

– Introduction –

THE CRISIS IN ITALY

Anthropological Insights on Changes of Work,
Enterprise and Life Horizons

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Economic Crisis and Cultural Crisis: Between Flexibility and Precariousness

During the summer of 2011, the FIAT (Fabbrica Italiana Automobili Torino) factory in Termini Imerese, a small town in the metropolitan area of Palermo (Sicily), closed down, and in 2012 strikes and demonstrations were held in the area attempting to reverse this decision. It was the first (and up until now the only) FIAT factory to be decommissioned. This event marked a watershed that anticipated the new global structure of FIAT, but it also indicated the culmination of a crisis that has had strong repercussions in Italy, in an industrial-capitalist system characterized by specificity and weaknesses. The crisis, which started with the US Credit Crunch of 2007/2008, produced profound transformations that had repercussions on the Italian economic-productive system, which, as a whole and with the due internal differences, is certainly not one of the most solid examples in the European framework. In January 2019, major Italian newspapers reported a relevant figure, namely that Italian industrial production had dropped by 22 per cent since the 2007 crisis; almost a quarter of total production, a trend that is strongly divergent from the general European trend.¹

FIAT, a microcosm of the great Italian industrial capitalism characterized by family ownership and involvement, can therefore be taken not only as providing an example of some critical aspects of

the great interdependence between industry and politics in Italy, but also as a symbol of the general trend in the manufacturing industry: in the context of the general instability and political weakness that have been the subject of frequent reports in the press, the country has become less able to govern the processes of internationalization of the economy and to react adequately to the crisis.

Crisis is an increasingly used term and, since 2007, has become part of the international lexicon. As an Italian anthropologist noted, the image repeatedly broadcast by the media of Lehman Brothers employees leaving their offices with their boxes of personal effects constituted an iconic symbol of the crisis, immediately understandable for everyone, but corresponding however with an equally dense incomprehensibility of the reasons underlying what was happening (Signorelli 2016).

The aim of this work is to reflect in anthropological terms on the effects of the crisis in Italy, choosing industrial-manufacturing, small and medium-sized enterprises organized into districts (in central and northern Italy) as ethnographic field areas and case studies; then providing an example of a large manufacturing company (FIAT, the national automotive industry that has long operated as a sole player in Italy) as an example of the so-called assisted big industry in Italy; and, finally, examining a service sector that is particularly crucial for industrial production, namely the transport of goods by road. This type of freight transport, as illustrated in Chapter 6 of the volume, underwent significant development in Italy after the Second World War, both due to the devastation caused to the railway system during the war and to implicit agreements with vehicle manufacturers, primarily FIAT.

From an anthropological point of view, the 2007/2008 economic crisis and its effects maintain an inextricable link with a cultural crisis. By cultural crisis, we mean both a transformation of knowledge and values linked to work, and a transformation of everyday life practices, which consist of strategies of resistance, reaction and re-organization in the face of the economic crisis, and of the values and ethical principles that influence the organization of daily life, as well as the possibility of overcoming and transcending small and big difficulties which can arise in both the present and the immediate future. As we will show, the theory outlined by the Italian anthropologist Ernesto de Martino can help us to explain the impact of the crisis from an anthropological perspective and the cultural instruments used to tackle the crisis.

There is no doubt that the transformation of work, regarding its roles, functions and techniques, has lasted at least a century – ‘the short century’, in the famous expression of Eric Hobsbawm (1994). Starting from the writings of Karl Marx and during the twentieth century, the conceptual opposition, explained by Marx as dialectic, between capital and labour was central, and work was classified in the category of paid labour. Although this was not the only type of work possible (and since the late twentieth century, industrial workers have decreased in Western countries and are no longer a homogeneous category), it gave rise to the two specific categories of workers that define the social structure of the West (blue-collar workers, technicians and foremen on the one hand, and entrepreneurs and managers on the other).

However, at the turn of the twenty-first century, we found ourselves faced with a more fluid and heterogeneous category to describe workers, which saw changes in the distribution of workers between sectors (from the production of goods to the production of services and from manual work to so-called cognitive work), but also in the content and organization of the work itself. In the brief outline that we can give here: the result is a more heterogeneous composition, pulverized into a myriad of tasks and types of contracts, more polarized, and in which the definition of professional categories becomes more difficult, generating completely redefined status, identity and class memberships.

Many scholars, within the frame of international debate, have confronted the economic crisis and its outcomes in social life, in the cultural organization of work and subsistence strategies. Indeed, recent ethnographies of industrial work have raised interesting points of view in order to interpret the large-scale changes introduced by the crisis.

In the introduction to *Industrial Work and Life*, Massimiliano Mollona not only considers the central role of ethnography in capturing the variegated forms of contemporary capitalism in its different locations, but also underlines, in the wake of Marxian philosophy, that work is something more than and different from a merely material and individual process: it is mainly ‘a social and collective process of imagination, creativity and self-realization’ (Mollona 2009: xxv). This is a central point of view for anthropological analysis, which also forms the focus of this volume.

The viewpoint taken by Sharryn Kasmir and August Carbonella (2014) is an even more explicitly Marxian perspective, which is nec-

essary, in the authors' opinion, due to the worldwide increase in protest movements and demands for rights; these reveal the ever-more evident contradictions of the capitalist system in its neoliberal form and of the forms of dispossession and delocalization that are capable of producing accumulation by dispossession (Harvey 1989); this, albeit in a heterogeneous form, determines what the authors consider to be a new global proletariat. In thus reaffirming the need for a comparison, the authors underline the fact that dispossession was experienced and articulated in different forms at the end of the twentieth century, and yet the theoretical focus is not so much on the global/local opposition 'that has captured the anthropological imagination in the last twenty years' (Kasmir and Carbonella 2014: 3); instead, they refer to the critical junctions (in the sense of Kalb (2009)) in which the working classes relate to the regional, national and global institutions of power and influence.

At the same time, Kasmir and Carbonella also warn us that the widespread disappearance of the notion of class is linked more to the disappearance of its Fordist form, while the opposition between specialized industrial workers in the North and workers deprived of skills (and racially connoted) in the South also risks obscuring a more fluid and heterogeneous class experience. In addition, the authors believe that the consequences of the great ongoing recession are producing new differences and inequalities within the processes of dispossession. They consider it necessary to place labour policies at the heart of the analysis, as a fundamental step towards a global anthropology of work centred 'on the dialectic of dispossession and incorporation in people's daily lives, as well as the ways working people make new divisions and alliances in the context of global accumulation' (Kasmir and Carbonella 2014: 6). The more interesting point here is the notion of work as politically connoted, which implies a multiplicity of connections with the state and capital as mechanism of regulation on the one hand, and with workers and their living conditions at the local levels on the other.

