indeed all aspects of life.<sup>50</sup> Certainly, each form of labor remains singular in its concrete existence, and every type of worker is different from every other—the autoworker from the rice farmer from the retail salesperson—but this multiplicity tends to be inscribed in a common substrate. In philosophical terms we can say that these are so many singular modes of bringing to life a common laboring substance: each mode has a singular essence and yet they all participate in a common substance.

Lessons from the field of anthropology can help clarify this relationship between singularity and commonality. As we said earlier, the decline of classical anthropology and its paradigmatic figure of otherness, the primitive, gave rise to modern anthropology and its paradigmatic figure of the peasant. Now the decline of the figure of the peasant as other and consequently of modern anthropology gives rise to a global anthropology.<sup>51</sup> The task of global anthropology, as many contemporary anthropologists formulate it, is to abandon the traditional structure of otherness altogether and discover instead a concept of cultural difference based on a notion of singularity. In other words, the “others” of classical and modern anthropology, the primitive and the peasant, were conceived in their difference from the modern European self. The differences from modern Europe were posed in both cases in temporal terms, such that the non-European was an anachronistic survival of the past, either the primordial past of the primitive or the historical past of the peasant. Global anthropology must overcome the fundamental Eurocentrism of these conceptions that think of difference primarily as difference from the European. Cultural difference must be conceived in itself, as singularity, without any such foundation in



the other.<sup>52</sup> Similarly it must think all cultural singularities not as anachronistic survivals of the past but as equal participants in our common present.

Consider, as an example of this new global paradigm, how anthropologists have begun to reconceive African modernity. As long as we view European society strictly as the standard by which the modern is measured, then of course many parts of Africa, along with other subordinated regions of the world, will never match up; but as soon as we recognize the singularities and plurality within modernity we can begin to understand how Africa is equally as modern as, yet different from, Europe. Africans, moreover, in our age of globalizing relationships, are just as cosmopolitan as those in the dominant regions in the sense that their social life is constantly changing and characterized by cultural exchange and economic interaction with various distant parts of the world.<sup>53</sup> Some of the phenomena that pose the strongest challenge for this conception of African modernity and cosmopolitanism are the forms of ritual and magic that continue to be integral elements of contemporary life. In post-apartheid South Africa, for instance, there has been a marked increase in reports of occult phenomena and violence, such as witchcraft, Satanism, monsters, zombies, ritual murder, and the like.<sup>54</sup> This is not a resurgence of the primitive premodern, nor is it a local phenomenon. It is rather one common element emerging in comparable contexts all over the planet, albeit in a variety of local guises. Indonesia, Russia, and parts of Latin America, for example, have similarly experienced a resurgence of occult phenomena and violence. These are all societies in which new dreams of wealth in the global capitalist economy have for the first time been plunged into the icy realities of the imperial hierarchies. Magic and monsters are means to understand in each of these contexts this shared contradictory social situation. The local singularity and global commonality of these modes of life do not contradict but rather together determine our plural collective planetary condition.

This kind of study helps us understand the primary anthropological characteristics of the multitude. When we approach a different population we are no longer forced to choose between saying either "They are the same as us" or "They are other to us" (as was the case with the discourse

on primitives and, to some extent, peasants). The contradictory conceptual couple, identity and difference, is not the adequate framework for understanding the organization of the multitude. Instead we are a multiplicity of singular forms of life and *at the same time* share a common global existence. The anthropology of the multitude is an anthropology of singularity and commonality.

## TWO ITALIANS IN INDIA

*Once upon a time, two Italian writers go on vacation together in India, and each writes a book about his travels. One sees in India only what is different and the other only what is the same.*

*The one writer, Alberto Moravia, titles his book An Idea of India (Un'idea dell'India) and tries to explain how different India is, but he is frustrated that he can grasp it only in the most abstract, metaphysical terms and through a series of tautologies. The experience teaches him why Europeans are Europeans and Indians Indians, but that is so hard to capture in words. The difference of religion, he thinks, will help him put his finger on it. India is the land of religion par excellence, he explains. Not only are its religions different than ours but also in India religion envelops all of life. The religious idea completely permeates experience. Indians go about their daily lives living their religions in countless strange and incomprehensible rituals. But this notion of a living religious idea, he finds, does not really capture the difference either. The difference of India is much more than that. In fact, this extreme difficulty of expressing it proves to him that the difference of India is ineffable. My fellow Italians, he concludes, I cannot describe India to you. You must go there and experience its enigma yourself. All I can say is, India is India.*

