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Chapter XX

The Birth of a Power.

Amazon and the relation between Capital and the State

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Abstract

The chapter delves into Amazon's pivotal role among high-tech unicorns like Tencent, Alibaba, Microsoft, Google, Apple, and Meta. Characterized by their trillion-dollar valuation and global reach, these entities redefine capitalism. Amazon's dominance transcends market conquest, monopolizing sectors via specific strategies, leveraging finance, technology, and political power, raising ethical concerns. These unicorns metamorphose into infrastructures shaping material and informational flows, concurrently influencing politics. This analysis contextualizes Amazon within platform capitalism, spotlighting its multidimensional identity as a tech company, service platform, and infrastructure provider. The chapter examines spatial expansion, tax dynamics, lobbying, and Amazon's role in a malleable cloud metropolis. Balancing criticisms of labor conditions, consumerism, and power concentration, the study highlights democratizing potentials of platform capitalism through technology access and enhanced human agency. Amazon's pipelines, while contentious, serve as arenas for transformation, presenting opportunities for alternative power utilization and imaginative interventions.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the Seattle-based company Amazon and its founder Jeff Bezos. There is certainly no shortage of books investigating some of the aspects of this Tech Company. In many cases, however, the focus has been only on certain specific aspects such as the business model, logistics, e-commerce or working conditions in warehouses. From our part, we have registered the need to try to situate Amazon's success and expansion within a more comprehensive reading of contemporary capitalism framing this company as a multifaceted emerging power. The point is not only that Amazon is among the top ten companies in the world (with \$469 billion in sales and \$33 billion in profits in 2021 according to the Fortune 500 list) or that Jeff Bezos is the third richest man in the world (with an estimated wealth of \$133 billion). If, as Jake Wilson and Ellen Reese argue (2020), we live into an Amazon-capitalism, then what are the features of this particular configuration of the capitalist mode of production and what role does Amazon play within it? Our idea is that today Bezos' company not only exemplifies the full range of operations that structure contemporary capitalism, but it also strongly shapes its evolution. Obviously, Amazon is not the only leading economic actor – and more generally all the similar commercial empires that have established themselves at all latitudes in the last decade (from Alibaba in China to MercadoLibre in Latin America). There is a more general 'hegemonic' trend by these actors: an Amazonification of society.

In this chapter, initially we trace the multiplicity of its spatial plans and its geographical articulation. Then, we address its role within the broader contemporary capitalist transformations, and we discuss how it can be framed as a real emerging power by showing its 'infrastructural' character.

The Geographies of Amazon

The pervasiveness of the operations of this Big Tech affects its geographies, both logistical and otherwise, articulated on a global scale. Bezos's company is the undisputed leader of the e-commerce market in the United States, where the multinational's logistics network, consisting of both huge warehouses and delivery mechanisms, extends across all 50 states. In the country, the company has 110 active distribution centres, while worldwide there are 185 warehouses. In addition to its presence in North America, Canada and Mexico, Amazon is also growing in the United Kingdom and has numerous European locations. Turning to Asia, the company has warehouses in China, Japan, India, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, and the United Arab Emirates, with Australia, Brazil and Egypt completing the remaining international destinations. This first glimpse seems to render the idea of Amazon as a global empire, whose operations multiply incessantly, expanding its already blurred boundaries. The company's dominant position is essentially limited to the West, while elsewhere it is challenged by ruthless competition with other e-commerce giants. Resorting to an already sufficiently abused formula, it is therefore necessary to provincialise Amazon (Chakrabarty 2000) by analysing the corporation's actual presence in different contexts.

According to Worldfirst.com "Amazon's global market share (based on gross merchandise volume) was calculated in 2019 at around 13%. Although this figure seems relatively small, it makes the company the third-largest e-commerce retailer in the world. Amazon made significant gains in 2020/21 during the pandemic, and it will enter 2022 in a very strong market position". Amazon's global aspirations, accompanied by major foreign investments as well as attempts to 'e-colonise' Africa and India, are challenged by strong competition, represented by Alibaba (which covers 60% of the e-commerce market in China), MercadoLibre (dominant in Latin America), and other giants such as Flipkart and eBay. With the pandemic acceleration of e-commerce, Amazon has grown exponentially, and the company is expected to operate in 100 countries by the end of 2023, reaching more than 1.2 billion people worldwide. The initial analogy between Amazon and a commercial imperial power thus seems to be apt. Certainly, however, it does not only concern the Seattle giant, which rather resembles a power with hegemonic aspirations and in competition with other commercial

empires, for a market estimated for 2023 to bring global ecommerce sales worldwide to \$6.3 trillion. Amazon thus emerges as a commercial power that is not hegemonic but with global aspirations, proven, moreover, by the articulation (and pervasiveness) of the multinational's extra-logistical network around the world.

