

# # DUKE-BOLOGNA SCHOOL ON GLOBAL STUDIES AND CRITICAL THEORY

*Summer 2014*

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The first session of the School on Global Studies and Critical Theory, a summer program co-organized by Duke University and the Department of History, Culture and Civilization at the University of Bologna, was held in 2014. Having made some minor progress in my study of Italian, the possibility of a summer trip to Italy came to me at an opportune time.

But the primary draw was the range of topics covered in the Summer School's lectures and seminars and the faculty members' importance in their fields. The focus of the program was "Space and Politics in the Global Age," an expansive topic, toward which the Summer School took an equally expansive approach. Its description promised "a radical rethinking of our theoretical tools and critical exchange among different research fields" aimed at "the collective production of knowledge and critical thought." To this end, a diverse group of graduate students from the United States, Europe, Latin America, and Asia were in attendance, representing a wide array of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. The United States and Italy were the structuring national influences, and indeed the faculty were entirely drawn from either American or Italian institutions. This was not necessarily a limit on the program's scope, as the juxtaposition of two quite different cultures and pedagogies of theory opened a wide field for intervention by the international assemblage of graduate students. The two-week program was divided into week-long units of morning courses and two afternoon seminars, punctuated throughout by three lectures.

The immense organizational efforts of Raffaele Laudani, Greta Messori, and Roberto Dainotto were immediately apparent. I have to confess that I did not attend as many sessions as the organizers—of the two op-

tional seminars offered, I chose one each week. Without this time it would simply have been impossible to do the readings or take advantage of the opportunity to adopt the Italian practice of an evening *aperitivo* with our new colleagues—both integral components of the practice of critical theory.

The opening lecture by Carlo Galli presented the local Italian context for the critical analysis of space. One of the most influential political philosophers in Italy (and a member of the Italian parliament) Galli's analyses of political philosophy, extending from Niccolò Machiavelli to Carl Schmitt, have placed the problem of space at the center of the political. Speaking of a "spatial turn" in political theory, Galli's political argument brought out the stakes of the conceptual categories of space and time. For Galli, the political philosophy of time was tied to the philosophy of history, to the inquiry into the subject and goal of the historical process, represented in the Hegelian problematic by political revolution. After the "spatial turn," we are required to rethink the history of political philosophy—to understand the political space constituted by modernity and how it has been transformed by globalization. This implies that political possibilities today lie in the re-imagination of political space—which means leaving temporality, the philosophy of revolution, behind. This dramatic encounter, this tension between a critical liberalism and the coded reference to Marxism played out in the historical constitution of global political space in modernity, turned out to be a defining thread of the Summer School. Indeed, Galli remarked in a discussion of Carl Schmitt, about whom he has written a book of over 900 pages, that while liberalism's politics remain correct, its theory has been slow to catch up—the task now is to incorporate the insights of the critique of liberalism, to forge a liberal *theory* adequate to liberal politics.

We proceeded the next day with the morning course of Sandro Mezzadra, whose recent book *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor*, written with Brett Neilson, has presented a very different methodology for the analysis of globalization. In his course, "Global Borders," Mezzadra suggested, in contrast to Galli, the possibility of "bringing time back in"—which meant bringing revolution back in. This was not, however, the Hegelian conception of revolution within a historical teleology; it implied instead a theory of the differentiated and articulated temporalities historically specific to capitalism. But in keeping with the workerist tradition within which

Mezzadra situates himself, these temporalities have to be understood from the viewpoint of capital's antagonist. This means labour-time at the point of production, to be sure, but also the time of the detention camp, the time of the practices of "benching" that hold labour in reserve, which frame the experience of the migrant labourer. There has been a temptation within Italian "post-workerism" to revert to a philosophy of history—to understand capitalist development in progressive terms, even if this progress is viewed from the perspective of the increasingly socialized forms of labour, manifested today in the hegemonic figures of "immaterial labour." Mezzadra's work has been instrumental in subjecting this perspective to the challenges of postcolonial theory and research into the supply chain, which require us to rethink the relation between space and time in capitalist development. This course guided us toward the examination of flows of labour and goods across and through a world of borders, *constituted* by borders, rather than the erasure of borders by a sovereignty beyond nation-states.