*The other writer, Pier Paolo Pasolini, titles his book The Scent of India (L'odore dell'India) and tries to explain how similar India is. He walks the crowded streets at night in Bombay, and the air is filled with odors that remind him of home: the rotting vegetables left over from the day's market, the hot oil of a vendor cooking food on sidewalk, and the faint smell of sewage. The writer comes upon a family conducting an elaborate ritual on the riverbank, making offerings of fruit, rice, and flowers. This is not new to him either. The*



peasants back home in Friuli have similar customs, ancient pagan rituals that have survived for ages. And then, of course, there are the boys. The writer talks playfully in broken English with groups of boys who congregate on street corners. Eventually in Cochin (Kochi) he befriends Revi, a poor, laughing orphan who is continually tormented and robbed by older boys. Before leaving town the writer convinces a Catholic priest with the promise of sending money from Italy to take the boy in and protect him, just as he would have done back home. All of these boys, the writer finds, are just like the boys in every poor neighborhood of Rome or Naples. My fellow Italians, he concludes, Indians are just the same as us. In his eyes, in fact, all the differences of India melt away and all that remains is another Italy.

It makes you wonder if the travel companions even saw the same country. In fact, although polar opposites, their two responses fit together perfectly as a fable of the two faces of Eurocentrism: "They are utterly different from us" and "They are just the same as us." The truth, you might say, lies somewhere between the two—they are somewhat like us and also a little different—but really that compromise only clouds the problem. Neither of the two Italian writers can escape the need to use European identity as a universal standard, the measure of all sameness and difference. Even Indians (and Indonesians, Peruvians, and Nigerians too) have to measure themselves to the standard of European identity. That is the power of Eurocentrism.

India, however, is not merely different from Europe. India (and every local reality within India) is singular—not different from any universal standard but different in itself. If the first Italian writer could free himself of Europe as standard he could grasp this singularity. This singularity does not mean, however, that the world is merely a collection of incommunicable localities. Once we recognize singularity, the common begins to emerge. Singularities do communicate, and they are able to do so because of the common they share. We share bodies with two eyes, ten fingers, ten toes; we share life on this earth; we share capitalist regimes of production and exploitation; we share common dreams of a better future. Our communication, collaboration, and cooperation, furthermore, not only are based on the common that exists but also in turn produce the common. We make and remake the common we share every day. If the second Italian writer could free himself of Europe as standard, he could grasp this dynamic relation of the common.

*Here is a non-Eurocentric view of the global multitude: an open network of singularities that links together on the basis of the common they share and the common they produce. It is not easy for any of us to stop measuring the world against the standard of Europe, but the concept of the multitude requires it of us. It is a challenge. Embrace it.*

## THE WEALTH OF THE POOR (OR, WE ARE THE POORS!)

When we say that the becoming common of labor is a central condition necessary for the construction of the multitude, this might suggest that those who are excluded from waged labor—the poor, the unemployed, the unwaged, the homeless, and so forth—are also by definition excluded from the multitude. This is not the case, however, because these classes are in fact included in social production. Despite the myriad mechanisms of hierarchy and subordination, the poor constantly express an enormous power of life and production. To understand this, an inversion of perspective is necessary. Certainly, we need to recognize and protest the ways increasing numbers of people across the world are deprived of adequate income, food, shelter, education, health care—in short, recognize that the poor are victims of the global order of Empire. More important, we need to recognize that the poor are not merely victims but also powerful agents. All of those who are "without"—without employment, without residency papers, without housing—are really excluded only in part. The closer we look at the lives and activity of the poor, the more we see how enormously creative and powerful they are and indeed, we will argue, how much they are part of the circuits of social and biopolitical production. To the extent that the poor are increasingly included in the processes of social production, they are becoming, along with all of the traditional laboring classes, participants in a common condition and are thus potentially part of the multitude. The poor's inclusion in various forms of service work, their increasingly central role in agriculture, and their mobility in vast migrations demonstrate how far this process has already developed. At the most

general level, biopolitical production—including the production of knowledge, information, linguistic forms, networks of communication, and collaborative social relationships—tends to involve all of society, including the poor.