The introduction by Victoria Goddard to *Work and Livelihoods: History, Ethnography and Models in Times of Crisis* (2017) opens up further interesting scenarios, starting with the crisis in large industrial sectors such as the steel industry, a process symbolized by the bankruptcy of Detroit City Hall in 2013. This process is also identifiable in the move of the central production of US General Motors from the north of the United States to Tennessee (Kasmir 2014), and can be similarly traced easily for the Italian case, via the story of Turin and the decline of the local FIAT Mirafiori plant, which followed the

internal relocation with the construction of the Melfi plant in 1993, until the international merger between FIAT and Chrysler in 2014 (D'Aloisio 2003, 2014, 2016, 2017). In view of the enormous changes in the production, work and assets of global capitalism that these sites are both an effect and a cause of, Goddard draws attention to the aspects of continuity in the changing processes, as well as break points, and how the 'old' can recur and remain in the 'new'. In essence, it is difficult to reduce the current issue to the decline of industry, and, vice versa, it is more profitable in Goddard's view (and for previous authors) to pay attention to the coexistence of different forms of inclusion and translation of the dominant capitalist forms: this is because 'it is clear that globalized production strategies have uneven outcomes, producing a complex landscape consisting of different forms of production and particular concentrations of economic activity' (Goddard 2017: 3).

It is beyond the scope of this volume to analyse the changes that occurred globally in terms of employment due to technological innovation, yet a reflection on the consequences of this matter on the global structure of social class is necessary. As noted by James Carrier and Don Kalb, the category of class calls for a very strong redefinition, first because, contrary to a conventional notion of class:

Exchanges between classes are not restricted to the transaction of labor power and pay. They also include rent for the use of property of various sorts, most obviously housing and land, but also patents or even money (in the form of interest), as well as the purchase of commodities produced by labor power for the profit of the owners of capital. (Carrier and Kalb 2015: 2)

Second, class is increasingly associated with kinship, gender, race and ethnicity, which has produced a proliferation of class-structured social domains that are not always reducible to the categories of income, education and occupational status. The idea of Kalb's regarding the disclaimer of the class category is not independent from a cognitive distortion, due to the hegemony of the Western middle class and the success of capitalism that seems to transcend it. Conversely, Kalb thinks that the long opposition between practice and structure, and between the local and the global situations, has been the most important mistake responsible for separating 'the intimate ethnography of what it means to be human and the big historical process' (Kalb 2015: 11). Instead of the old notion of class, he prefers to talk about a class emerging from class struggles, an interesting point of view that recalls – in our opinion – the role of ethnographic fieldwork capable of outlining several specific situations of class structuring.

With regard to the transformation of work that is directly dependent on technologies, which is one of the areas of focus in our case studies, there is a vast literature. From the metamorphosis of work by André Gorz (1964) to the end of work as proposed by Jeremy Rifkin (1994), which was subsequently taken up by Ulrich Beck (1999) in his idea of the end of traditional working practices, many authors have described, in more or less apocalyptic terms, transformations that evoked the objective reduction of manufacturing work. Furthermore, they evoked scenarios that had become more noticeable at the turn of the twenty-first century and during the 2007/2008 crisis. In brief, they are as follows: the need to free work from the paradigm of cumulative economic growth (Latouche 2006); the possibility of a capitalism paradoxically 'without work' (Beck 2000), in reference to a society that is increasingly divided between holders and non-holders of a job, which also has serious consequences for democratic coexistence; and finally the appearance of a new ideal type of worker, the flexible man, effectively described by Richard Sennett (1998).

Beyond these more or less catastrophic hypotheses, in 2015 the International Labour Organization (ILO), the UN agency responsible for the study and control of work transformation, already noted that in 180 countries with different levels of development analysed, less than a quarter of job contracts were stable and full-time (ILO 2015: 5). Moreover, the trend seemed to continue and it was assumed that, in the coming years, the level of stable labour would have represented an even lower fraction of the total. This data produced new worries, since a reduction in the number of jobs corresponds in the widespread opinion of economists to the risk of a further slowdown in the demand for global goods, due to the fact that workers are the most consumer-friendly category, and so, as a consequence, a further slowdown in the demand for labour could be generated; the danger, clearly, was to perpetuate the negative traits that characterized the global economy in the period following the 2007/2008 crisis.²

In this regard, what happened in the twentieth century can be defined, in the words of the Italian sociologist Aris Accornero (2000: 145), as 'the missing work'. According to Accornero, this is the real collapse of the production model and worker profile that characterized the twentieth century, which has produced an almost constant increase in unemployment not only in Europe and the United States, but also in Japan. Well-known processes, such as the financialization of businesses, the expansion of the stock market, the increase in competition and the radical change in protection and the representation of work, have made the constraints and margins of employment

more labile; the result is, on the one hand, the increased risk of losing one's job, and, on the other hand, the reduction in laws to protect workers. The most nefarious effects of these processes are felt in the precariousness of work, which has recently increased especially in Europe, but also in what can be defined as pulverization: a multiplicity of forms and contracts that are more difficult to control through legislative protection.

Between work that is lacking and work that is transformed, perhaps the most effective synthesis is given as three parallel processes, as follows: a traditional type of work is moving away from both the European and American continents, based on the shifting of much manufacturing to countries with lower labour costs, and the corresponding expansion of services and the tertiary sector. New jobs arrive with foreign immigration, which often cover areas in which the natives or locals no longer commit themselves (from agricultural labourers to carers for the elderly, to cite just two examples common in Europe). Finally, there is work that remains and that is invested with extensive restructuring processes, in its techniques, purposes, contents and quantitative and qualitative composition (Negrelli 2013). It is also important to add that economic migration towards industrialized countries is increasingly characterized by gender, according to three characteristic trends: the growing feminization of the global workforce; the increase of women working in the informal or more dangerous sectors of the economy; and the increase of women migrating to occupy the service sector in industrialized countries (Sherif Trask 2014: 29; Desai 2010).