However, it would be reductive to compress Amazon's geographies to those of its logistics services. Its IT infrastructure - simultaneously 'material' and 'digital' - constitutes a further layer of spatial planes that intertwine with the former. Amazon Web Services is a cloud computing and cloud storage platform that was founded on 3 March 2006 in Seattle, USA. Across the planet, four companies own the digital infrastructure capable of offering these services: Amazon Web Services (34% of the world market), Microsoft Azure (21%), Google Cloud Platform (11%) and Alibaba (5%). In this context, Amazon Web Services is the largest company in chronological order and the largest cloud ecosystem ever. Its connections span continents all over the planet and its vectors, called zones and regions, have determined the specific typology of all major infrastructures subsequently created by any other competitor, from Microsoft to Google, from Tencent to Akamai and Alibaba, from West to East.

To visualise the phenomenon, let us first try to go beyond Amazon, looking at a service economy that to a large extent relies on the management and storage of data. To put it bluntly, a quintillion byte, 60 per cent of the world's networked data, reside in the cloud, but the articulations of this infrastructure are anything but virtual architectures. Protected by physical systems with up to 7 levels of access and 24/7-armed surveillance, the data of millions of users are processed by powerful servers safeguarded by power subsystems, uninterruptible power supplies, ventilation and cooling systems, fire suppression systems, generators, and external network connections. True, data centres, the vertebrae of contemporary digital infrastructures, differ from each other in their purpose and type, but in a general way they correspond to the physical space of routers, switches, firewalls, storage systems, servers, and application distribution controllers assembled to provide network components, memory (storage) components and processing resources for what travels within them: data.

Today, AWS has 26 active regions, 84 availability zones, 17 local zones, 28 wavelength zones and more than 400 edge locations distributed over every continent on the planet. By 'region' AWS means a cluster of several data centres located no more than 100 km apart from each other. Each region thus consists of several data centres, which are called availability zones. With a network of zones, the company can offer flexibility, security and scalability to customers who want to run applications and databases on cloud computing. Physically spaced but located no more than 100 km apart, the zones allow the partitioning of applications across multiple architectures that in their own way respond to any electrical, geological, and environmental problems that may cause systems to fail. Within the region, each zone has its own power, cooling, and physical security capacity. By offering its customers multiple zones for data processing and storage, such a deployment benefits from a certain fault tolerance, ensuring redundant network architectures with minimal latency, self-sufficient but always connected.

The distribution strategy by concentric circles became from 2006 onwards an example for all major cloud providers to be set up in the future: from Microsoft Azure to Alibaba. To date, it is the most developed certification around data storage and management security, Tier4, that confirms the intuition of Andy Jessy, then C.E.O. of the Amazon cloud giant. The multi-sited geography of AWS data centres derives its strength from the property of scale-invariant networks: deployments whose nodes can grow with the capacity to cope with multiple types of attack, whether due to random events, such as failures, or caused by targeted assaults, such as hacking or strike attempts.

It should also be emphasised that AWS is very active in cooperation with institutions: public resources is a field that globally counts more than 1472 partnerships, from the observation of animal migration routes by means of meteorological data and machine learning to the support of the transition to online learning; from the monitoring of crude oil spills from oil tankers that have broken

down off the ocean coast to the storage of data on the human genome. Shedding light on the spread of AWS in the public sector informs us of the pervasiveness of a private company's operations in the lives of millions. Finally, to visualise the phenomenon plastically, we could take the analysis a little further and consider Amazon's ambition to establish an architecture that can be called, in the words of architect Pier Vittorio Aureli, "absolute" (Aureli 2011). The role of international security certifications such as Tier4 is sufficient to protect IT infrastructures from targeted and random attacks, but it does not address the pervasiveness that these environments possess within today's institutions and societies.