Communists and socialists have generally reasoned that since the poor are excluded from the capitalist production process they must also be excluded from any central role in political organization. The party is thus traditionally composed primarily of the vanguard workers employed in the hegemonic form of production, not the poor workers and much less the unemployed poor. The poor are thought to be dangerous, either morally dangerous because they are unproductive social parasites—thieves, prostitutes, drug addicts, and the like—or politically dangerous because they are disorganized, unpredictable, and tentatively reactionary. In fact, the term *lumpenproletariat* (or rag proletariat) has functioned at times to demonize the poor as a whole. To make complete the disdain for the poor, finally, they are often thought to be merely a residue of pre-industrial social forms, a kind of historical refuse.<sup>55</sup>

In economic terms, the poor have often been considered by Marxists and others as an “industrial reserve army,” that is, a reservoir of potential industrial workers who are temporarily unemployed but could at any time be drafted into production.<sup>56</sup> The industrial reserve army is a constant threat hanging over the heads of the existing working class because, first of all, its misery serves as a terrifying example to workers of what could happen to them, and, second, the excess supply of labor it represents lowers the cost of labor and undermines workers’ power against employers (by serving potentially as strike breakers, for example). These old theories of the industrial reserve army reappear in globalization when corporations take advantage of the vast differences in wages and labor conditions in different countries through a kind of labor “dumping,” moving jobs around the world to lower their costs. Workers in the dominant countries constantly live under the threat that their plants will be closed and their jobs exported. The poor global south thus appears in the position of an industrial reserve army, wielded by global capital against the workers not only in the global north but also in other portions of the global south. (The threat of moving jobs to China, for example, is used against workers in both

North and South America.) Just as traditionally many communist and socialist political projects sought to save the working class from the destructive pressures of the industrial reserve army within each nation, so too today many labor unions in the dominant countries adopt strategies to save workers from the threat of the poor workers in the subordinated countries.

Whether this logic was valid in the past, it is mistaken today to think of either the poor or the global south as an industrial reserve army. First, there is no “industrial army” in the sense that industrial workers no longer form a compact, coherent unity but rather function as one form of labor among many in the networks defined by the immaterial paradigm. In fact, more generally, the social division between the employed and the unemployed is becoming ever more blurred. As we said earlier, in the era of post-Fordism the stable and guaranteed employment that many sectors of the working class could previously count on in the dominant countries no longer exists. What is called the flexibility of the labor market means that no job is secure. There is no longer a clear division but rather a large gray area in which all workers hover precariously between employment and unemployment. Second, there is no “reserve” in the sense that no labor power is outside the processes of social production. The poor, the unemployed, and the underemployed in our societies are in fact active in social production even when they do not have a waged position. It has never been true, of course, that the poor and the unemployed do nothing. The strategies of survival themselves often require extraordinary resourcefulness and creativity.<sup>57</sup> Today, however, to the extent that social production is increasingly defined by immaterial labor such as cooperation or the construction of social relationships and networks of communication, the activity of all in society including the poor becomes more and more directly productive.

In many respects the poor are actually extraordinarily wealthy and productive. From the perspective of biodiversity, for example, some of the poorest regions of the world, generally speaking the global south, have the greatest wealth of different plant and animal species, whereas the rich global north is home to relatively few. In addition, poor populations, particularly indigenous populations, know how to live with these plant and

animal species, keeping them alive and profiting from their beneficial qualities. Think, for example, of the indigenous populations of the Amazon, who know how to live with the forest and whose activity is necessary for keeping the forest alive.<sup>58</sup> Or think, alternatively, of the indigenous knowledges of the medical uses of plants. This wealth of knowledge and this wealth of plant and animal genetic resources does not translate into economic wealth—in fact, we will see later in this chapter that some of the most interesting property debates today have to do with the ownership of indigenous knowledges and plant genetic materials. It is important to recognize nonetheless that, even though the profit goes elsewhere, this enormous wealth plays an essential role in global social production.