In relation to the three categories mentioned above, the distinctive feature of contemporary work therefore appears to be precariousness, which has been analysed recently by Guy Standing, who poses the problem of the nature, causes and outcomes of the creation of a vast number of precarious workers, a true global class in progress (Standing 2011). First of all, Standing clarifies the definition of a category that can be vague and generic, arguing that it is not just casual or poor workers, or workers without protection, while the condition of total lack of control over one's work does not seem sufficient either. More precisely, Standing believes that precarious workers should be understood as those who lack the seven types of occupational safety that social democratic parties and trade unions had prioritized in the postwar period for the working class.³ Overall, what is missing from the category of precarious workers is professional identity, a lack of belonging to a working community, established practices and a shared memory, alongside a growing sense of alienation and exploitation in the fulfilment of their tasks. This is a condition Accornero

(2000) has effectively encapsulated in the expression 'small-w work', as opposed to typical twentieth-century work: wage-earning, productive and manufacturing, which founded an ethic and an ideology, as well as the status system. This is a form of work that has therefore multiplied in terms of its variety, which has decreased in its overall availability and is more disjointed in its lifespan, with a shorter amount of time necessary for many activities, even if not all people work fewer hours than before. Alongside this, it should also be remembered that work and employment do not necessarily prevent poverty, according to a growing relationship in recent years in EU countries (Ehrenreich 2001; Saraceno 2015).⁴

From the perspective of organizations, and therefore of the establishment, the hallmark of contemporary work appears instead as flexibility. According to the Italian sociologist Luciano Gallino, flexibility is a real keyword, which in recent years has been used in economic research, in speeches and announcements from the Bank of Italy, in economic newspapers and in other sources (Gallino 2007, 2012, 2014). This is obviously not a neutral term, since it implies a precise vision of work, which directs policies on the subject and which, as mentioned above, ends up being similar but politically opposite to the term 'precariousness'; however, before investigating the nefarious effects of the link between flexibility and precarity, it is worth remembering that there are opposing perspectives – between workers that benefit from flexibility and workers that don't – as discussed in the aforementioned essay by Sennett (2000).

In contrast to routine, flexibility is expressed in our contemporaneity, according to Sennett (1998), in three substantial elements: discontinuous reinvention of institutions, flexible specialization of production and concentration of power without centralization. At the individual level, the characteristics of flexibility materialize in the ability to abandon one's own past, in self-confidence and also a strong disposition to accept job fragmentation. However, according to Sennett, it is possible to find in flexibility a new culture of risk (which flexibility necessarily entails), which enhances movement, considers stability to have negative economic and career repercussions, and resorts to movement as a continuous search for new opportunities. This situation, which is perhaps commonplace in the US labour market, is not properly representative of the Italian case, as labour mobility has never been at the core of labour legislation.

According to Ronald Dore, the issue of flexibility, regardless of the positive or negative connotation that one wishes to attribute to

it, must be traced back, at least in English-speaking countries and in particular in the United Kingdom, to a collective desire for it as a means to oppose the protection practices operated by the trade unions (Dore 2004). Dore also points out that at least since the 1980s, we must distinguish between internal flexibility and external flexibility: the latter refers to allocative efficiency, achieved through the greater freedom of companies to hire and fire employees, which offers the possibility of downsizing the workforce at minimal cost and, at the same time, the free search for the desired skills in the labour market; the former refers to productive efficiency, which is to improve the organization, to lead to innovation and to increase the efficiency of work. A relevant consequence of this distinction, which opens up a broad debate on the possibility of reconciliation between the two types of flexibility, is a compromise solution, so to speak, that sees companies engaged in creating a core of reliable workers with distinctive enterprise skills and who have been subjected to long training schemes; conversely, there would also be a wide range of functions that require minimal training, with little specific knowledge, for which full-time and long-term jobs are not needed and where it is obviously possible to contain costs (Dore 2004). This solution therefore implies the effect of the polarization of labour, from the moment that the companies use the flexibilization of work as an element in the response to the transformations in the market.

The anthropological focus of this volume is not on the economic issues of the crisis or on proposing possible solutions; rather, it intends to explore the meaning and the (ethical) value of work, to discuss the extent to which work is (or is not) still able to effectively contribute to building and shaping the subjectivities and social identities of men and women, as new forms of production and consumption are emerging, and to think about the structure of roles and tasks in this particular phase of capitalism.

Taking advantage of these reflections, in this work we aim to provide an overview of some case studies of Italian industrial production, their situation during the crisis of 2007/2008 and the strategies of resistance and transformation implemented by the protagonists – male and female workers, entrepreneurs, families linked to the companies, cities and local populations involved in the crises – which together gave rise to specific and original local reorganizations. Special attention has been paid to the industrial districts, systems of organized production which principally developed in north and central Italy.

Difficult Economic Conjuncture and Systemic Crisis in the Made in Italy Industrial Districts

As explained above, a lot of attention has been paid to the transformations of industrial capitalism into more flexible forms of production. Italian capitalism has provided some interesting insights on this subject because it encompasses different and yet intertwined systems of production that have converged towards flexibility. The 'mix' of an informal economy, petty commodity production and mass production in one small region or even a single location attracted the attention of geographers, sociologists, economists and eventually some anthropologists. Thus, it is not accidental that the majority of the chapters in this volume contribute to the anthropological literature by focusing on local production systems.

These local production systems received international recognition in the late 1970s, when the sociologist Arnaldo Bagnasco (1977) coined the well-known term 'the Three Italies'. He proposed a three-fold model of Italian development: the 'first' Italy of the industrial triangle (Milan-Turin-Genoa) characterized by the presence of large and vertically integrated factories; the 'second' Italy of the less developed south; and the 'third Italy', former rural areas of northeastern and central Italy that experienced rapid social and economic development due to the mushrooming of small-sized and family firms practising subcontracting and flexible production – a form of production organization quite distinct from the Fordist model of production, in which large vertically integrated firms were dominant. In the same period, two Italian economists, Giacomo Becattini (1978, 1986) and Sebastiano Brusco (1986, 1989), provided empirical evidence of spatial clustering of small firms in Tuscany and Emilia-Romagna respectively. They proposed an explanatory model of the 'third Italy' that bore a strong resemblance to the organization of production described by Alfred Marshall (1919, 1920) in some areas of England: the industrial district. Marshall noticed that commodity production could take place through the division of labour in large factories, as well as by distributing each step of production in localized small firms and workshops. Becattini borrowed the term and defined it 'a socio-territorial entity which is characterised by the active presence of both a community of people and a population of firms in one naturally and historically bounded area' (1990: 38). In their model of the Third Italy, both Becattini and Brusco were well aware that in order to understand the economic efficiency of these localized production models, social and cultural categories had to be included in

their analysis. Local outsourcing, flexible arrangements and know-how were embedded in the intricacy of information networks, encouraged by social proximity between entrepreneurs and workers, and by self-organizing forms of local cooperation with relatives and acquaintances.