Having dissolved the distinctions between citizen and consumer, person and user, the AWS infrastructure aspires to act as an uninterrupted landscape of connections, archives, and monitoring that between the public and the private sector record, compose and modify the roads on which the challenges of the near future will be played out. Within the global landscape, standing behind the scenes of a series of essential services for the public and private sectors, the role it aims to assume becomes unrecognisably enduring and multiple, colossal, and discreet. From the logistical distribution of consumer goods to the launching of space satellites, from monitoring the ocean depths to storing genomic data, Amazon Web Services is an indispensable lens through which to structure an organic analysis of Amazon, the parent company for which cloud services provide a substantial portion of stock market value. Ultimately, such a look provides insight into some of the ways in which the vertical geography of contemporary capitalism is structured today.

Amazon Capitalism

We tried to sum-up the steps that enabled Amazon to build up its ecosystem composed by both digital tools and physical spaces, global flows and specific markets. This leads us to considering Amazon as a paradigm of contemporary capitalism in a double sense, namely that it exemplifies the different operations of capital (Mezzadra and Neilson 2019) and, at the same time, it influences its evolution. In our view, there are three reasons behind the Amazon paradigm. The first hypothesis is that today some specific actors – the so-called Big Tech or "infrastructure platforms" (Van Dijck, Poell, De Waal 2018) – are the point of synthesis of the different operations of capital. Within what we might loosely and broadly call the 'critical theory' of recent decades, the belief has settled that it is not possible to conceptualise contemporary capitalism in unambiguous terms. A particular definition of post-Fordism, as generic and problematic as it is, which has found from time to time more specific declinations such as cognitive capitalism, knowledge society, post-industrial society, the multiplicity of which is probably symptomatic of the explosion of any claim to *reductio ad unum*, has been flanked by approaches that insist instead on the multiplicity – of forms, spaces, times and subjects – of contemporary processes of valorisation: multiplicity of capitalism (Hall and Soskice 2001), variegated capitalism (Peck and Theodore 2007), the aforementioned operations of capital (Mezzadra and Neilson 2019). The differentiation of capitalist processes is a fact and probably an intrinsic feature of capitalism itself since time immemorial, even if some processes have been concealed over time. Even when speaking of the factory system and its establishment in Western countries during the 19th century, this paradigm included other figures and spaces of labour, often invisibilised: sexualised domestic care work, racialised and slave labour on plantations. The factory, however, acted as the pivot of this paradigm, determining the assemblage of the different subjective and objective stratifications. Is this role played today by another unit of production? Or, rather, are there specific economic actors who have the capacity and power to hold together, manage and expand the different operations of capital? Companies such as Amazon, in fact, hold together logistics and production, data mining and labour exploitation, financial capital and industrial capital, couriers and crowdworkers, warehouses and data centres, and articulate them on different planes, from the metaverse to the outer space via the warehouses of the urban suburbs. This overlapping of levels means that the efficiency of

one of its segments – logistics, for example – is immediately linked to the expansion of other segments – robotics, IT services. Without wishing to suddenly cut out of our analytical horizon other geographies or the diversity of economic actors on the field today, we are however faced with a company that alone articulates the multiplicity of forms of contemporary capitalism. Put another way, Amazon represents a particular viewpoint from where to reflect on the various operations that characterise the capitalist mode of production today because it can act directly on all these levels.

What is more, Amazon's interest lies not only in its ability to synthesise the existing, but also in its constant striving to outline new scenarios for the evolution of production, consumption, and society in general. As Alessandro Delfanti (2021) well illustrates in an article analysing the company's spasmodic production of new patents, Amazon colonises and privatises the future, spends millions of dollars experimenting with technological innovations to beat the competition to the punch and make itself well placed in the market. This weakens the range of possibilities to the point where they overlap with its lines of development, while all that is left for all of us to do is to walk in the groove. From deliveries by drones to automated driving systems, from the artificial intelligence of home assistant devices to the digitalization of agriculture, today large economic players like Amazon are revolutionising our present, not only in material terms but also in terms of our imagination. Big Tech (in particular, in the West, Google, Amazon, Meta, Apple, Microsoft) are moving on the frontier between the existing and the future, the internal and the external, the colonised and the colonisable, the Internet and the Metaverse, the Earth and Space.