This common nature of creative social activity is further highlighted and deepened by the fact that today production increasingly depends on linguistic competencies and community.<sup>59</sup> All active elements of society are agents of linguistic creativity in the constant generation of common languages. To an ever greater extent, this linguistic community comes before profit and the construction of local and global hierarchies. Language maintains hierarchical relations in at least three respects: within each linguistic community with the maintenance of signs of social superiority and inferiority; among linguistic communities, determining the dominance of one language over others—for example, the dominance of global English; and within technical languages as a relationship between power and knowledge. We find, however, that despite these hierarchies the subordinated are often the most creative agents of a linguistic community, developing new linguistic forms and mixtures and communicating them to the community as a whole. (The creative role of African American speech within American English is one obvious example.) In fact, the contradiction between linguistic hierarchies and linguistic production and commonality is what makes language today such a powerful site of conflict and resistance. This paradox helps invert the traditional image of the poor: since the poor participate in and help generate the linguistic community by which they are then excluded or subordinated, the poor are not only active and productive but also antagonistic and potentially rebellious. The paradoxical position of the poor within the linguistic community is indicative of their position in social production more generally. And, in fact,

the poor can serve in this regard as the representative or, better, the common expression of all creative social activity. To complete the inversion of the traditional image, then, we can say that *the poor embody the ontological condition not only of resistance but also of productive life itself.*

Migrants are a special category of the poor that demonstrates this wealth and productivity. Traditionally the various kinds of migrant workers, including permanent immigrants, seasonal laborers, and hobos, were excluded from the primary conception and political organization of the working class. Their cultural differences and mobility divided them from the stable, core figures of labor. In the contemporary economy, however, and with the labor relations of post-Fordism, mobility increasingly defines the labor market as a whole, and all categories of labor are tending toward the condition of mobility and cultural mixture common to the migrant. Not only are workers often forced to change jobs several times during a career, they are also required to move geographically for extended periods or even commute long distances on a daily basis. Migrants may often travel empty-handed in conditions of extreme poverty, but even then they are full of knowledges, languages, skills, and creative capacities: each migrant brings with him or her an entire world. Whereas the great European migrations of the past were generally directed toward some space “outside,” toward what were conceived as empty spaces, today many great migrations move instead toward fullness, toward the most wealthy and privileged areas of the globe. The great metropolises of North America, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East are magnets for the migrants, and, in turn, these regions need the migrants to power their economies. Just like in Democritus’s physics, a fullness attracts another fullness.

Part of the wealth of migrants is their desire for something more, their refusal to accept the way things are. Certainly most migrations are driven by the need to escape conditions of violence, starvation, or deprivation, but together with that negative condition there is also the positive desire for wealth, peace, and freedom. This combined act of refusal and expression of desire is enormously powerful. Fleeing from a life of constant insecurity and forced mobility is good preparation for dealing with and resisting the typical forms of exploitation of immaterial labor. Ironically, the great global centers of wealth that call on migrants to fill a lack in their

economies get more than they bargained for, since the immigrants invest the entire society with their subversive desires. The experience of flight is something like a training of the desire for freedom.

Migrations, furthermore, teach us about the geographical divisions and hierarchies of the global system of command. Migrants understand and illuminate the gradients of danger and security, poverty and wealth, the markets of higher and lower wages, and the situations of more and less free forms of life. And with this knowledge of the hierarchies they roll uphill as much as possible, seeking wealth and freedom, power and joy. Migrants recognize the geographical hierarchies of the system and yet treat the globe as one common space, serving as living testimony to the irreversible fact of globalization. Migrants demonstrate (and help construct) the general commonality of the multitude by crossing and thus partially undermining every geographical barrier. This does not mean that everyone in the world is in the same situation. The vast differences in income, working conditions, and living conditions are not only the cause of great misery but also, as we argue in the next section, essential to the management of the contemporary global economy. Our point rather is that these should be conceived not as a matter of exclusion but one of differential inclusion, not as a line of division between workers and the poor nationally or globally but as hierarchies within the common condition of poverty. All of the multitude is productive and all of it is poor.

We do not mean to suggest that the poor or the migrants are better off and that we should all give up our wealth and hit the road. On the contrary, every kind of poverty brings its own special suffering. In chapter 3.2 we will present grievances against the enormous and growing forms of poverty and inequality in the global system. These should be combated in every way possible. But despite their poverty and their lack of material resources, food, housing, and so forth, the poor do have an enormous wealth in their knowledges and powers of creation.

There is no qualitative difference that divides the poor from the classes of employed workers. Instead, there is an increasingly common condition of existence and creative activity that defines the entire multitude. The creativity and inventiveness of the poor, the unemployed, the partially

employed, and the migrants are essential to social production. Just as social production takes place today equally inside and outside the factory walls, so too it takes place equally inside and outside the wage relationship. No social line divides productive from unproductive workers. In fact, the old Marxist distinctions between productive and unproductive labor, as well as that between productive and reproductive labor, which were always dubious, should now be completely thrown out. Like the notion of industrial reserve army, these distinctions too have often been used to exclude women, the unemployed, and the poor from central political roles, entrusting the revolutionary project to the men (with calloused hands from the factories) who were thought to be the primary producers. Today we create as active singularities, cooperating in the networks of the multitude, that is, in the common.

