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Time, space, city and resistance:
Situating Negri's multitude in the contemporary metropolis

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Abstract

Cities are not merely inanimate objects. They are complex living environments, built over time by cultures and civilisations. This thesis argues that cities have a central place in human history and civilisation because they are imbued with meaning and meaningful activity. Thus, cities are inherently political spaces, and it may be reasonably expected that they will be important sites of social transformation in the postmodern era. In order to understand the relationship between urban space and political consciousness, this thesis traces several different interpretive paths within the marxist tradition. First, we examine the work of Henri Lefebvre, who argues for an understanding of urban space as socially produced. Next, the thesis looks at the contributions of Guy Debord, particularly at his understanding of the relation between time and the city. Both writers struggle to understand the urban in the context of the shift to what we now call postmodernity. Despite their many strengths, Debord and Lefebvre ultimately fail to theorise a social subject capable of resisting capitalist domination of the city. As a result, the thesis turns to a consideration of the work of Antonio Negri. Negri's analysis of the fate of contemporary subjectivity has reinvigorated marxist critique with a return to the question of political change. His figure of the multitude takes leave of traditional marxism in challenging and productive ways, and helps us better understand the nature of subjectivity and resistance in a world of immaterial labour and virtuality. Nevertheless, this thesis argues that there is still work to be done before Negri's work can be mapped out onto the contemporary metropolis.

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