From another angle, we can say, as already mentioned, that we are facing an Amazonisation of society, a large-scale transposition of certain processes taking place within this as well as other large technology companies. In this sense, the Covid-19 pandemic has been an important moment of transition: faced with a crisis of human mobility – lockdowns, restrictions on access to public spaces, the endemic malfunctioning of global value chains – there has been an acceleration of digitisation processes that have benefited first and foremost these companies that are the gateway to many digital services. The organisational principles underlying these companies – big data, outsourcing of the workforce, algorithmic management of the production process – have increasingly established themselves as the guidelines for an overall reorganisation of production and distribution processes on a global scale. We may be facing a new moment of transition – brought about by the war in Ukraine and then in Palestine which is contributing to a disarticulation and reorganisation of global value chains, by the run-up in inflation which is eroding real wages and thus consumption, and by the rise in interest rates by central banks with a consequent reduction in the willingness of venture capitalists to invest unrestrainedly in digital technologies – which is also likely to impact digitisation processes. Our hypothesis, however, is that this contraction of the global economy, which is also affecting Big Tech – which in turn has immediately passed on the costs to the workforce by cutting employees – will not so much result in a deceleration of the digitalisation race as in a greater and more ruthless economic selection between structured and unbalanced businesses, which risks leaving only a few economic players in the field who are then able to secure a monopoly of market segments. This monopoly, we hypothesise, will increasingly push States to seek alliances with Big Tech within a more general framework of economic and political competition between 'areas of influence'. It is in this perspective, perhaps, that both the Chip Act and the Reduction of Inflation Act enacted by US President Joe Biden in late 2022 to counter Chinese competition in logistics and technology in favour of American companies can be read.

There is a third element to elevate Amazon from particular to general object of study in contemporary capitalism: its corporate form. Today, we cannot think of it like other companies in purely managerial or organisational terms. Amazon is not just an economic actor: like other Big Tech, it pushes in the direction of monopoly, builds ecosystems, erodes the market itself. What is more, it penetrates social relations, influencing forms and modes of common living, to the point of operating as a veritable governmental device that shapes and directs individual and collective conduct, exercising de facto

what is a political power. How did it achieve and perform this? By means of an enormous and constant accumulation, production and processing of data. This is obviously not the exclusive prerogative of Bezos' company, but in the latter, it finds a subject capable of exercising these prerogatives on a scale unthinkable until a few years ago. This governmental power, in our view, cannot be conceived without reference to a broader transformation of capitalism that looks at other subjects – first and foremost the State – struggling in their ability to manage the relationship between population, resources and social reproduction. Faced with a progressive erosion of public welfare, for example, today private entities such as Amazon increasingly guarantee their employees – and only them – access to health and care services. In 2022 in the United States a great debate was generated around the Supreme Court's decision to overturn the *Roe vs. Wade* ruling denying abortion the status of a Federal Right. Well, on that occasion, Amazon itself offered to cover the costs of travel for its employees to go for abortions in States where it is still legal to do so. If we do not also consider these constituent and governmental aspects of the Amazon paradigm, we risk failing to understand its operations, particularly those affecting subjection and consent to the company's disciplinary power.

These three characteristics – the ability to synthesise different operations of capital, the construction of imaginaries and the governmental power – are rooted in the materiality of the subject Amazon, which can be described as both a tech company (a company that produces digital technologies) and as a platform of services (logistical and web) or an infrastructure (material and digital). This assemblage of factors – logistical rationality, technological innovation, and digital services – allows Amazon and a few other companies to play a decisive role today in the expansion of contemporary capitalism to the point of directing its development.

The Historical Relationship between State and Capital: A Marxian Perspective

In 2012, Charles S. Maier published a text significantly titled *Leviathan 2.0*. In the last section of the last chapter titled *Towards a Leviathan 3.0?*, Maier discussed the push since the 1980s in the direction of less and less State interventionism in favour of other governance actors (he was not necessarily talking about economic actors) and highlighted the possibility of newly rising entities such as Google playing “a larger public role” (2018, p. 305). This perspective, written only ten years ago, needs updating. Today, not only we live in a world built on unprecedented heterogeneous geographies, i.e. where the relationship between State and territory is no longer unambiguous but striated by a multiplicity of new spatial forms (from new logistical spaces to special economic zones). In the current “platform society” (Van Dijck, Poell, De Waal 2018; Srnicek 2016), even actors from the digital arena such as Amazon are gaining increasing power sometimes in direct competition or opposition with that of the State itself. Although – at least formally – sovereignty remains in the hands of the State (indeed, in its many variants), the political role of these actors has increased strongly in recent years. At all latitudes, State structures have had to reckon with the emergence of platforms as new agents of contemporary governance. And it is not a matter, as Benjamin Bratton writes, of joining those who believe in “another prophecy about the end of the State [...], but, on the contrary, that the redevelopment of the State takes place in relation to the new network geographies that can neither contain nor be contained by it” (Bratton 2015: 114). In short, the State certainly does not disappear, but de-structures and then recomposes itself, hybridising with capital itself.