The struggles of the poor against their conditions of poverty are not only powerful protests but also affirmations of biopolitical power—the revelation of a common “being” that is more powerful than their miserable “having.” Throughout the twentieth century in the dominant countries, poor people’s movements have overcome the fragmentation, discouragement, resignation, and even panic that poverty can create and posed grievances against national governments, demanding a redistribution of wealth.<sup>60</sup> Today’s struggles of the poor take on a more general, biopolitical character and tend to be posed on a global level. Ashwin Desai recounts, for example, the development of a contemporary protest movement against evictions and water and electricity cutoffs that began in Chatsworth, near Durban in South Africa. One remarkable element of the movement is its common basis. Black South Africans and South Africans of Indian descent march together saying “We are not Indians, we are the poor!” “We are not Africans, we are the poor!”<sup>61</sup> Another remarkable aspect is the global level on which the poor pose these grievances. They certainly direct their protests against local officials and the South African government, which they claim has since the end of apartheid deepened the misery of the majority of the poor, but they also target neoliberal globalization as the source of their poverty, and they found the occasion to express this in Durban during the 2001 UN World Conference Against Racism. These

South African protesters are certainly right—"We are the poor!"—and perhaps in a way more general than they intend that slogan. We all participate in social production; this is ultimately the wealth of the poor.

Eventually protests against the common conditions of poverty will have to reveal this common productivity in constituent political projects. The demands for "guaranteed income," for example, an income due to all citizens regardless of employment, which have circulated in Europe, Brazil, and North America for several years, is such a constituent project aimed against poverty.<sup>62</sup> If extended beyond the national realm to become a global demand of guaranteed income for all, this could become an element of a project for the democratic management of globalization. Such a common scheme for the distribution of wealth would correspond to the common productivity of the poor.

Our claims of the wealth, productivity, and commonality of the poor have immediate implications for trade union organizing. The old form of trade union, which was born in the nineteenth century and aimed primarily at negotiating wages for a specific trade, is no longer sufficient. First of all, as we have been arguing, the old trade unions are not able to represent the unemployed, the poor, or even the mobile and flexible post-Fordist workers with short-term contracts, all of whom participate actively in social production and increase social wealth. Second, the old unions are divided according to the various products and tasks defined in the heyday of industrial production—a miners' union, a pipefitters' union, a machinists' union, and so forth. Today, insofar as the conditions and relations of labor are becoming common, these traditional divisions (or even newly defined divisions) no longer make sense and serve only as an obstacle. Finally, the old unions have become purely economic, not political, organizations. In the dominant capitalist countries, working-class organizations were granted legal, constitutional status in exchange for focusing narrowly on economic workplace and wage issues and renouncing any social or political demands. In the paradigm of immaterial labor, however, and as production becomes increasingly biopolitical, such an isolation of economic issues makes less and less sense.

What is necessary and possible today is a form of labor organizing that

overcomes all the divisions of the old unions and manages to represent the becoming common of labor in all its generality—economically, politically, and socially. Whereas traditional trade unions defend the economic interests of a limited category of workers, we need to create labor organizations that can represent the entire network of singularities that collaboratively produce social wealth. One modest proposal that points in this direction, for example, involves opening up trade unions to other segments of society by merging them with the powerful social movements that have emerged in recent years in order to create a form of "social-movement unionism."<sup>63</sup> A more militant example is provided by the "piqueteros," the movements of unemployed workers in Argentina that have begun to function like activist, politicized unions of the unemployed. Another example of labor activism outside the traditional framework of labor unions can be recognized in the 2003 strikes conducted in France by the "intérimaires" workers—that is, part-time workers in entertainment, media, and the arts.<sup>64</sup> In any case, a union worthy of the name today—and worthy of the legacy of labor struggles—must be the organized expression of the multitude, capable of engaging the entire global realm of social labor. The poor have no need of poor laws—in fact, the old poor laws only kept them poor.