Raffaele Laudani's seminar "Nova Totius Terrarum Orbis" brought these questions back to the constitution of modern political space with a focus on the relation between land and sea in the work of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Thomas Paine. Colonialism, the Atlantic slave trade, and the peculiar role of piracy were fundamental to understanding the political role of oceanic space. Here Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker's work on the Atlantic proletariat, whose insurgencies challenged the emergence of capitalism, shed light on the role of the ocean in modern political philosophy. At first, the Atlantic represented a space of disorder, which had to be countered with the stability of sovereignty on land. But responding to Linebaugh and Rediker's suggestion that political philosophy discovered the "rights of man" when the Atlantic proletariat put narrowly conceived national conceptions of right into question, Laudani suggested that the shift from Hobbes to Locke represented a radicalization of the theory of control. Colonial America appears in Locke's texts as the space in which natural right is derived, projecting property into the state of nature rather than understanding nature as a state of war that a socially constructed sovereignty must arise to control. What seems like a shift towards a gentler liberalism is in fact retroactive introduction of the logic of stabilization into the New World itself—the pacification of the Atlantic.

Galli, Mezzadra, and Laudani formed a kind of introduction to the Italian field, a hybrid one which presented innovative analyses of English

texts. Claudia Milian’s course “The Global South,” of which I was able to attend only one session, and Rey Chow’s lecture “Skin Tones: About Language, Postcoloniality, and Racialization,” brought in the approaches representative of the American academy—again hybrid in its own way—drawing on work addressing Latin American, African, and Asian contexts, and incorporating the European theorists usually brought together in the uneasy united front of “poststructuralism.” In the course and the discussion following the lecture, interesting questions of pedagogical and theoretical translation arose, as the European and international students encountered debates characteristic of the U.S. academy which are not widespread abroad—namely, the often contentious debates between Marxism and the various “posts” (poststructuralism, postcolonialism, etc.), which are remarkably difficult to translate into non-Anglophone discussions.

This work of translation continued the following week in Harry Harootunian’s course “Marx Beyond Europe: The Expansion of Capitalism and the Formation of World History.” Harootunian used three classical texts of the Marxist tradition—Karl Marx’s manuscript “Results of the Immediate Process of Production,” Rosa Luxemburg’s *The Accumulation of Capital*, and Antonio Gramsci’s “The Southern Question”—to argue against the perception of Marxism as a Eurocentric, progressivist theory of history. Instead, these texts made it clear that the Marxist tradition was preoccupied with the problem of the relation of the West to the colonized world and sought to formulate theories of development that broke with progressivist schemas. Harootunian suggested that this potential in Marxist theory had been obscured by the theorists of Western Marxism, who erased the non-Western world and imagined that the process of capitalist development had been fully achieved. While there is no space here to review the complex exegetical questions this analysis raises, we should take a moment to mention the important and underappreciated texts from Asia that Harootunian also introduced: from Japan, Uno Kozo’s “The Agrarian Question” and “What is the Debate on Japanese Capitalism?” and from China, Wang Yanan’s *Principles of the Chinese Economy*. These fascinating texts brought out the questions of primitive accumulation and uneven development with direct reference to their respective national experiences of integration into the world market. The most promising texts were those of Uno, whose analysis of Marx’s critique of political economy was the most

sophisticated of all the interpretations presented, and whose account of Japanese capitalist development merits further translation and interpretation in English.

The discussion in Harootunian's course of Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe* provides a bridge to the course of Paolo Cappuzzo, in which it also took on decisive importance. Chakrabarty's influential critique of Marx had the potential to hit upon the questions which Harootunian had demonstrated Marxism had already raised. However, it frequently ran aground because of its ambiguity regarding categories like abstract and living labour, which were defined eclectically and hastily. The core problem, which there is no space to elaborate here, was of adequately identifying the breaks in Marx's conceptual development, which make it necessary to exercise caution when taking categories from the *Grundrisse* and placing them alongside those of *Capital*.