These pioneering studies catalysed the attention of scholars from different quarters, who speculated at length about the organizational and technological changes that took place in Italian industrial capitalism and that contributed so much to the market success of the so-called Made in Italy production.

Michael Piore and Charles Sabel (1984) examined the regional economies of the Third Italy to argue that craft production supported by technological development and organizational innovation proved to be an effective alternative to mass production. In their analysis, the revival of craft production-cum-computerized machinery was an indication that a solution was about to be found for the crisis of Fordism and mass production. They suggested that the transition to flexible processes of specialization and decentralization of production in some Western economies, resulting in the creation of smaller productive units, represented the 'second industrial divide' in the history of industrialization, whereas the first divide occurred in the nineteenth century when 'the emergence of mass-production technologies – in Great Britain and then in the United States – limited the growth of less rigid manufacturing technologies' (Piore and Sabel 1984: 5). Thus, according to these authors, the second industrial divide partially reversed the technological process that favoured mass production at the expense of craft production in the nineteenth century. In their optimistic view, the skilled worker and labour autonomy, which had been lost in the first transition, would be reconstituted under the new technological conditions.

Others, such as Scott Lash and John Urry (1987), viewed the crisis of capitalism in a different way. They distinguished between an epoch of 'organized capitalism' and a new era of 'disorganized' capitalism, emphasizing not only the economic aspects of this transition but also wider social and cultural changes. According to their view, the Italian industrial districts are an example of disorganized capitalism; they developed as large factories declined and underwent major restructuring, and flexible and deregulated forms of work organization were increasingly implemented in small workshops. David Harvey (1989, 1991, 2005) theorized in Marxist terms the transition from Fordism to a new regime of 'flexible accumulation' regulated by neoliberal policies, stressing the corporate attempt to regain full con-

control over the labour process through the geographical relocation of industrial production. An analogous position was held by the regulation school (Lipietz 1992; Jessop 1992, 2003), which viewed capitalism as a crisis-ridden economic system requiring modes of regulation to sustain it and limit its inherent structural and conjunctural contradictions. Thus, for the regulationists, the current post-Fordism phase – neoliberalism – is a new hegemonic regime of accumulation emerging from the crisis of Fordism during the 1970s and 1980s, after a period of intensive accumulation and mass production. Contrary to Piore and Sabel's view, this new phase of capitalism 'involves the subordination of small and medium enterprises to new forms of monopolistic competition on a global scale' (Jessop 2003: 260).

Another critical, albeit different, position was held by scholars such as Anna Pollert (1988, 1991) and Ash Amin (1989), who raised critical questions about this alleged new phase of post-Fordist production much earlier than any other scholar. Pollert in particular argued that the debate on the contemporary restructuring of capitalist economies created a 'new orthodoxy of flexibility', which is a conflation of meanings, a single typology on a diverse range of social realities:

The implication of a radical break from the past, in the preoccupation with newness and change and the absence of a historical perspective on the significance of work and labour market flexibility in previous periods, has consolidated a nostalgic picture of past stability and harmony and future stability and growth based on flexibility. (Pollert 1991: 3–4)

The 'fetish of flexibility', as Pollert calls it, seems to have reached an overarching consensus, which emerges clearly in the present relentless commitment of nation-states to search for labour-market flexibility. However, flexible arrangements are not a novelty, as Alfred Marshall had documented; moreover, they seem to raise various concerns in terms of labour exploitation and disguising new rigidities in gender relations (Gibson-Graham 2006). This is an issue that has seldom been fully explored in the industrial district literature, with some noticeable exceptions in anthropology (Yanagisako 2002).

The criticism by these scholars is relevant to our discussion as they foresaw some of the emerging critical issues that will be examined in this volume. We began by presenting an almost idyllic, perfectly functional image of the Italian model of small-scale production, as illustrated by Piore and Sabel's work, and we concluded by mentioning critical approaches that compellingly challenge a much of the mythology of competitiveness, cooperation and social stability em-

bodied in the industrial districts. Their economic success contributed to portraying them as a highly functional model of production to measure against others, and at the same time it blurred and obscured faults and contradictions that only the recent crisis has managed to bring to the fore. Indeed, an early important contribution to this critique has been Michael Blim's *Made in Italy* (1990), an ethnographic work on the emergence of small-scale industrialization in the Italian region of Marche. Blim clearly suggested that this model of capitalism, which has become 'the darling of neo-liberal development theory' (1990: 3), offers a rather mixed view, with the spectre of economic decline always present. His chapter in this volume seems to confirm his early foresight, as we will illustrate shortly. On the whole, further signs of economic decline and significant transformation in the social setting of the industrial districts became apparent at the turn of the millennium (Whitford 2001; Ghezzi and Mingione 2003; Hadjimichalis 2006). Indeed, since Bagnasco published his provocative work, much has changed in all three Italies. Areas of localized production are widespread throughout Italy, from north to south, like a fragmented patchwork; large factories have been shut down, downsized and relocated to the Mezzogiorno (such as the FIAT plant at Melfi) or abroad; family enterprises and self-employment are persistently dynamic, but seem to have lost part of their enterprising vitality. And finally, the argument that industrial districts are 'communities of people', homogeneous systems of values and views, with widespread social consensus is no longer tenable, as all of the contributions to this volume seem to imply.

All of the chapters in this volume on the industrial districts make the argument that the recent economic downturn was not simply the manifestation of the worst economic crisis since the Second World War. What on the surface appeared to be prolonged economic crisis was actually a crisis of a different kind. The analysis that the authors have carried out in their own case studies indicates a consistently convergent path towards a systemic crisis. In other words, the transformations that have occurred and are still occurring suggest a more complex picture that these contributions have just begun to outline.