It is easy to see now why from the perspective of capital and the global power structure all these classes are so dangerous. If they were simply excluded from the circuits of global production, they would be no great threat. If they were merely passive victims of injustice, oppression, and exploitation, they would not be so dangerous. They are dangerous rather because not only the immaterial and the industrial workers but also the agricultural workers and even the poor and the migrants are *included* as active subjects of biopolitical production. Their mobility and their commonality is constantly a threat to destabilize the global hierarchies and divisions on which global capitalist power depends. They slide across the barriers and burrow connecting tunnels that undermine the walls. Moreover, these dangerous classes continually disrupt the ontological constitution of Empire: at each intersection of lines of creativity or lines of flight the social subjectivities become more hybrid, mixed, and miscegenated, further escaping the fusional powers of control. They cease to be identities

and become singularities. In the inferno of poverty and the odyssey of migration we have already begun to see emerge some of the outlines of the figure of the multitude. Languages mix and interact to form not a single unified language but rather a common power of communication and cooperation among a multitude of singularities.

### DEMONIC MULTITUDES: DOSTOYEVSKY READS THE BIBLE

*The multitude has a dark side. The well-known New Testament parable of the Genesene Demoniac, recounted with variations by Mark, Luke, and Matthew, throws some light on the demonic face of the multitude. Jesus comes across a man possessed by devils and asks him his name, since a name is required for exorcism. The demoniac responds enigmatically, "My name is Legion; for we are many." The devils ask Jesus to send them from the man into a nearby herd of pigs. The pigs, now possessed, rush off a cliff and drown in the water below in an act of mass suicide. The man, now free of the devils, sits gratefully at the feet of Jesus.*

*One of the curious and troubling aspects of this parable is the grammatical confusion of singular and plural subjects. The demoniac is at once both "I" and "we." There is a multitude in there. Perhaps this confusion between the singular and the plural subject is itself a demonic attribute. The threat is emphasized by the demoniac's name, Legion. The Latin word legio was widely used in Aramaic and Greek to mean a great number but the term also referred, as it continues to today in modern languages, to the Roman military unit of about six thousand men. Why is Legion the demoniac's name? Because he has such powerful destructive force? Because the multitude inside him can act together? Perhaps the real threat of this demonic multitude is more metaphysical: since it is at once singular and plural, it destroys numerical distinction itself. Think of the great lengths to which theologians have gone to prove there are not many gods but only one. Linguists similarly have long been troubled by nouns that have indeterminate number, at once singular and plural, such as deer and sheep. The threat to political order is perhaps even more clear: politi-*

*cal thought since the time of the ancients has been based on the distinctions among the one, the few, and the many. The demonic multitude violates all such numerical distinctions. It is both one and many. The indefinite number of the multitude threatens all these principles of order. Such trickery is the devil's work.*

*Fyodor Dostoyevsky grapples with the torment caused by these demonic multitudes in his great 1873 novel, The Devils.<sup>65</sup> Dostoyevsky's Russia is infected with dark, dangerous forces. The serfs have been liberated, the traditional social order is collapsing, and foreign influences are leading toward moral and social catastrophe. Good Russians are acting as if they have been possessed—but what or who possesses them? Who are Dostoyevsky's devils? The novel is set in a calm Russian village where we find the widower Stepan Verkhovensky spending his twilight years courting the affections of the widow Varvara Savroginina, the wealthiest woman in town. Verkhovensky's son Peter, recently returned from years of traveling in the capitals of Europe, charms the young women in town. Perhaps he could fall in love with a respectable young woman in the village, and the social order could be reproduced as it has been for all eternity. As the novel develops, however, we learn that beneath the timeless rituals of Russian village life is breeding an ultrasecret pseudorevolutionary political organization, which is bent on mindless destruction and includes members of some of the village's best families, with Peter Verkhovensky himself its egotistical leader. The mysterious group's activities lead to a series of catastrophic events. Everyone in the village seems to be unknowingly manipulated or influenced by the sinister plot in some way. By the end of the novel, however, all the members of the clandestine conspiracy have either committed suicide, been killed by their own comrades, or are safely away in prison or exile. Stepan Verkhovensky reflects in the final pages of the novel on the biblical parable of the Genesene demoniac. It is exactly like our Russia, he exclaims, which has been infected by devils for centuries! Perhaps we are the pigs who have been possessed by the devils and we will thus now rush over the cliff to drown in the water so that Russia can be saved at the feet of Jesus!*

*Stepan Verkhovensky (and Dostoyevsky himself) tries to soothe his fears with a naive view of the exorcism of demonic multitudes and the Christian redemption of Russia.<sup>66</sup> Once he casts the political conspiracy, and especially its*