It is worth emphasising that the State has certainly never appeared as a monolithic subject, but rather as a complex and stratified forms of power where there has never been a lack of conflicting parties. Nor can it be considered as a unitary model: the already recalled “provincialisation of Europe” and its outlook proposed twenty years ago by Dipesh Chakrabarty should also involve our interpretation of the State, whose vision should at least be extended on a planetary scale and grasped in the multiplicity of State forms that colour the global landscape (Gherardi and Ricciardi 2009). Finally, within the variegated world of platforms, even Amazon has quite peculiar characteristics that cannot necessarily

be translated into a general paradigm, although here it seems more useful to focus on the contiguities rather than the differences between these types of companies. Notwithstanding these three clarifications, it seems to us that the basic assumption that we want to demonstrate in this chapter retains all its value: today Amazon plays a fully political role and contributes to constructing new forms of governance within the framework of the “fragmented sovereignty” (or “graduated sovereignty” to recall a text by Aihwa Ong 2000) characteristic of today’s world.

Of course, we recognise that all this is nothing completely unprecedented. In fact, if we look closely, the political role of large Amazon-like multinational corporations underpins the history of capitalism. As it is well known, it was since the early modern age that the sovereignty of the State began to be questioned. Limiting ourselves to European soil, a multiplicity of philosophers (from Bodin, to Hobbes and Weber) focused on the action of governing, helping to build the image of the individual sovereign over a given territory. On closer inspection, however, examples of ante litteram fragmented sovereignty can already be discerned in the XVII and XVIII centuries, where the large mercantile companies were involved in governing the territory. In essence, just as is the case today with, for instance, Big Tech (Amazon, but also Google, Meta, Microsoft and Apple), it is to be considered completely wrong to understand the State as “the sole and sometimes the only indicator of order in modern society” (Ricciardi 2013: 82).

From a historical perspective, the role played by Big Tech today is not, as mentioned, unprecedented. The Company-States were already performing governmental functions over immense portions of territory around the globe in the mid-1700s. In a recent text, two international relations’ theorists – Andrew Philipps and J.C. Scharman (2020) – show in full detail how companies such as the English or Dutch East India Company (EIC), or the Hudson Bay Company (HBC) in Canada, were characterised by “extensive sovereign prerogatives, formidable armies and fleets, and de facto independence” (2020: 1). They were in essence hybrid agents, institutions of European “expansionism and imperialism” that played a crucial role “in the construction of the first international society” (16). Emerging from the “mosaic that characterised the sovereignty of medieval Europe” (22), where power was shared with actors such as the church, universities, cities, merchant guilds, etc., between the 17th and 19th centuries the Company-States acted as real sovereign agents. Emblematic in this respect are precisely the cases of the British EIC or the HBC which, at a certain point in its history, “was formally sovereign of territories covering about 10 per cent of the earth’s surface” (18). We can then state, firstly, how the international system was not constructed through the spread of sovereign States, but rather by mercantile (and logistical) companies to which real governmental functions corresponded. Secondly, these capitalist companies emerged as actors in direct competition with the State for the sovereignty of some territories.

Along these lines, Philipps and Scharman indeed point out how in the centuries between the 17th and 19th, and regarding empires, it makes little sense to consider sovereignty in terms of internal and external sides. Recalling the historian of international relations John Gerard Ruggie, they prefer rather to speak of “heteronomy”, understood precisely as “a mosaic of incomplete and overlapping governmental rights” (Philipps and Sharman 2015: 439). Through the notion of heteronomy, they effectively capture the multiple forms of sovereignty that characterised the modern age. And indeed, if not of heteronym, other historians of the Chartered Companies have spoken of a “nebula of power” in reference to the Portuguese companies that shared sovereignty of overseas territories with Lisbon, or precisely of “Company-State” in reference to realities such as those of the Dutch and British India companies or the HBC (Bethencourt 2011; Stern 2014).

