The Southern Line

The *Meridione* and the Limits to Periodisation

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‘Italy’s incredible too. You have to go to Sicily to realize just how incredible Italy is.’

‘Maybe the whole of Italy is becoming a sort of Sicily. When I read about the scandals of that regional government of theirs, an idea occurred to me. Scientists say that the palm tree line, that is the climate suitable to growth of the palm, is moving north, five hundred metres, I think it was, every year … The palm tree line … I say instead: the *caffè ristretto* line, the *caffè concentrato* line … It’s rising like mercury in a thermometer, this palm tree line, this strong coffee line, this scandal line, rising up throughout Italy and already passed Rome …’

- Leonardo Sciascia, *The Day of the Owl*

The enigmatic model of the line is thus the very thing that philosophy could not see when it had its eyes open on the interior of its own history. This night begins to lighten a little at the moment when linearity – which is not loss or absence but the repression of pluri-dimensional symbolic thought – relaxes its oppression because it begins to sterilize the technical and scientific economy that it has long favored. In fact for a long time its possibility has been structurally bound up with that of economy, of technics, and of ideology.

- Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*

anyone who is blind to forms sees little here

- Walter Benjamin & Asja Lacis, «Naples»

I. Between archaism and anarchy

Reflection on the political, cultural or ideological uses of the category of the «South» – be it on a global, regional or national scale – quickly reveals its operation as a designator at once spatial and temporal, geographical and historical. In multiple respects, this is an effect of its participation in the colonial conditioning of modernity as both process and imaginary. Any talk of the South must thus be framed by an understanding that the «still abiding form of modernity was the colonial modern», enacting «a geopolitical spatialization of temporal differences and a temporalisation of spatialized colonial differences». The South, as a modality or figure of colonial difference is accordingly «constituted *internal* to the conceptual dialectics of the modern as a historical concept».[[1]](#footnote-2) Such a perspective poses an interrogation that we think critical to contemporary theorising, so habituated to anchoring its strategic imaginary in periodization and all its accompanying epochal scansions, prefixes, and namings. In short, is the urge to periodize inextricable from spatial projections laden with colonial legacies? More precisely, is any politics or aesthetics of the South – or any movement through the history of the South as category, zone, and process – ultimately beholden to this nexus of world history and geopolitics, with all of the violence of originary accumulation it entails?

Our approach, however, will not take a transcendental or methodological tack but rather explore some theoretical episodes in which the more or less spontaneous philosophies of history and time binding the South to conceptions of *origins* and *archaism* come undone. In particular, we will be concerned with the manner in which social, political and technological conceptions of the Italian South (or *meridione*)as somehow primitive come to unsettle a common sense about what it is to be original or derived, archaic or ancillary. Before venturing into these more specific forays into a political aesthetics of Southern archaism, it is worth pausing for a moment on the very nexus between the South and the archaic.

Bracketing the centuries-long discourse on Southern backwardness, and focusing simply on how Southern archaism is thematised in the ambit of 20th century historical-materialist inquiries, it is evident that Southern «primitivism» is above all a *political* problem. Perhaps the signal investigation in this direction in English is E. J. Hobsbawm’s *Primitive Rebels*, the study of millenarian social movements that articulated that notion of the «pre-political» which served as such a fruitful critical foil for the Subaltern Studies group in India . In his studies of the Sicilian *fasci* and Andalusian anarchism, the South comes to figure as a reservoir of antisystemic energies in which the deficit of organisational form and the sedimentation of mythical and religious imaginaries throws up inchoate, apocalyptic rebellion as the response to the social cataclysm represented by the incursion of bourgeois or capitalist (Northern) society.[[2]](#footnote-3) For Hobsbawm, the rebellious South speaks in a rough or borrowed tongue, that of «*pre-political* people who have not yet found, or only begun to find, a specific language in which to express their aspirations about the world».[[3]](#footnote-4) Its hope lies in an integration or sublation into the *organised* forms of class struggle articulate by a labor movement whose fulcrum lies to the North (whence the comparative advantage of the Sicilian *fasci* over Spanish anarchists). This diagnosis, rich in historical nuance, albeit not devoid of the «historical condescension» castigated by E. P. Thompson first and the subalternists later, in many respects echoes and expands Gramsci’s observations on the politics of the peasantry in «Some Aspects of the Southern Question», the 1926 essay which was left unfinished by his arrest, and which has been viewed as the germ-cell for the entire research programme of his *Quaderni del carcere*. There, the communist leader noted that the «Southern peasants are in perpetual ferment, but as a mass *they are incapable of giving a unified expression to their aspirations and needs*».[[4]](#footnote-5) The South is a synonym for a kind of heterogeneity verging on incoherence, and a resistance to the modernising impetus towards (national, cultural) unity and *organisation.* This isa stance deployed across a range of political stances, albeit to different ends, giving ground at once to the racial pseudo-science of criminal anthropologists, such Cesare Lombroso and Alfredo Niceforo, in their battle against «contemporary barbarian Italy» (as Niceforo titled one of his volumes), and to PCI leaders, such as Giancarlo Pajetta, who lamented the way that the *meridionale* riots of the late ‘60s and early ‘70s «demonstrate the absolute lack of the party’s presence and of the political sensibility of comrades».[[5]](#footnote-6)

There is, in short, something *formless* about the South (a theme to which we’ll return below, in the context of the Neapolitan travel writings of Alfred Sohn-Rethel, Ernst Bloch, Walter Benjamin and Asja Lacis). Gramsci is categorical on this point: «the South can be defined as an area of extreme social disintegration»; its peasantry (in an echo of Marx’s notorious remark in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* on the «sack of potatoes») is a «great amorphous, scattered mass», whose elements «have no cohesion among themselves».[[6]](#footnote-7) The archaism that Gramsci will elsewhere ascribe to the incomplete polity of the South is here explicitly, and provocatively, linked to the theme of anarchism, drawing on that rich amalgam of political sarcasm and cultural philology so unique to Gramsci. Writing of Sidney Sonnino and Leopoldo Franchetti’s 1877 *Inchiesta in Sicilia*, he comments:

Sonnino and Franchetti had been terrified by the popularity that the Bakuninist ideas of the First International had achieved in the South of Italy. Their fear led them to make blunders that were often grotesque. In one of their publications, for example, they cite the fact that an inn or cheap *trattoria* in a Calabrian town (we are quoting from memory) was named after The Strikers [*scioperanti*], as evidence of how widespread and deep-rooted Internationalist ideas were. This fact, if it is true (and it must be, given the intellectual probity of the authors) can be explained more simply if one recalls how many Albanian colonies there are in the South and how the word *skipetari* [«Albanians»] has undergone the strangest and most curious deformations in the various dialects (so that in certain documents of the Venetian Republic we read about military formations made up of *S’ciopetà*). Now then, it is not so much that Bakunin’s theories were widely known in the South as that the situation itself was such that it could have suggested Bakunin’s theories to him. Certainly, the impoverished peasants of the South were thinking about «smashing everything up» long before Bakunin’s brain dreamed up the theory of «pandestruction».[[7]](#footnote-8)

In what sense was this native, unreflexive Southern anarchism bound to something archaic, primitive? To sketch an answer, it is useful to turn to another Gramscian seam – not the study of «disorganised» popular rebellions and their social bases, but that of the «conception of the world and of life» that lay behind them, otherwise known as *folklore*.