To categorize the crisis as 'systemic' is not just a mere question of semantics. This term allows us to consider the interdependence of various elements and the frailty, rather than the resilience, of the system when one or more of these elements falls apart. The crises that periodically hit the empirical contexts discussed in this volume have left visible marks or, rather, scars that are reflected in the ambivalence of small enterprising households towards precisely the

very craft production that receives so much praise from a number of scholars. Indeed, the very idea of labour as an individual asset upon which industrial districts founded their economic prosperity has been called into question principally by those who contributed to shaping that same idea and benefited from it. Work is now imagined in a wider and precarious global economy, and not simply embedded in the local territory or conceptualized within the boundaries of the family. The dislike and distrust of a future following in the footsteps of and the same trade as one's parents do not cause dismay in the household, but nonetheless are creating a 'transitional vacuum' and a future loaded with uncertainties. This same sense of uncertainty is similarly perceived among employees. The increasing cross-boundary transactions of coveted locally produced commodities have exposed the industrial districts to international capital that has no links to the territory. This capital may indeed breathe new life into mature sectors, but it also raises some concerns. The new management of these factories is not compelled to establish moral obligations with the local labour force; therefore, as a trade unionist argues in Zanutelli's chapter, the recourse to lay-offs has turned into an impersonal procedure, whereas in the case of autochthonous employers, the lay-offs of their workers would be experienced as a painful choice and as a last resort after everything else has failed. By the same token, the new management of these firms may alter the network of the local suppliers to establish new forms of labour exploitation and precarious work.

The emergence of new leaders among the most successful medium-sized Italian firms in the industrial districts is also causing remarkable changes in the local economy. Some of these firms, which are well known in the global market, have created their own global networks, bypassing the structural organization of the industrial district. Others, by contrast, have chosen not to renounce local resources in terms of knowledge, skilled workers and outsourcing in general; however, in order to remain competitive, they have imposed their own business model based on strong investments in technology and managerial resources. Hence, it is likely that this kind of endogenous reorganization has triggered other restructuring processes as far as labour is concerned – that is, work precarity and flexibility. Following this reorganization undertaken by the industrial districts, the embeddedness that had characterized the older system of production – then an essential ingredient of competitiveness and development – is now being called into question by the new industry leaders.

As a result of these recent changes, there seem to be two major forms of labour precarity in the current Italian capitalist model. The first is the precarity generated in the manufacturing industry, which has affected traditional forms of occupation, such as craft labour in the industrial districts and elsewhere. Skilled labour that was achieved through continuous working experience is now becoming increasingly jeopardized by fragmented work experiences and precarious job positions. The second is the precarity regarding intangible (i.e. cognitive and linguistic) production that is widespread in the flexible environment of the service industry of large urban centres, as discussed by Fumagalli in this volume. These new jobs, which are inherently precarious, have begun to spread among highly educated freelancers and professional workers following the organizational transformations of biocognitive capitalism. In both cases, organizational and technological innovation leads to various forms of (self-) exploitation.

The crisis in craft production means not only that the younger generations are no longer committed to the manufacturing sector, but also that the transmission of skills and know-how, and consequently the reproduction of a skilled labour force, is undermined. The cases of the jewellery district in Valenza and the furniture district in Brianza discussed in this volume are emblematic of this, as both regional economies are experiencing a 'generational vacuum'. Since both entrepreneurs and the skilled labour force are ageing, various attempts to revive vocational training and apprenticeship have been made. Yet, the responsiveness of local institutional and private actors has been sporadic and uneven in its effects due to a lack of collective and synergic actions between the local/regional and the national levels. The crisis of apprenticeship also inhibits the potential long-term beneficial effects of subsidies and tax exemptions introduced as incentives to stimulate entrepreneurial activities and start-ups; these merely become palliative measures, given that craft production can hardly survive without the transfer of craftsmanship to the younger generations of workers and artisans. In conclusion, what the ethnographic accounts in this volume have documented is that Italian industrial districts, despite having gained wide currency among scholars who saw them a decisive remedy to the crisis of Fordist mass production, have become themselves a source of instability. As a result of the pressure of recurrent economic crises, they show vulnerabilities and contradictions that we interpret as warning signs of a systemic crisis.

Interpreting the Crisis and Its Effects: Crisis of Presence and 'Horizons of Redemption'

Italian anthropological studies on work and enterprise (c.f. *anthropologie de l'entreprise* in France) have arrived much later than their European counterparts, due to the prevalent folkloric orientation recalled and analysed by Italian studies on the history of anthropology (Fabietti 2001; Signorelli 2011). However, even within the line of folkloristic study, we must remember that there is a tradition of research that has analysed not only the craft trades, but also the objects and artefacts of the popular farming world: this is the perspective of the studies of so-called 'material culture', which constituted a specific feature of Italian folklore compared to other European countries (Cirese 1973). However, this perspective has privileged material work tools, and therefore products, in their material and symbolic functions, rather than the production processes, and is far from being a perspective on the specific dynamics of the work itself. Other studies have focused specifically on farming and artisanal work, examining material, social and symbolic aspects in specific historical-cultural contexts, such as Sardinia (Angioni 1986, 2003) and, in a more dynamic perspective oriented towards processes of transformation, there are those of Papa (1985) on the production of bread and olive oil in the Umbria region.

In Italy at the end of the 1990s, Papa's *Anthropology of the Enterprise* (*Antropologia dell'impresa*, 1999) introduced a different perspective that tried to define, through the criticism but also the synthesis of different international theoretical perspectives, an approach to enterprise as an anthropological object of study. From this viewpoint, the company has been considered above all as a point of intersection of more complex convergent dynamics. This perspective, inspired by authors such as Miller (1997) and Strating (1998) and following their research at the end of the 1990s on the island of Trinidad and on the flower industry in Rijnsburg in the Netherlands respectively, tried to overcome the idea of studying the local variations of a supposed model of global capitalism – fruit, in Papa's view, of an ethnocentric vision of the homogenous spread of Western capitalism.

In recent decades, anthropological research aimed at industrial work has multiplied in Italy, aided by the contribution of foreign scholars in various sectors: crafts and big industry (Blim 1990; Yanagisako 2002; D'Aloisio 2003, 2014, 2017; Ghezzi 2007; Carosso and Ghezzi 2015; India 2017), but also in sectors of Italian labour that expatriate in the new global productive chain (Redini 2008), and also

in relation to the work of migrants, who, conversely, arrive in Italy, placing themselves in various sectors of production of goods and services (Miranda 2008; Ceschi 2007; Ceschi and Giangaspero 2009; Riccio 2007). Italian studies focused on work in extra-national contexts should also be mentioned (Viti 2007; Vignato 2010). In all these studies, from different theoretical perspectives, the outflow from merely local contexts prevails, and so does the search for underlying global logics, with much attention being paid to intersections, syncretisms and global dynamics.