Cappuzzo's course, "Time and Space in World History," situated the broader work of Subaltern Studies within an overview of the concept of time in Western historiography. Moving through Hegel, Marx, Weber, Koselleck, and Said, Cappuzzo presented the linear and dialectical notions of progressive time that constituted the Eurocentric cartographies of history. Here the break between Marx's early and late writings took on a considerable importance. Working within Hegel's paradigm, Marx's writings on India represented a powerful, dialectical, and Eurocentric conception of time. I suggested that Marx's later writings on Ireland and Russia represented an important rupture with this earlier conception, and Cappuzzo immediately agreed. We had less time to reexamine the Leninist conception of time, which seemed to be resolved into the linear conception, but I would argue it also contains the possibility, most clearly argued by Althusser, of a kind of differentiated temporality revolving around the theory of the conjuncture.

Subaltern Studies represents a crucial critique of the progressivist models of historiography, as Cappuzzo demonstrated through his analysis of the work of Ranajit Guha and Chakrabarty's analysis of labour in the jute mills. However, despite Chakrabarty's emphasis on histories of difference, it was not always clear that his more methodological statements on the character of postcolonial critique paid adequate attention to the unstable blurring of categories in the reality of historical fact, which make divisions

into a “History 1” and “History 2” problematic. Chakrabarty’s important critique of “historicism,” moreover, ran into genealogical difficulties. The term, originally properly applied to the relativistic German school of historiography, is applied in the peculiar usages of Croce and Gramsci to an entirely opposite Hegelian, teleological, and universalist model of time. By the time Althusser’s critique of this Hegelian “historicism” came to be widely read it was somewhat indiscriminately mapped onto Benjamin’s elliptical critique of the German variant, which is articulated *alongside* a critique of Second International teleology. In Chakrabarty’s usage, “historicism” is a highly indeterminate concept; it is not clear whether it is relativism or universalism being criticized, how these two different notions of time are in fact related to one another, whether they share a common problematic, or what alternative is on offer.

The closing lecture of Fredric Jameson brought our intellectual work into the global totality, which was at that time structured by the World Cup. His talk, “Globalization and Narrative,” presented the international circuits of soccer as an allegory for globalization, tracing lines from the movement of players across borders to the figure of the expatriate writer of modernism. I had earlier discussed with Jameson, at the hotel breakfast, the *Cinema Ritrovato* festival that was also taking place at the time, and at which I had had the opportunity to see some surprising and remarkable silent films while seated in the Piazza Maggiore. Our discussion moved towards science fiction, and I presented my theory of the differing conceptions of time in *Star Trek: The Original Series* and *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, in which the transition towards a liberal adherence to the Prime Directive disguised the turn away from the differentiated temporality of the conjuncture towards a stagist teleology. I am much better at *Star Trek* than I am at soccer, so I leave the discussion there.

I have not spent nearly enough time explicitly addressing the important and substantive contributions of the other graduate students who were there; suffice it to say that their interventions were altogether fundamental in shaping the course of the discussions as I have described them. As this all-too-brief survey of the many discussions at the summer school suggests, both the *range* of topics discussed and the *rigour* with which they were presented were remarkable. The challenge of the School on Global Studies and Critical Theory will be to continue to balance between the two—a

challenge faced by any interdisciplinary program, especially one that works at this level of international collaboration. On the one hand, gathering together such a wide range of disciplinary and thematic directions allows the collective inquiry to approach unexpected and essential questions, and it also allows for the inclusion of many extraordinary participants. On the other hand, it is not always clear how to proceed from this array of themes and approaches towards the more precise and delimited analysis which has now become possible and necessary. It may be that this tension is irresolvable, and the condition of critical inquiry. I would strongly encourage those who are interested in the future of theory to keep a close eye on the Duke-Bologna School on Global Studies and Critical Theory, in order to observe how its structure and methodology evolve to continue the rich and far-reaching collective inquiry it has established.