In a 1935 draft of reflections first jotted down in 1929, Gramsci frames the problem of folklore not merely as that of an area of social research or cultural policy but as the site of a contrast between the conception of the world and of life of subaltern social strata and that of the «official» (cultured, intellectually dominant) components of society. The people is here not the name of a unity, be it substantial or formal, but that of a motley amalgam (we could recall here the Bolivian theorist René Zavaleta Mercado’s *sociedad abigarrada*), a sedimented palimpsest of diverse experiences, practices, ideas.[[8]](#footnote-9) The people’s

[…] conception of the world is not elaborated and systematic because, by definition, the people (the sum total of the instrumental and subaltern classes of every form of society that has so far existed) cannot possess conceptions which are elaborated, systematic and politically organized and centralized in their albeit contradictory development. It is, rather, many-sided – not only because it includes different and juxtaposed elements, but also because it is stratified, from the more crude to the less crude – if, indeed, one should not speak of a confused agglomerate of fragments of all the conceptions of the world and of life that have succeeded one another in history. In fact, it is only in folklore that one finds surviving evidence, adulterated and mutilated, of the majority of these conceptions.[[9]](#footnote-10)

The tradition decanted into folklore is a kind of mosaic, the product of a «bizarre» procedure of assimilation. Far from a holistic form of culture and consciousness, folklore is marked by «contradictoriness, fragmentation, dispersal, multiplicity, implicitness, non-elaboration, unsystematicness, difference, juxtaposition, stratification, indigestibility, etc.».[[10]](#footnote-11) The «people» is hence both pre-historical and post-historical, still bereft of an organised impetus but saturated with historical experience – albeit one which is generally not its own, since «folklore has always been tied to the culture of the dominant class». Accordingly, as an accretion of historical derivations, distortions and degradations, «nothing is more contradictory and fragmentary than folklore».[[11]](#footnote-12)

The geological metaphor[[12]](#footnote-13) can also be enlisted in an attempt to detect that which in the people – specifically in its moral life – is not reducible to the incoherent sediments of «official» conceptions. This is why in the sphere of morality,

one must distinguish various strata: the fossilized ones which reflect conditions of past life and are therefore conservative and reactionary, and those which consist of a series of innovations, often creative and progressive, determined spontaneously by forms and conditions of life which are in the process of developing and which are in contradiction to or simply different from the morality of the governing strata.[[13]](#footnote-14)

This portrayal of folklore repeats the critical characterisation of common sense (defined in turn as the «folklore of philosophy», in Gramsci’s very expansive use of the latter term) as without coherence, fragmented, and «usually “disjointed and episodic”. Into it the traces and “stratified deposits” of more coherent philosophical systems have sedimented over time without leaving any clear inventory».[[14]](#footnote-15) The originality of Gramsci’s understanding of political consciousness and subjectivity lies, as Stuart Hall long ago suggested, in his recognition of the «plurality» of selves or identities of which the so-called «subject» of thought and ideas is composed. He argues that this multi-faceted nature of consciousness is not an individual but a collective phenomenon, a consequence of the relation between «the self» and the ideological discourses which compose the cultural terrain of society. It contains «Stone Age elements and principles of a more advanced science, prejudices from all past phases of history […] and intuitions of a future philosophy […]».[[15]](#footnote-16) As the Italian avant-garde poet Edoardo Sanguineti observed, this is not just true of subaltern, «folkloric» consciousness, especially since Gramsci teaches that there is «a chaotic stratification in each of us who thinks himself enlightened and rational but then discovers this is not true».[[16]](#footnote-17) This stratigraphy of political consciousness was intimately bound up with the diagnosis of the socio-cultural retardations besetting any effort at a progressive construction of party, state, nation, culture and class, above all in that over-determined complex gathered under the name of the Southern Question. In this way, that question itself remains torn between visions of what the South emblematizes as exception (or lag): on the one hand, of a developmental model of retardation – which, in colonialist and proto-fascist iterations taking shape in the 1910s and against which Gramsci sharpened his early positions, becomes the trace of not merely the archaic but the *atavistic*[[17]](#footnote-18) – and, on the other, of territorial and social difference as fragmentation, within which no single historical narrative or temporal structure determines its total meaning.

The 1950 publication of Gramsci’s notes on folklore in Felice Platone and Palmiro Togliatti’s edition of the *Quaderni*, in the volume on *Letteratura e vita nazionale*, could not but intervene critically into the anthropological debate on the South, already energised and polarised around the question of the subaltern. In the writings of the great Neapolitan anthropologist Ernesto De Martino, folklore became a key prism through which to attack anew the problem of Southern archaism and backwardness. While De Martino’s studies on popular magic and ritual in the South may have suggested the persistence of a kind of prehistoric layer of experience refractory to absorption or modernisation, dialogue with Gramsci’s «*Osservazioni*»led him to clarify the profound impurity of this seemingly primitive dimension of popular experience. Seemingly accepting the Gramscian project of national-popular unification and hegemony (De Martino was at this time a militant in the ranks of the PCI, having earlier been a Socialist), he summarised the view of «folkloristic material» in the *Quaderni* as «prevalently fragmentary, contradictory, disorganic, incoherent, both because it often represents the descent and popular re-adaptation of cultural products elaborated by the intellectuals of the dominant class, and because in the midst of the popular world is absent the work of qualified intellectuals that could reduce the fragmentary, disaggregated, chaotically stratified, contradictorily coexistent into a unitary organic system (an organicity that high culture tends towards)».[[18]](#footnote-19) This is folklore as an obstacle to the «modern popular Reformation» that can only be enacted through the hegemony of the organised industrial working class, but also through the autonomous activity of subaltern strata capable – in a notable expansion of Gramsci’s passing observations about innovations arising from popular life – of generating a «progressive folklore», no longer tainted by servility and subordination to the dominant.