The ethnographies that make up this volume analyse the transformations resulting from the economic crisis, and all transcend local contexts, linking to the global scenarios in which the processes of production and work are inserted, and in which the locally developed strategies make it possible to trace similarities and differences. The transversal and underlying focus, even within the different theoretical perspectives adopted by the authors in different geographical and productive areas, relates to some fundamental points:

- the change in the anthropological meaning of work, that is, the meaning and value that work takes on in the experience and the daily life of the subjects, following the changed conditions of the companies in the global framework; the effects of this change on the tasks, the contents of work, the job role, the status connected to work and the perception/self-representation elaborated by the workers, but also on social contexts, often identified or strongly connoted by local industrial productions (e.g. the so-called gold city of Valenza);
- the conditions of cultural and existential crisis, which result from the economic crisis of 2007/2008; the transformation of work related to its reduction, disappearance or precariousness, which are read from the anthropological point of view using the concept of the 'crisis of presence', elaborated upon by Ernesto de Martino in his research in southern Italy in the 1940s; connected to this, the construction of a possible 'horizon of redemption', a concept also elaborated upon by de Martino, which indicates a strategy for the search for new values capable of overcoming a distressing present and transcending the contingent situation, fiercely maintaining one's own position in history and at the same time prefiguring oneself in future projects. In the case of the economic crisis, the 'crisis of presence' is generated by the weakening or loss of job positions in the face of economic constraints, in the impossibility of main-

taining companies handed down from generation to generation; as a consequence, the 'horizons of redemption' indicate the effort by social actors to find ways out and a new position from which to restore their presence in history;

- subsistence strategies, or strategies that the subjects are able to make use of in order to resist the crisis, both in material and in relational terms, with explicit reference to the notion outlined by Narotzky (1997);
- finally, all the research contained in the volume reiterates the role of ethnographic methodology, particularly to analyse the different configurations that the capitalist model and its transformations take on in local contexts. Ethnography also helps us in capturing minute and daily aspects of the changes induced by the crisis in the lives of the subjects, and the problematic local/global connections, both in the sense of the repercussions of global processes on everyday existence and, in the opposite direction, the elaboration of responses and reactions – that is, as we have said, the activation of possible strategies of resistance, reorganization and overcoming, which brings us back to the problem of the construction of new horizons of redemption.

In relation to the last point in this list, the ethnographic methodology allows us to analyse in depth and bring to light the new meanings of work, which correspond to profound transformations of the living conditions of workers (and also entrepreneurs), of their identity and of the cultural horizons of present and future life. Contemporary ethnography, which is at the centre of a great debate that is beyond the scope of this discussion given here, is increasingly oriented towards multilocated collocations, critical and self-critical positions, and dialogic and self-reflective perspectives, which have moved away from a holistic and objectifying perspective which is by now completely impractical given the fluid and diffused situations of contemporary conditions.⁵

In the chapters presented in this volume, the economic crisis is analysed in its various aspects: the reduction or disappearance of work (Ghezzi and D'Aloisio), the exacerbation towards increasingly oppressive and exhausting working conditions (Bogani) and the loss and transformation of entrepreneurial activities (Fontefrancesco, Blim and Zanotelli). Within the various situations, the discussion can be linked to a common category: a new, general appearance of the

crisis of presence. This conceptual expression was coined by Ernesto de Martino (1948, 1959, 2002; de Martino and Zinn 2005), during his research in southern Italy during the 1950s. It was a historical condition lived and experienced by agricultural workers in southern Italy (which can be extended to the populations of the various 'Souths' of the world studied by ethnologists), who lived on the margins of national socioeconomic development after the Second World War, when modernization entered the Italian peninsula at different speeds and with different results in its various areas. The crisis of presence is conceived by de Martino as a historical condition, which was collective and never individual in its nature, and was generated by the material and psychological misery that narrowed the possibility for people to act on negative events and to maintain their own presence. In this regard, Crapanzano explains: 'The crisis of presence refers to a sense of not being there (*esserci, daisen* in Heidegger's sense), yes, of death but also of loss, loss of subjectivity, vulnerability, alienation, dissociation, being out of control – overwhelmed if you will, to the point of extinction. Individuals in crisis lose their sense of dynamic relationship with the world around them and therefore of themselves and their intentional capacity, with their place in history' (Crapanzano 2005: ix).⁶

The protagonists of the crisis of presence in the studies conducted here are social subjects who have experienced a new condition of precarity and insecurity, which affects work starting with the impossibility of maintaining an occupation and of taking home a steady income; thus, the crisis strikes at the certainty of one's identity throughout, from one's working life to one's larger existence, as well as across generations, through the transmission of entrepreneurial activities and skills from parents to children. This represents a new condition of the impossibility of being in the world and therefore of producing contrasting actions; a new risk of cultural chaos, linked not only to the ongoing economic crisis, but also to the increasingly difficulty of subjects to understand the causes and how to control them.

In the first paragraph of this chapter we discussed the crisis and its consequences in the current neoliberal scenario, but two aspects are worth mentioning again briefly: the increasingly elusive and uncontrollable character of productive and working dynamics in the global scenario, and the breaking of the so-called 'Fordist pact' in terms of its characteristics of protection and labour guarantees. The current phase of the industrial revolution, according to Peter Marsh (2012), leads to shorter production cycles, fragmented and dislocated in various areas of the globe, to supply increasingly narrow and spe-

cialized groups of consumers. In this scenario, it becomes ever more difficult for manufacturing companies to establish not only the different locations where it is most appropriate to produce, but also, as pointed out by other authors, which new indicators will be attractors for businesses locations. This takes place alongside a passage from mere territorial and labour resources to new resources such as new skills, localization of financial companies and spin-offs (Dore 2004; Moretti 2013). In this scenario, the ability to control and even to know one's working destiny is reduced for many categories of workers, while the continuous exposure to contingent and uncontrollable situations makes workers vulnerable to increasing risks and precariousness. On these bases, a condition of the crisis of presence takes root in the fragmentation of work processes at the global level, in their more rapid and intense delocalization and relocation, in the reduction of trade union protections and in the intervention of the state in limiting or mitigating these processes, as some studies on the global dislocation of capital and labour have demonstrated (Harvey and Krohn-Hansen 2018).

