To experience the circle Italian autonomist thinkers in their own biotope is certainly a privilege. Uninomade is a network from 'the social movements' and organizes its meetings in different parts of the country. The topic of the Mestre meeting on May 7/8 2010 (near Venice) was 'digital commons'.

Special feature of this meeting was the presence of four international speakers: UK cyber-feminist theorist Sadie Plant, P2P evangelist Michael Bauwens, anti-globalization academic Nick Dyer-Witheford and me. Simultaneous translation was provided. Amongst the known Italian speakers were Tiziana Terranova (organizer of the international panel), Matteo Pasquinelli, Luca Casarini (ex Tutti Bianchi) and, featured as the last speaker, Antonio Negri. Paolo Virno and Sergio Bologna were not able to come. Their contributions were taped on video and played during the conference (attended by approx. 100 people). Events like this clearly show that Italy has taken over the role of France as the factory of Europe's leading intellectuals. The fact that this group of thinkers is marginalized in their own country, and many were forced to study and work elsewhere has only made them stronger. In particular amongst the younger generation there is a serious attempt to develop a global or at least European perspective. It is no coincidence the related internet server is called Global Project (with most content in Italian only…though it would be no punishment for the world to learn Italian!).

It was a sensation to witness the Italians revving up each other. The (mainly) male speakers are so in love with their own rhetoric. They admire their own poetic language to such an extend that you get the feeling that its taking over. At first hand it seems as if they are reading a text, but that's not the case. None of them was using the internet or prepared a powerpoint presentation. Needless to say it is one big feast of self-referential concepts. There are references made to studies, and sometimes even empirical works, but the general trend is rather broad and dense. What is important is to contribute to the current debates amongst Italian comrades. There are references made to what is written in the US and elsewhere in Europe but they are rarely specific. What is also absent is the realization of the actual importance of this specific Italian discourse in the world at large. There is no apparent dialogue apparent with the outside world. Conceptual hegemony within the Italian world of social movements is all that counts.

In this context digital commons is mostly discussed within the framework of the so-called second generation of autonomous work, the knowledge

workers. The argument goes like this. The period of industrial decline is accompanied by outsourcing of the production of material goods. Since the mid-nineties we see a growth of immaterial goods related to the manipulation of symbols, media and code. In this age of rapid transformation and crisis, the concept of 'commons' is (re-)introduced. The Italian understanding of commons is one of neither state nor market, and this is where its political potential is located. Commons is post-welfare state, and post-state socialism (in the tradition of autonomous critique of Eurocommunism and the historical compromise). For some (Negri amongst them) commons holds the promise of yet-to-come communism, whereas others shy away to make this lingo-political association. Commons can be anything, even rubbish, but in this context it is mainly used in the meaning of commonly produced knowledge (as a result of ' horizontal experiences'). The culture of open networks is actual realization of this idea. Networks are breaking ideological and social barriers. This leads to questions like: how can we prevent new initiatives from privatizing the new wealth of code, concepts and social relationships that the network commons produces?

There was a moment that the networks made us believe that there was no 'work' anymore. But that's gone. The liberating phase of the internet is over and it is now a medium that is tightly integrated into society. What we now have is the self-enterprise, non-typical and invisible. The confrontation of company and workers no longer happens. In his pre-recorded message Sergio Bologna spoke about the difficulties of organizing autonomous workers and their health care issues. Andrea Fumagalli mentioned the young temp workers on the fringes of the fashion industry, which are paid very little but who nonetheless continue to work because of some possible fame in the future. It is seen as a possibility to within a famous company and celebrities for very little or no money (as interns).

Paolo Virno mostly spoke about language, a topic which I could not directly connect to the digital commons debate. Language is not a tool, for instance, of thought. It is a way of life and has its own rules. Linguistic work. Speaking is not an activity that adds to other activities. It is important to understand how speaking reorganizes our activities. Why is our life so marked by the cult of creativity, Virno asked. There is creativity that applies rules and creativity that changes the rules. In the one case you apply the rules, like in chess. and in the other you invent a new game.

What stroke me was the absence of references to Creative Commons and

free software/open source. With the exception of Michael Bauwens, no one talked about this. It could very well be that the spreakers and audience of this particular event had no insight knowledge of these somewhat legal and technical matters. However, it is a bit strange if you want to discuss the 'digital commons' not to cover these terrains. Digging a bit deeper it seemed that both CC and FLOSS is seen as 'reformist' projects. So be it, but why not critique them as such? Funny enough there is a certain fascination in these radical leftist circles for US techno-libertarian positions of people like Lawrence Lessig and Yochai Benkler. This is quite odd if you take the slightly conservative, pro-capitalist agendas of these people into account. Here we clearly run into the non-technical background of many of the Italians. Vitalist in spirit it is in particular the constitution of work, and (precarious) working conditions, that matter. As Franco Berardi points at, the crucial term here is 'composition'. Instead of such a subject-based politics we need to wait for a next generation that understands underlying technologies and is indeed willing to critique reformist agendas. It is only then that we really discussed the many faces that a term like 'digital commons' has in contemporary global society.