That said, as Cesare Bermani has noted in an incisive essay on De Martino’s appropriation of Gramsci, in private notes where the Neapolitan anthropologist abandoned the political cautions dictated by his militancy, De Martino objected to the equation of folklore with the «dustbin [*immondezzaio*] of cultural history» that could be gleaned from the *Prison Notebooks*. He acknowledged the negative fact of sedimentation, namely that «the leftovers of some great cultural banquets celebrated in the past, or still celebrated, in the tables of the masters of knowledge and intelligence […] can be found [in folklore] disaggregated, debased, chaotically accumulated, and still susceptible of some nutritive power for beggars and ignoramuses, for weak and backward brains»[[19]](#footnote-20) but countered this with the reality of a popular world irreducible to its incoherent dependency on a history forged in the commanding heights, stressing, against a unidirectional model of folkloric degradation, the «dialectic of descents, ascents, resistances, struggles, conflicts, dualisms, compromises, etc.»[[20]](#footnote-21) that constituted the relation between popular and hegemonic cultures, and undermined any reified dichotomisation of the high and the low. In his later masterpiece, *Sud e magia*, De Martino would revisit these themes, while letting go of the theme of «progressive folklore», describing his own work as an «ethnographic exploration of the Lucanian survivals of the crudest [*più rozze*] practices of ceremonial magic», painting a «panorama that at first sight appears extremely disaggregated, contradictory, punctuated by absurd coexistences» (note the repetition of the pejorative terms from Gramsci’s «*Osservazioni*»). However, De Martino would remark, moving from a more strictly political, to a phenomenological-existential register, «upon closer examination, what will become patent is the unitary theme that holds together such heterogeneous elements, namely the demand of psychological protection faced with the extraordinary power of the negative of everyday life, and the narrowness of effective behaviours that are “realistically” oriented»[[21]](#footnote-22) – an echo, it could be noted, of Hobsbawm’s observations on the pre-political.

What is most significant for our purposes about these debates on Southern folklore, anthropology and subaltern politics, is that while the *meridione* continues to be ascribed an *archaic* quality, what in one (polemical) register is rendered as primitive survival reveals itself under another light as an impure and derivative amalgam, where the descent and sedimentation of «bizarre», «mutilated» material from the cultural heights is curiously intermixed with ancient layers of experience or extremely recent popular innovations. In this way, the *arkhe* in the Southern archaic is hard to stabilise as any kind of historical or temporal *origin* and instead serves to unsettle and undermine any *arkhe* understood as a principle of command.[[22]](#footnote-23) It is therefore unsurprising to see this flight to a geological metaphorics of para-historical and pre-political difference when it comes to diagnosing the Southern Question.

II. «The South passes into its own North»

Before we turn to how a refusal of origin and short-circuiting of distinctions in the *meridione* was positively articulated in the 1920s by a number of young German theorists who would go on to shape critical theory, it is worth noting that the nexus between the South, origin and periodisation is critical to one of the crucial critiques of a philosophy of origins (and of associated figures of periodisation) in contemporary theory, Jacques Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*. The North/South distinction is a framing and genetic device in Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Essai sur l’origine des langues*, the text whose kaleidoscopic deconstruction occupies the bulk of Derrida’s 1967 book. Counter to dominant claims for the derivative nature of the South, it is there that Rousseau chooses to see the true origins of language, shaped by passions, voiced in melody and untainted by writing.[[23]](#footnote-24) The North emerges instead as a kind of second origin, where the articulation of consonants subsumes the accenting of vowels, and the strictures of interest come to dominate. In Derrida's reading, the passage from South to North becomes emblematic of the Rousseauian image of the origin:

beginning with an origin or a center that divides itself and leaves itself, an historical circle is described, which is degenerative in direction but progressive and compensatory in effect. On the circumference of that circle are new origins for new circles that accelerate the degeneration by annulling the compensatory effects of the preceding circle, and thereby also making its truth and beneficence appear. It is thus, by destroying the «progress of the human spirit» that the anterior cycle had produced, that the invasion of the northern barbarians ushered in a new cycle of historical degeneration […] each new cycle begins a progression-regression which, destroying the effects of the preceding one, brings us back to a nature yet more secret, more ancient, more archaic. Progress consists always of taking us closer to animality while annulling the progress through which we have transgressed animality. I shall confirm it often. In any case, it would be difficult to represent the «thus to infinity» of this movement by the tracing of a line, however complicated that line might be.[[24]](#footnote-25)

For our inquiry, two elements are especially worth drawing out from Derrida’s reflection. First, as would come to be expected from Derridean method, the very separation between first and second origin will be undone, as the (political) metaphysic of presence «declared» by Rousseau comes to be undermined by the movement of language and writing he «describes» – revealing the operation of that «anoriginary», an-archic principle that is the «supplement of the origin». Most striking in Derrida’s account is the excavation from Rousseau’s chapters on the «*Formation des langues méridionales*» and «*Formation des langues du Nord*» of a conception of this difference, this «polarization of language» as neither spatial nor temporal but *structural*, or internal to all systems of language, beyond their empirical mapping.

Rousseau *would wish* the opposition between southern and northern in order to place a natural frontier between different types of languages. However, what he *describes* forbids us to think it. That description shows that the opposition north/south being rational and not natural, structural and not factual, relational and not substantial, traces an axis of reference *inside* each language. No language is from the south or the north, no real element of the language has an absolute situation, only a differential one. That is why the polar opposition does not divide a set of already existing languages; it is described, though not declared, by Rousseau to be the origin of languages. […] Not being able simply to accept the fact that the concept of origin has merely a relative function within a system situating a multitude of origins in itself, each origin capable of being the effect or the offshoot of another origin, the north capable of becoming the south for a more northern site, etc., Rousseau would like the absolute origin to be an absolute south. […] The northern languages lead back to that need, to that physicality, to that nature to which the southern languages, which had just left it, were in the closest possible proximity. It is always the impossible design, the unbelievable line of the supplementary structure. Although the difference between south and north, passion and need, explains the origin of languages, it persists in the constituted languages, and at the extreme, the north amounts to the south of the south, which puts the south to the north of the north.[[25]](#footnote-26)

This cardinal chiasmus affects the crucial Rousseauian problem of the *origin of society* (a problem not absent from the aforementioned Italian debate on the Southern Question, it could be argued, mutated there into the problem of the *making of a society*). By thinking through the way in which Rousseau describes the South/North difference, we can come to the realisation that,

the birth of society is therefore not a passage, it is a point, a pure, fictive and unstable, ungraspable limit. One crosses it in attaining it. In it society is broached and is deferred from itself. Beginning, it begins to decay. The South passes into its own North. […] The South and the North are not territories but abstract places that appear only to relate to each other in terms of each other. Language, passion, society, are neither of the North nor of the South. They are the movement of supplementarity by which the poles substitute each other *by turn*.[[26]](#footnote-27)

The second element worth noting appears in Derrida’s attention to the language of «degeneration», invasion, and barbarians, all conceptual tropes central to the aforementioned late-nineteenth-century criminal anthropologists and to early-twentieth-century conservative nationalist ideologues, such as Enrico Corradini, against whose ideas Gramsci will explicitly hone his thinking. Especially when fused with an explicit vitalism that deploys recurrent metaphors of «youth», slipping between individual health and the state of the body politic, such positions hinge on a convenient homological chain between what is «below» the human and what is designated as originating below the equatorial line (or at least south of Rome). This fuels a discourse, in Max Nordau’s infamous *Degeneration* (itself dedicated to Lombroso), of the «dusk of the nations» and a pseudo-concept of the «*fin-de-race*», as though the twilight of civilization were spreading to the Northern races due to a complex of racialized factors, recalcitrant backwardness, collapsing colonial projects, and biomedical metaphors that will become indissociable from conservative and fascist discourse in the following century.