This crisis of presence is then articulated in situations such as the inability to assert one's own rights or to establish one's skills, work commitment and hard work; even in the difficulty of keeping a job and in the loss of social capital and skills. Among family businesses, the crisis of presence manifests itself in the loss of the intergenerational transmission of companies, which makes continuation no longer possible in the case of the small craft industries described in the book.

In addition, another factor contributes to determining a widespread crisis of presence in contemporary workers: the end of what the economist Andrea Fumagalli has effectively described as the golden rule of the Fordist social compromise (Fumagalli 2013, 2015; Fumagalli and Morini 2013). In other words, the core of the Fordist era had introduced a new, different view of wages, not as a mere cost to be reduced and therefore to increase profits, but as one of the main components of final consumption demand. The simultaneous growth of profits and wages, typical of the Fordist phase, also represented the substantial regulatory model, so that the permanent employment contract entailed the submission of the worker to the needs of production and technology, but in exchange guaranteed stability, putting an end to the precarity of income which was typical of the pre-Fordist phase. It is not difficult to deduce that, starting from so-called post-Fordism, this mutual link has failed, instead triggering the phase that Fumagalli defines as 'cognitive biocapitalism', connoted by two

main processes. The first is characterized by the fact that the social relationship of capital moves away from the relationship between the labour force and machines to that between mind and body, in which the whole life of individuals, their cognitive-relational capacity, becomes capitalizable. The second process consists of the increasingly mobile and dispersed nature of work, which increases precariousness to the point where it becomes a pervasive and generalized condition of life (Fumagalli 2011). Starting from these characteristics of precariousness, coupled with the increasing absorption of the lifetimes and of the intellectual and relational faculties of workers, we can speak of a crisis of presence, corroborated by the fact that this growing submission of the worker to the new rules of production is no longer accompanied by the certainties of the Fordist era.

As is typical of a crisis of presence, it becomes necessary to search for new horizons of values, designed to outline a possibility of overcoming the criticality of the present and opening up new avenues towards existential redemption. According to de Martino, and as noted by Signorelli, the horizon of redemption is not to be found only in the use of magical-religious rituals, such as among the Australian Aborigines or the agricultural workers of southern Italy: 'at its highest level of abstraction the scheme can be applied to study the dynamics of crisis and redemption in practically any society' (Signorelli 2015: 84). According to Signorelli, although the symbolic universes produced so far have been mostly magical-religious in form, and in any case metahistorical, this does not exclude the notion that in today's societies, which are predominantly secularized, it could be different. The overcoming of negative events and the need to find new cultural instruments to tackle the crisis can be achieved using other means, such as political engagement, economic resources and leisure distractions. According to de Martino, Signorelli remarks, 'the control of the negative is achieved by using even symbolic constructions based, however, on the immanence of values and not on the transcendence of powers' (*ibid.*: 88).⁷

A final reflection regards subsistence strategies, a concept borrowed from Susana Narotzky and identified as a useful category that summarizes and explains the actions and reactions put in place to deal with the crisis at various levels and in different situations by the protagonists of the ethnographies presented here. It is indeed the daily subsistence strategies, alongside and mixed with the search for new points of reference, which seek to reintegrate the presence shaken by the crisis. Narotzky has remarked that the boundary between productive and reproductive work is permeable. As voluntary

organizations or leisure activities contribute to social welfare activities, the category of work must also be extended outside the narrow field of employment (Narotzky 1997). Moreover, 'the "means of livelihood" thesis points out how people manage to get the necessities of life. Formal, market-mediated economic relations such as employment and informal, non-market systems for getting hold of resources are considered on an equal methodological standing' (ibid.: 39), and 'by focusing on how people manage to earn a living, in fact, "production" has become an epiphenomenon of "reproduction" processes ... The "means of livelihoods" framework enriches our understanding of economic processes and focuses on human agents and their everyday social relations in a daily struggle for livelihood' (ibid.: 40).

More recently, with explicit reference to the political-institutional crisis that has accompanied the current economic crisis, Narotzky observes the new moral value of the demands of disadvantaged groups (above all the unemployed), starting from the Spanish case, but usefully applicable in other contexts. In substance, the classic demand by workers for a different economic policy seems to have been replaced by the demand for a new 'moral economy' (e.g. the demand for dignity in the collective Spanish protest movements), which protects citizens from corruption and speculation on a global scale, which in the general public opinion has been responsible for the current situation of increasing precarity and insecurity (Narotzky 2016). Although organized in different forms and still far from reaching a fully organized form, these demands are directed towards a new form of solidarity, in which the author sees new principles of global cohesion and aggregation.

From the perspective traced by Narotzky, it is evident how relationships of kinship, neighbourhood, forms of exchange and solidarity, generational transmissions and also informal relationships with institutions are instruments that act, moment by moment, to tackle, mitigate and manage the crisis. These strategies can reasonably be included in the progressive construction of a 'horizon of redemption', in de Martino's terms, just as the search for a new ethical cohesion and the appeal to dignity would seem to open new possibilities. Therefore, even these could be configured, in the terminology of de Martino used here, as the 'horizon of redemption', which evokes a system of culturally generated values, able to guarantee the possibility of going beyond the threatening condition of the present, and the possibility of transcending a critical phase, of overcoming negativity, of reconstructing a solidity of presence in real life. This means encountering a scenario in which companies, which are increasingly

globalized, distribute their processes in different and distant contexts which increasingly escape the control of national policies, while at the same time becoming more difficult for scholars to analyse. However, this process increasingly conditions the lives of millions of people around the world.

The studies contained in this volume analyse some enterprises and the work processes within them, but also look at local contexts, conflicts and institutional synergies, which are sometimes lacking or absent, and at the social relations that the actors build inside and outside the companies. They also analyse the practices of transformation and adjustment, the systems of relationships and the values (both old and new) put in place by male and female workers, which clash with the economic and organizational transformations located within each context, the effects of which are felt in their daily lives.