However, it is crucial to refuse the idea that resistance to such conceptual schemas did or does involve recapitulating a liberal conception of global progressive development. Towards this end, we turn to how, immersed in a very specific concrete locality, Naples, some fledgling theorists of capitalist society came to abstract from it two related models of non-originarity, two different suspensions or deviations of the periodising and progressive schemas underwriting the cardinal or hemispheric difference of South and North.

III. The broken and the porous

Having languished on the margins of the Frankfurt School, Alfred Sohn-Rethel came to some prominence only in the wake of the student insurgencies of the late 1960s and 1970s, namely in his native Germany and in Italy, where *Geistige und körperliche Arbeit* was published as *Lavoro intellettuale e lavoro manuale* by Feltrinelli, and its theses discussed by the likes of Toni Negri and Pier Aldo Rovatti in the pages of *Lotta Continua*. Half a century earlier (and prior to his covert research on Nazi economic structures carried out while employed at the big business association MWT[[27]](#footnote-28)), Sohn-Rethel had lived in Naples and Capri at some length, where he was joined by the likes of Ernst Bloch, Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer. While sketching some of the precursors of the theory of «real abstraction» that he would come to be associated with, Sohn-Rethel also penned some brief but captivating observational writings about Neapolitan life. In some respects, these repeat tropes familiar from (German) travel literature to the Italian South, ever fascinated by that which escaped the hierarchies, rigidities and customs of Northern Europe. But, especially in a theoretical vignette first published in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in 1926, on «The Philosophy of the Broken: On Neapolitan Technics» [*Das Ideal des Kaputten. Über neapolitanische Technik*], Sohn-Rethel exceeds the exoticising or oneiric portrayal to provide a theoretical model that can allow us to expand upon the problem of Southern an-archy from the specific angle of the relation to objects and machines. In this way, his text also opens obliquely towards a wider frame inseparable from the history of how the Global South was conceived: that of the fantasy of technologized *ratio* held up as the mark of a civilized North equally committed to the use of machinic power in colonization. This was also the fantasy of that power’s mythic novelty in the eyes of the allegedly bewildered populations confronted by it, accompanied by the idea that the invention of functional technical apparatuses was an absolute dividing line that separated the European from those who do not invent «a thing so simple as a handle for a hammer», as in Paul Du Chaillu’s castigation of the Fon people of the Congo Basin.[[28]](#footnote-29)

What is this Neapolitan «ideal» or philosophy of the broken? Sohn-Rethel begins from the common foreigner’s observation that in the Campanian city, all machines and apparatuses appear to be always already busted, malfunctioning, *kaput*. Yet behind the appearance of degradation and neglect, he glimpses a *sui generis* form of appropriation and *détournement* of «proper» use, a savage practice of salvaged design and a subversion of functioning. It is not that machines fail to function because they are broken but rather that «for the Neapolitan things begin to function only when they are broken».[[29]](#footnote-30) Sohn-Rethel adduces a host of examples: boats run with busted fuel tanks, which the pilot nonchalantly «fixes» en route, in between making coffee for his passengers; automobiles that depend on the insertion of seemingly random bits of wood to start; idling trains whose status and schedule remains mysterious to the station master; a telephone network whose system of numeration remains deeply mysterious; and the very «improbability» of the functioning of electricity itself throughout the city of Naples. Yet behind this ragged pattern lies a seemingly unified style. Its description is not devoid of the condescension of exoticism – the Neapolitan has the fantastical charm and luck we associate with children, etc. – but at its core is a striking idea: a concerted resistance to the imposed purposefulness that pervades technical objects, and a reaction against a functioning which, to the users and consumers but not producers of the apparatus, cannot but translate into a kind of mysterious domination. The Neapolitan (rightly) suspects what is intact and «functions on its own» – and this is also why his «fixes» are intentionally partial, incomplete, ever to be renewed. Precisely to the extent that things function of their own accord, «one can never say how and where they’ll end up».[[30]](#footnote-31)

Though the Marxian matrix that marks Sohn-Rethel’s better-known texts is difficult to discern in these notes,[[31]](#footnote-32) we could say that Neapolitan technics is a very peculiar form of disalienation, in which the appropriation of the machine or technical object and its *mal*functioning are part of one and the same gesture.[[32]](#footnote-33) This is a technics against the smooth and alien functioning of technology, against those potentially «dangerous» elements like electricity «that cannot be broken and of which one cannot establish unequivocally that they truly come from this earth»[[33]](#footnote-34) (in perhaps a distant foreshadowing of those real but invisible abstractions that govern «social synthesis» under capitalism). In a text that is, like the rest of Sohn-Rethel’s episodic writings, devoid of any recognition of the political dimension of Neapolitan life, there is nonetheless a profound metapolitical moment, in the identification of a spontaneous philosophy of material emancipation running through everyday life in the Southern city:

Technics begins […] as soon as man can counter the blind and hostile automatism of the machine and enter into its world. He thereby shows himself to be well above the laws of technics, because he appropriates the conduction of the machine, not so much by learning how to use in accordance with its instructions, but rather discovering within it his own body. In so doing, he first of all destroys the magic – enemy of man – of the machine that functions without a hitch, and installs himself in the unmasked monster and in its obtuse soul, delighting in having incorporated it and dominated it without limits, in the utopia of his own omnipotence.[[34]](#footnote-35)

Yet this is a peculiar mastery, since it does not involve possessing, accumulating and conserving but rather expending, even wasting the object, since a «true property must also be capable of being mistreated, otherwise one doesn’t have it at all. It must be fully used up; it must be consumed, annulled».[[35]](#footnote-36) Having broken from the hetero-direction of proper use, that of the hostile *telos* embodied in the machine, «technics undergoes the most unexpected deviations, and it penetrates with amazing and persuasive efficacy into territories of vitality that were completely alien to it». This permits a situation of arrested development – for Sohn-Rethel Naples continues to abide in a kind of protracted seventeenth century – to be site of a «freedom» that captivates the Northern theorist and depends on the disactivation of proper use, functioning and purpose: «Utterly transformed in spite of themselves [the instruments of the most sophisticated technics] finally result ineffective in view of their original finalities».[[36]](#footnote-37) If De Martino’s Gramscian-inflected investigations into Southern folklore reveal an absence of *arkhe*, of a principle of commencement and command, in what otherwise appears as «archaic», we could see Sohn-Rethel’s philosophical vignette on Neapolitan technics as sapping commonplaces about Southern retardation from the other end, that of the *telos*, of the proper purpose, as embodied in technical objects and machines. In this sense, Sohn-Rethel’s approach shares something crucial with Gramsci’s delineation of the Southern question: in both cases, the answer comes before the question, so to speak, in terms of the Northern accumulation that reinforces the material retardation of Southern development (as judged by the standards vaunted by that principle of accumulation). However, in both cases, the question itself is shown to be contagious, provided that it is dislocated from a transhistorical constant and is instead approached genealogically, as it demarcates not what is uniquely «Southern» but rather the contradictions, hostilities, and frictions latent in the Northern project of rationalized development. In other words, we might say that well before Derridean grammatology cut its teeth on Rousseau’s oppositions, efforts to think through Southern question, especially from those who sought to respond to it in a revolutionary key, by no means deepened a dividing line but instead revealed an expansive and fraught zone of displaced origins, retroactive causation, and necessary supplements, ones whose political stakes were undoubtedly high and which could by no means be restricted to the *Mezzogiorno* itself.