The chapter by the economist Andrea Fumagalli in this book serves to add a different perspective beyond the anthropological one to explain the Italian situation, inasmuch as, according to the cases described, Italy seems to have weakened, or reduced, and almost squandered much of its industrial structure (Berta 2001; Bianco 2003; Gallino 2003). Fumagalli traces this balance and indicates the causes, using the skills of an expert on the transformation of contemporary capitalism and precarious work, and with the sensitivity that makes him willing to enter into a dialogue with other social sciences. This chapter therefore represents a useful analysis that summarizes the characteristics of precarious work in contemporary Italy and the lack of economic policies (but not investment, it is worth noting) intended to support businesses, and also clarifies the confusing and perhaps mystifying principle that has represented the flexibility of work as a sort of solution to all current industrial problems. Especially in Italy, this perspective has translated into a further thinning of the propulsive drive of the industrial sector and therefore into a vicious circle that flexibility produces in the overall economic system, reducing skills, technological change and innovation. All these characteristics, in addition to political instability, contributed to the delay with which Italy has faced the crisis. In line with the ethnographic research presented, Fumagalli's analysis also clarifies that behind these difficulties there are more remote issues, systemic aspects of Italian economy, which contribute to explaining why the Italian industrial apparatus has shown itself to be so clearly inadequate in terms of dealing with the current crisis.

In concluding this introduction, the anthropological viewpoint allows us to go deeper and to highlight some problematic aspects: the

disappearance of tasks and competences, the redefinition of roles and new job duties, the breakdown of the generational transmission of knowledge and activities, the narrowing of the material horizons of life, and even more, the restriction of future expectations. Even the cases showing a more dynamic reaction to the crisis raise questions about the future of these areas and of the workers engaged in new tertiary activities. Subsistence strategies include the efforts of technological modernization, extending commercialization and the use of 'traditional' systems, such as parental support, but at the same time they show a distancing from familiar enterprise, encouraged by older generations, that leads towards the advanced tertiary sector described by Fumagalli: this new sector seems to be more dynamic and in greater expansion compared to manufacturing activities, which are now in a state of crisis that seems inexorable. Regarding the construction of horizons of redemption, the issue has become more complicated, more viscous and more uncertain. The protagonists of the ethnographies show the disappearance of values, the shortcomings of institutions, industrial policies and supranational bodies, the weakening of the trade unions and the increasing inaccessibility of the centres of power and decision-making to which they can seek recourse. Furthermore, the sense of work has radically changed, transforming an ethical system of commitment, sacrifice and skill (typical of the artisanal categories described here) into a new tertiary and cognitive form of work, with new and different characteristics.

So where are the horizons of redemption? Colin Crouch (2011) clearly indicates the importance of values and civil society as the only intermediaries against the neoliberal power of a few elitist groups (in his words, the power of the giants). This power has weakened the opposition between the state and the market, and the latter tends to increasingly coincide with companies. In this scenario, Crouch contends, the triangular confrontation between corporations, the state and the market no longer takes the form of a dialectically comparative triad, but leads to an overall loss of democracy that results in greater instability and insecurity: 'One consequence is that democracy is joined by the market as a kind of victim... One might talk of a triangular confrontation among state, market and the corporation, but I prefer "comfortable accommodation"' (Crouch 2011: ix, x). As such, loneliness, uncertainty and poor intervention possibilities often characterize the lives of workers and entrepreneurs.

'Caught in a situation defined by a distant economy power structure and pedagogic political technologies that advocate less social protection for the market's invisible hand, vulnerable people, being

de-unionized and unable to forge a “class in itself” solidarity, become powerless to defend themselves and are unwittingly led to a grey area regarding their work identity and life trajectories’ (Spyridakis 2018: 3). These traits characterize the protagonists of the changes in companies and work, and their attempts to face the crisis, which are analysed in this volume.

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Notes

This introduction is the result of scientific dialogue between the two authors. Specifically, the first and third sections were written by Fulvia D’Aloisio; the second was written by Simone Ghezzi.

1. The data were reported by the daily newspaper *Repubblica – Economia e Finanza*, retrieved 14 February 2020 from www.repubblica.it/economia/2016/09/23/news/investimenti_produzione_industriale_crisi-148365722.
2. This is how the ILO expresses itself in its brief presentation of the results: ‘The report shows that average incomes for workers in non-standard forms of work tend to be lower than is the case with stable jobs. Furthermore, the rise in informal employment, undeclared and temporary work arrangements, as well as involuntary part-time work, has contributed to the widening of income inequalities, which have been recorded in the majority of countries over the past two decades’ (ILO 2015: 5).
3. The seven indicators identified by Standing are: job security (understood as the opportunity to receive adequate income), job safety (i.e. protection against dismissal), safety of the professional role, safety at work (from the risk of accidents or illness), the safety

- of training at work, security of income (as a fixed or adequate income) and finally the security of representation (Standing 2011).
4. According to data provided by the European Commission in 2014, 9.3 per cent of 18–64 year-olds in the EU were living below the relative poverty level in 2012 (up from 8.5 per cent in 2008). The distribution of these employees in EU countries is as follows: about 4 per cent in Finland and Belgium, about 5 per cent in Austria, the Czech Republic and the Netherlands, about 13 per cent in Spain and Italy, 15 per cent in Greece and 19 per cent in Romania (Saraceno 2015: 51). The book *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by America*, by American journalist Barbara Ehrenreich (2001), is a report of the direct experience of exploited workers and low-paid jobs that the author undertook for about two years, providing an acute and detailed account.
 5. After the well-known fracture made by the Santa Fe seminar, only some contributions to the recent debate on ethnography (such as Piasere 2002) are mentioned here: Robben and Sluka 2006; Gallini and Satta 2007; De Lauri and Achilli 2008; Faubion and Marcus 2009; Hannerz 2010; Matera 2015.
 6. We are referring to the introduction by Vincent Crapanzano in the English edition of de Martino's masterpiece *The Land of Remorse*, translated by Dorothy Zinn (2005).
 7. Colin Crouch identifies five types of groups that in civil society are inspired by values able to hypothetically counteract the dominance of the company and the market: first, political parties, then religions, opinion groups (which direct opinion campaigns, not always and not only against large companies), volunteering groups and finally the professions, with their respective professional ethics often opposed to the logic of profit maximization. Organized in a civil society as a whole alternative to the market, the author sees in these groups a useful bulwark that, notwithstanding conflicts of interests, can contribute to act in the interstices of power, mitigating 'the power of the giants' (Crouch 2011: 144–61).

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