To this inventory of Southern «supplements» we should add a concept crafted by friends and acquaintances of Sohn-Rethel during their contemporaneous Neapolitan sojourn. In 1925 Walter Benjamin and his Latvian lover Asja Lacis penned a short essay on Naples, whose crucial notion, «porosity», was also developed that same year in a piece by Ernst Bloch, «Italy and Porosity». Working, like Sohn-Rethel, from the ephemera of urban observation towards capturing an idea able to synthesise the singularity of the Neapolitan form of life, Benjamin and Lacis identify, like so many philosophical travel narratives, a *difference* in the Southern city – a difference which in this case names a different experience of difference itself. Where the urban form of the North (a form at once spatial, psychic, political, economic, and juridical) is founded on compartmentalisation, dichotomisation, and distinction, Naples conversely names a movement of «interpenetration» for Benjamin & Lacis. Like Sohn-Rethel’s text, their essay revisits some commonplaces about Naples (its «rich barbarism» and hyper-Catholicism), and pivots around the picturesque anecdote or travel tale.[[37]](#footnote-38) Indeed, porosity – a term initially suggested by Naples’s crags and grottos – is first of all identified in terms of architecture and its uses, but it bleeds out from there and comes to colour the entire form of life of the city. As Benjamin & Lacis declare: «Building and action interpenetrate in the courtyards, arcades, and stairways. In everything they preserve the scope to become a theatre of new, unforeseen constellations. The stamp of the definitive is avoided. No situation appears intended forever, no figure asserts its “thus and not otherwise”.»[[38]](#footnote-39)

There is a strong resonance here with Sohn-Rethel’s remarks on the refusal of the complete and enduring fix that marks Neapolitan technics as a technics of incompletion, or, in Benjamin & Lacis’s terminology, «improvisation» – which, they suggest, goes beyond what the prejudiced outsider misrecognises as Neapolitan «indolence». In much of Naples, «one can scarcely discern where building is still in progress and where dilapidation has set in. For nothing is concluded. Porosity results not only from the indolence of the Southern artisan, but also, above all, from the passion for improvisation, which demands that space and opportunity be at any price preserved». And this refusal of completion (as loss of opportunity and blockage to improvisation) has its own meta-political dimension, that of public life as a collective spectacle in which «[b]uildings are used as a people’s theatre [*Volksbühne*]» and «[e]ven the most wretched pauper is sovereign in the dim, dual awareness of participating, in all his destitution [*Verkommenheit*], in one of the pictures of Neapolitan life that will never return».[[39]](#footnote-40) The fundamental spatial and political condition named by porosity is the collapse or interpenetration of private and public, which also takes the name of «festival». The undoing of the line separating inner and outer, *oikos* and *polis*, is first revealed in the weird insertion of churches into the urban fabric of Naples: «The inconspicuous door, often only a curtain, is the secret gate for the initiate. A single step takes him from the jumble of dirty courtyards into the pure solitude of a tall, whitewashed church interior. His private existence is the baroque opening of a heightened public sphere.»[[40]](#footnote-41) This interpenetration is most intensely experienced however in the festival, which «[i]rresistibly […] penetrates each and every working day», and reveals that «everything joyful is mobile: music, toys, ice cream circulate through the streets». It teaches us that, «Porosity is the inexhaustible law of the life of the city, reappearing everywhere».[[41]](#footnote-42) We could even surmise that it is such porosity which makes it very difficult, perhaps impossible, to locate a sphere, level, or area for what in Northern climes may pass as «the political». For in Naples, the private is not privative of the public and de-politicised. Rather, the line is blurred from the start, because just like its commercial life, which Benjamin & Lacis describe as a perversion of any instrumental exchange-abstraction, private life in Naples is «dispersed, porous, and commingled»:

What distinguishes Naples from other large cities is something it has in common with the African kraal; each private attitude or act is permeated by streams of communal life. To exist, for the Northern European the most private of affairs, is here, as in the kraal, a collective matter. So the house is far less the refuge into which people retreat than the inexhaustible reservoir from which they flood out. […] Just as the living room reappears on the street, with chairs, hearth, and altar, so, only much more loudly, the street migrates into the living room. […] Poverty has brought about a stretching of frontiers that mirrors the most radiant freedom of thought. There is no hour, often no place, for sleeping and eating. […] The sleep, which men and women also snatch in shady corners, is therefore not the protected Northern sleep. Here too there is interpenetration of day and night, noise and peace, outer light and inner darkness, street and home.[[42]](#footnote-43)

Adopting Benjamin and Lacis’s concept, but expanding it beyond Naples to the Italian South and Italy as a whole, Ernst Bloch will articulate the undoing or indifference to the partitioning of collective life in a somewhat different register: «in the South something other than clear measure is thriving – something, indeed, that does not greatly value such measure».[[43]](#footnote-44) Like Benjamin & Lacis, and in his own way Sohn-Rethel, Bloch too is trying to conceive an unprecedented form – or perhaps a set of «form problems» (*Formprobleme*) as Wilhelm Worringer puts in his inflection of Alois Riegl’s *Stilfragen* (questions of style) – where others might only see formlessness, as in our earlier discussion of the politics of Southern folklore. What was a somewhat passing remark regarding the baroque in Benjamin becomes a pivot around which Bloch defines a complete Southern aesthetic of porosity, naming «not a classical but an interplay: an object that lacks boundaries, but that is nonetheless bound together».[[44]](#footnote-45) Bloch further considers Southern socialisation baroque as well: «groups of men gather in baroque patterns of verbal discharge and overflow; rapid gestures enable even further discharges of a word’s meaning, and soon the dialogue becomes a choir».[[45]](#footnote-46)

But the baroque form, that of *duttilità* – also present for Bloch in Pirandello’s «porous» dramatic technique – is one that the Northern European visitor often ignores or misrecognises, in desperate search for a *classical* counter to his own culture: «Those who come from the North would rather not see all this. They seek, in contrast to the gloom of their native land, a completely clear form of life, closed at every point. Far too few travel to Italy *from the South*, unfurling the map starting from Palermo, or even better from Tunis and its souks: here, the facile and wholly subjective contrast to the North’s lack of form is left behind».[[46]](#footnote-47) It is curious to note here the oscillation in Bloch between contrasting the South with Northern formlessness (Germanic) gloom, but also with a definiteness of form. It is in the latter register that Bloch makes explicit what only bubbles beneath the texts of Sohn-Rethel and Benjamin & Lacis, namely the contrast between Neapolitan and Southern life and the logics of capital. While porosity may seem more suited to the atmosphere of the North than to the clarity of Southern light,

the situation is reversed: the North is the home of separateness, of the clear (bourgeois) façade, of measured proportion. What could be more precisely opposed to porosity? These attributes of the North proceed from piecework, rather than from a still unified and holistic kind of activity: they derive from the capitalistic division of labor and its corresponding mathematically jointed mode of understanding, rather than from a feeling for characteristic form developing through its own vitality. In short, the bourgeoisie and its culture stand in opposition to porosity; as such they find themselves especially at home in the Renaissance of northern Europe.[[47]](#footnote-48)

In this political-economic and aesthetic framing of the problem, we can perhaps begin to see how the logics of the «supplement», of an-archy, or of an innovating derivativeness, which Sohn-Rethel discerned in the «broken» and Benjamin & Lacis in the «porous», can also be thought of not just in a generic and culturalising meta-political direction, but as short-circuiting some of the very conditions for capital accumulation. These notions, which crystallise the perception of a different (form of) *use* of objects and machines, can thus be grasped as a refusal of the very terms of Southern backwardness, of the periodising «line» of modernisation supposed to allow the *meridione* to catch up with capitalist norm in which one submits to the proper functioning of machines and respects the division between public and private, along with the other forms and practices that make a «Northern» capitalism possible – setting the latter as the standard against which all else is judged lagging, retrograde, and wanting.

IV. Southern Lines

A full theory of the permutations and contradictions that accumulate around, and are further impelled by, the uses of the South as a figure, concept, and lodestone of capitalist history is far beyond our restricted scope here, even internal to the narrower ambit of Italian national history. To gesture out beyond that frame, however, and to sketch an initial hypothesis about what such a theory would need to articulate, it is worth ending on one particular tendency especially visible within the Italian iteration of Southern questions.

One of the key antagonists against which Gramsci’s interventions in the mid-1910s were posed was Enrico Corradini, the nationalist novelist instrumental in the founding of Associazione Nazionalista Italiana (ANI). Corradini’s most influential concept, especially as expounded in a 1910 speech to the founding congress of ANI, was that of the «proletarian nation», which hinged on an extended analogy with, and transposition from, a vaguely Marxist account of class, which he deployed in a defense of the right of nations to imperial might and self-determination, connected explicitly in the following years to the *guerra di Libia*:

there are proletarian nations as well as proletarian classes; that is to say there are nations whose living conditions are subject to great disadvantage, compared to the way of life of other nations, just as classes are. Once this is realised, nationalism must, above all, insist firmly on the truth: Italy is, materially and morally, a proletarian nation. What is more, she is proletarian in a period before her recovery. That is to say, before she is organised, in a period when she is still groping and weak. And being subjected to other nations, she is weak not in the strength of her people but in her strength as a nation.[[48]](#footnote-49)

Corradini would continue to elaborate his ideas in the following years, and they played a pivotal role in the shift of Italian syndicalism towards a fully nationalist frame, so much so that Gramsci tackles it head on in two of his *Sotto la Mole* columns from 1916. In «Class Struggle and War» (*Lotta di classe e guerra*), Gramsci points out that not only has Corradini stolen Marx’s ideas – and gotten them profoundly wrong in the process – but also fundamentally misunderstood the very nature of historical comparison itself: «History doesn’t have one to one examples; this equivalency is that of a mathematical formula, not an observation of a relation between two realities that is supported by past or present events[…] [C]lass is not equal to nation and hence cannot have the same laws.»[[49]](#footnote-50)

In that text, Gramsci will go on to suggest his own version of the «proletarian nation», one that is «the unification of all the proletarians in the world». However, what remains crucial in his engagement with Corradini is how it detects an utter contradiction in scale, comparison, and analogy that lurks at the heart of the concept. Even aside from the noxious stew of vitalism, youth fetishism, and gender stereotype, the true incoherence – and fascist potentiality – of Corradini’s thought lies in how it collapses a set of distinct frames, geographical scales, historical moments, and sliding categories. These move not only from class to nation, but also from the life of a person to the life of a country, and from the healthful youth of a body to a body politic, all of which allows its ultimate maneuver, that of framing a nation that itself manifests tremendous social disparities and condemnations of its Southern half into a unified entity that is itself rendered comparatively «proletarian» by the powerful nations surrounding and threatening it. This is hardly a new trope, as Corradini inherits and mobilizes a common complaint glimpsed in Montesquieu’s sly mockery of Italy’s fall from imperial grace («Italy was no longer at the center of the commercial world; it was in a corner of the universe, so to speak, and it remains there today») and amply evident in nineteenth-century sentiments that Italy was always, in the words of Francesco De Sanctis, «at the end of the line, or in the second-class seats.»[[50]](#footnote-51) De Sanctis’ phrasing is acute, as the figure of the passage southwards towards the end of civilization was a signature rhetorical move in the denunciation of Southern archaism, such as Augustin Creuzé de Lesser’s quip, in 1806, that «Europe ends at Naples and ends there quite badly. Calabria, Sicily, all the rest belongs to Africa».[[51]](#footnote-52)

The *Mezzogiorno* figures explicitly in Corradini’s work as well, where it allows him to enact a key transposition. In *Il nazionalismo italiano* (the book-length version of the theory from 1914) he attempts to deflect the casual anti-*meridionale* sentiment and usual castigations of archaic indolence and backwardness otherwise present throughout the book’s developmental schema, in addition to seeking to capitalize on the criticisms levied in the previous decade by Italian syndicalists against socialists for focusing too heavily on Northern struggles. In *Il nazionalismo italiano*, Corradini argues that the Southern Question is not uniquely internal, as commonly thought, but is instead a dynamic, if unformed, force of expansionary energy, revealing in the individual overseas emigrations of southerners the «courage» to do what must be done by «the nation as a whole». These emigrants are, Corradini sighs, «the precursors of imperialists, bad ones, but precursors all the same».[[52]](#footnote-53)

What becomes evident even – or especially – in this hyper-nationalist attempt to answer the Southern question is that the «problem» of the South names not a clear discursive dividing line between stages of development or racially-distinct tendencies towards atavism or progression, but rather an over-determination of competing scales, levels, and historical currents. To even speak of the Southern Question in the Italian context must start from recognizing how much it devastates the coherence *of* that context, because it signals at a dizzying zone of contradiction and comparison: between «real» Italy (identified solely with the North) and its archaic South, between Italy as a national project of modernization and everything that holds it back, between Italy as a colonial power and its tentative colonial holdings, between Italy as a southern «proletarian nation» and the bourgeois North of Europe busy outpacing it, and between the Global North (to which Italy undoubtedly belongs) and everything that is deemed, *avant la lettre*, the Global South. In this light, it is hardly surprising that some of those who came to Naples and tried to theorize the principles of Southerness on its busy streets turned to a logic of porosity. The Southern Question itself is an overlaid mesh of determinations, consisting of so many overlapping frames, autophagic analogies, and principles of refusal that it can only be understood as full of holes, a lace of castigation and misprision hardly contained by any map or imagined border.

1. P. Osborne, *The Postconceptual Condition*, Verso, London 2017 (forthcoming), «Global Modernity and the Contemporary: Two categories of the philosophy of historical time». Thanks to the author for sharing the text with us. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Such a figuration shows itself to be persistent long into the twentieth century, especially marking the reception –Swhether by way of support or condemnation – of late-‘60s «Southern» riots and revolts, such as those in Battipaglia and Avola, by left-wing formations, from the PCI to ultra-left communist groups. See our forthcoming essay «Il *Sessantotto* and the Southern Question: On Not Periodizing ‘68», in *Cultural Politics* (forthcoming 2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. E. J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels. Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries,* Norton, New York 1965, p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. A. Gramsci, «Some Aspects of the Southern Question, in Pre-Prison Writings», Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1994, pp. 313-337; p. 327. Our emphasis. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Quoted in G. Crainz, *Il paese mancato: dal miracolo economico agli anni* Ottanta, Donzelli Editore, Rome 2003, p. 340. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. A. Gramsci, *Some Aspects of the Southern Question*, p. 327. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. A. Gramsci, «Some Aspects of the Southern Question», pp. 331–312. This philological note on the elementary aspects of Southern rebelliousness resonates with Benedetto Croce’s lexical-historical notes on the Neapolitan *lazzari*. See ‘I «lazzari»’ [1895] and ‘I «lazzari» negli avvenimenti del 1799’ [1935], in the collection of his writings on Naples: *Un paradiso abitato da diavoli*, ed. Giuseppe Galasso, Adelphi, Milan 2006, pp. 83-114. The *lazzari* were the origin of Marx’s reference in Chapter 25 of *Capital, Volume 1*, to the ‘Lazarus-layer’ [*Lazarussichte*] of the proletariat. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. We would connect this as well to the extended figuration of the palimpsest in Harry Harootunian’s recent work, especially in his reading of JoséeCarlos Mariátegui, whose thinking he sets alongside a Gramscian framework concerning the historical simultaneity and spatial contiguity of uneven developmental timescales, hence joining a Blochian framework to the conceptualization of the Global South itself. See H. Harootunian, *Marx After Marx: History and Time in the Expansion of Capitalism*, Columbia University Press, New York 2015, pp. 135–152. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. A. Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, Einaudi, Turin 1975, p. 2312; *The Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935*, New York University Press, New York 2000, p. 360. See also *Quaderni del Carcere*, p. 680. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. A. M. Cirese, «Gramsci’s Observations on Folklore», in *Approaches to Gramsci*, ed. Anne Showstack, Sassoon Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative Society, London 1982, pp. 212-247; p. 219. The original version of the essay includes philological material not included in the English translation: see A. M. Cirese, «Concezioni del mondo, filosofia spontanea e istinto di classe nelle “Osservazioni sul folclore”odi Antonio Gramsci», in *Gramsci ritrovato*, ed. Antonio Deias, Giovanni Mimmo Boninelli, Eugenio Testa, Olschki, Florence 2009.Originally in *Intellettuali, folklore, istinto di classe. Note su Verga, Deledda, Scotellaro, Gramsci*, Einaudi, Turin 1976, pp. 65–104. See also Cesare Bermani,«Letteratura e vita nazionale. Le “Osservazioni sul folklore”», in *Gramsci, gli intellettuali e la cultura proletaria,* Cooperativa Colibrì, Milan 2007, pp. 57–80. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. A. Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, p. 1105. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. For another reading of the deployment of geological metaphor in the use of conservative accounts of civilizational drift and decadence (especially those of Oswald Spengler), see Williams, «The Good, the Bad, and the Pseudo», in *Frakcija* 64–65 (2013), pp. 48-59. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. A. Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, p. 2313; *A Gramsci Reader*, p. 361. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. S. Hall, Gramsci’s Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10 (1986), no. 5, pp. 5-27; p. 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. Hall, «Gramsci’s Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity», p. 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. A. Gnoli (ed.), *Sanguineti’s Song. Conversazioni immorali,* Feltrinelli, Milan 2006, p. 46. As a note toward further work, we should note here how this intersects with, but ultimately complicates, the liberal model of «the mask and the face»he i.e. of a politics in which managed representations hide an unruly chaotic subjectivity seething below – which marks iterations of left political culture that come to focus on the grotesque, especially as theorized in left Italian cultural criticism of the ‘70s. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. Lombroso advanced claims of southern atavism (and «atavist primitiveness») on the basis of a supposed phrenological discovery in 1870 – which, as Roberto M. Dainotto astutely points out, is the very year of Italian unification –abefore it becomes a central concept of *L’uomo delinquente.* Niceforo, following from Lombroso, will grandly expand the model of atavism from a corporal trace (and determinant of behavior) to a total «Delinquent Zone» that is «halted along the evolutionary path» and which spans the territorial, racial, cultural, and psychological. For Niceforo, the south «has been atrophied on the path to civilization and has conserved the moral ideas of primitive societies: men therefore present an individual psychic atavism, and the entire region, in its collective consciousness, displays a social atavism.» R. M. Dainotto, *Europe (in Theory),* Duke University Press, Durham, NC 2007, p. 226. A. Niceforo, *La delinquenza in Sardinia: note di sociologia criminale,* Remo Sandron Editore, Palermo 1897, pp. 43; 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. E. de Martino, «Gramsci e il folklore», in *Due inediti su Gramsci*, ed. S. Cannarsa, in *La ricerca folklorica* 25 (1992), pp. 73-79, p. 75. Cited in C. Bermani, «Due letture non canoniche degli scritti di Antonio Gramsci: Ernesto de Martino e Gianni Bosio», in *Gramsci, gli intellettuali e la cultura proletaria*, p. 249. On this fascinating theoretical and political moment, see *Antropologia culturale e questione meridionale: Ernesto De Martino e il dibattito sul mondo popolare subalterno negli anni 1948-1955*, ed. Carla Pasquinelli, Firenze: La nuova Italia, 1977, and *Dibattito sulla cultura delle classi subalterne (1949-50)*, ed. Pietro Angelini, Roma: Savelli, 1977). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. E. de Martino, quoted in Bermani, «Due letture non canoniche degli scritti di Antonio Gramsci: Ernesto de Martino e Gianni Bosio», p. 252. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. Ibid., p. 253. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. E. De Martino, *Sud e magia* [1959]*,* Feltrinelli, Milan 2001, pp. 8-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. On the *arkhe* as principle, origin and command see Reiner Schürmann’s *Heidegger on Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1987. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. As he does for Claude Lévi-Strauss’s *Tristes Tropiques* earlier in *Of Grammatology*, Derrida will repeatedly note how the counter-ethnocentrism of Rousseau’s celebration of the South never succeeds in leaving behind ethnocentrism itself, and more specifically Eurocentrism. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. Chakravorty Spivak, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1998, pp. 202–203; *De la grammatologie,* Ed. de Minuit, Paris 1967, p. 278. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, pp. 217–218; *De la grammatologie*, pp. 298–300. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, pp. 267–268; *De la grammatologie*, pp. 361–362. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. The results of which would become *Ökonomie und Klassenstruktur des deutschen Faschismus,* Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1973, translated by Martin Sohn-Rethel into English as *The Economy and Class Structure of German Fascism,* Free Association Books, London 1987. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. Quoted in M. Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Man: Science, Technology, and Ideas of Western Dominance*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY 1989, p. 156. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. A. Sohn-Rethel, «Das Ideal des Kaputten. Über neapolitanische Technik», in *Das Ideal des Kaputten*, ed. B. Wassmann, Verlag Ulrich Seutter, Frickingen 2008, pp. 33-38; p. 31; Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Napoli: la filosofia del rotto,* Alessandra Caròla Editrice, Naples-Milan 1991, p. 39. The theme of Naples’ other technics is also present in Sohn-Rethel’s short story on a traffic jam in Via Chiaia, «Eine Verkehrstockung in der Via Chiaia», in *Das Ideal des Kaputten*, pp. 9–19; *Napoli: la filosofia del rotto*, pp. 13–25. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. Sohn-Rethel will juxtapose societies of *appropriation* and societies of *production* in *Intellectual and Manual Labour*. The latter have their «social synthesis … determined by the labour relationship in the production process» and are thus capable of becoming classless, while the former can exist either in the form of political appropriation (tribute, feudalism, bondage) or reciprocal appropriation (private exchange and commodity production). The Neapolitan appropriation of technics would appear to exceed this historical-materialist schema. See A. Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology*, trans. M. Sohn-Rethel, Macmillan, London and Basingstoke 1978, pp. 83-84. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. For an extended and idiosyncratic attempt to develop an entire philosophy of design and architecture on this basis, see Charles Jencks and Nathan Silver, *Adhocism: The Case for Improvisation,* MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. A. Sohn-Rethel, *Das Ideal des Kaputten*, p. 33; *Napoli: la filosofia del rotto*, p. 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. A. Sohn-Rethel, *Das Ideal des Kaputten*, p. 34; *Napoli: la filosofia del rotto*, pp. 42–43. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. On this point, we can’t help but note an odd synchronicity: Sohn-Rethel wrote this text one year after the publication of Marcel Mauss’auEssai sur le don: Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques», the essay that would become the foundation of *The Gift* and its influential account of potlatch. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. A. Sohn-Rethel, *Das Ideal des Kaputten*, p. 35; *Napoli: la filosofia del rotto*, p. 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. Including this gem at the beginning: «The traveling citizen who gropes his way as far as Rome from one work of art to the next, as along a stockade, loses his nerve in Naples. No more grotesque demonstration of this could be provided than in the convocation of an international congress of philosophy. It disintegrated without a trace in the fiery haze of this city, while the seventh-centennial celebration of the university, part of whose tinny halo it intended to be, unfolded amid the uproar of a popular festival. Complaining guests, who had been instantly relieved of their money and identification papers, appeared at the secretariat. But the banal tourist fares no better. Even Baedeker cannot propitiate him. Here the churches cannot be found, the starred sculpture always stands in the locked wing of the museum, and the word “mannerism”awarns against the work of the native painters». W. Benjamin & A. Lacis, «Naples», in W. Benjamin, *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. P. Demetz, trans. E. Jephcott, Shocken Books, New York 1986, pp. 163-173; p. 164. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. Ibid., pp. 165–166. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. Ibid., p. 167. (Translation modified.) An important extension to this reading of Naples, which develops it in terms of feminist spatial studies and a rich mode of media archaeological inquiry, can be found in G. Bruno’s *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map: Cultural Theory and the City Films of Elvira Notari*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1993. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
40. W. Benjamin & A. Lacis, «Naples», p. 166. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
41. Ibid., p. 168. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
42. Ibid., pp. 171–172. See also Ernst Bloch’s riff on Benjamin & Lacis’s observations in «Italy and Porosity», in *Literary Essays*, trans. A. Joron et al., Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1999, where Bloch treats the Neapolitan way of occupying public space as «a diffuse, collective mode of gliding. Privacy and the demarcation of personal space remain universally almost incomprehensible» (p. 451), something which even affects the very nature of language (Bloch’s remarks on the «formation of vowels» distantly echoing certain passages of Rousseau’s on the formation of Southern languages); while architecturally: «The residential interior participates in the exterior world: the result is a merging of private and public space» (p. 452). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
43. E. Bloch, «Italy and Porosity», p. 450. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
44. Ibid., p. 451. See also the brief art-historical discussion of the Renaissance’s «dampen[ing] the […] eruption of the baroque’s entangled line» (p. 455), and the link between the Southern baroque, on the one hand, and «Oriental»rand «Moorish» art, on the other. The first is characterised by «the overflow, the *espressivo*, the transparency of every phenomenon and […] the reflective power of every monad to represent and contain the universe»; the second by «the art of merging and linking all of life’s expressions, written characters, lifelines and arabesques [which] lead from home to the workplace, the market, and the mosque, from one to the All, and from the All again to any given point along the way». (p. 456). [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
45. Ibid., p. 452. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
46. Ibid., p. 454. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
47. Ibid., pp. 455–456. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
48. E. Corradini, «Classi proletarie: socialismo, nazioni proletarie: nazionalismo. La relazione di Enrico Corradini», in *Il nazionalismo italiano. Atti del congresso di Firenze*, ed. G. Castellini, Quattrini, Florence 1911, pp. 22-35; p. 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
49. A. Gramsci, *Lotta di classe e guerra*, in *Cronache torinese*, *1913-1917*, ed. S. Caprioglio, Einaudi, Turin 1980, pp. 499–500. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
50. Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1989, p. 390; F. De Sanctis, *Storia della letteratura italiana,* Sansoni, Florence, 1960, p. 463. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
51. Quoted in N. Moe, *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern* Question, University of California Press, Berkeley 2002, p. 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
52. E. Corradini, *Il nazionalismo italiano*, Treves, Milan 1914, p. 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)