Although not unprecedented, we therefore welcome the interpretive tool that Philipps and Scharman offer us. At the same time, however, we keen to contest another significant statement that to some extent reveals the limitations of their approach. Looking at the present, the authors state: “We live today in an unusually homogeneous era” (Philipps and Scharman 2015: 437). In this sense, contrary to

appearances, large multinational companies such as Amazon play an even greater role in some ways than they once did:

“the activities of corporations,” as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri wrote twenty years ago, “are no longer characterised by the imposition of abstract command, the organisation of robbery and unequal exchange. Now, they directly structure and articulate territories and populations. They tend to relegate the function of nation-states to that of mere instruments for recording the flows of goods, currencies and populations that they set in motion” (2001, p. 46).

For the analysis of this perspective, Marxian theory is actually of particular interest. Or at least part of it. Indeed, although a significant section of this theory accepts the distinction between the sovereign (transcendent) political dimension and the economic dimension of capital (immanent), another part problematises this relationship by pointing out, on the one hand, the pressures of capital on politics; on the other hand, it considers it a relationship that responds to both a mutual interest and a direct political role of capital itself.

We may refer to three texts to mark the horizon of the discussion. The first is *Empire*, the book by Hardt and Negri that came out on the threshold of the “digital revolution”. Although they emphasise (echoing Marx and Engels) how the State has always represented “the executive committee that administers [...] the collective interests of capital” (285), in the book much space is reserved for how ‘giants rule the earth’. Multinational corporations and global networks of production – according to Hardt and Negri – have “decisively downsized the powers of the nation-state, even if in reality state functions have not disappeared, but have been relocated to other levels and in other spheres” (288). Rather than the crisis of the State, they argue, we are therefore witnessing its ‘deconstruction’ and the crisis of the ‘autonomy of the political’: “it is not so much politics that disappears, but rather any notion of its autonomy” (288). By hybridising with capital in the different levels of the pyramid that makes up the (precisely hybrid) “global constitution”, State politics maintains a central role and yet acts “in collaboration with other powers” (290).

The second text that we think it is important to mention also focuses on the disappearance of the autonomy of politics to talk about the State, but, placing itself a few years later than the first, it reserves its attention more specifically to digital networks. Rejecting “a purely technological reading of the technical capabilities entailed by digitalisation” (417) Saskia Sassen, in her 2006 book *Territory, Authority, Rights*, addresses both the relationship between the territorialised State (so to speak) and the “circumvention” of governmental control guaranteed by the network, and the relationship between State authority and the global capital market. The “downsizing [...] of the old hierarchies of scale” (438), according to Sassen reduces the “strategic importance” of the State in favour of other actors such as the global city, global markets or “university finance” (derivatives, subprime etc.). Moreover, by using the concept of the “assemblage” and “de-assemblage” of territories, authorities and rights, Sassen focuses on the continuities and discontinuities that have gone through the world from the 1980s to the early 2000s, when public, private or hybrid “evidently global entities” (not only multinationals in the generic sense, but also cities, the internet, etc.) have taken over the scene, imposing and negotiating a new agenda on the State actor.

In dialogue with these two texts and driven by the need to “continue the analysis and bring it up to date”, in Mezzadra and Neilson’s book the comparison with Big Tech, “Platform Capitalism” and the role played by Amazon is central. Their perspective starts from an assumption: for several reasons “the state is not powerful enough to confront contemporary capitalism” (21). First, private companies increasingly “negotiate public policies” or “dictate the terms within which states act” (Mezzadra and Neilson 2020: 79). Amazon’s influence on national labour laws is just one of the possible examples in

this regard. The second reason highlighted by Mezzadra and Neilson refers to the variable geographies that undermine the “territoriality typical of the modern state” (Ibid.). This aspect is particularly relevant both considering the complexification of geography in the global present and because dimensions such as the digital affect the very concept of territoriality. From this perspective, it is sufficient to take a clear example from Bratton’s book:

“What if a piece of data is originated in Beijing by a Japanese citizen, uploaded to a Russian server opposite Vladivostok in international waters, and finally used by a minor in a Las Vegas internet café to commit a crime in Brazil? Do the privacy and data prosecution and liability laws of a single country have clear tools to govern this?” (2015: 114).

The third element concerns the crisis of the idea of nationhood. Again, referring to the “transformation of the composition of the ‘people’” (79), Mezzadra and Neilson refer to “migratory movements”, the sharpening of “social polarisation” and not least the “communication technologies” among which platforms play a decisive role. Finally, the fourth reason relates to the ‘waste’ of the institutional unity of the State. For the two authors, this is a particularly important point, which is matched by another substantial assumption: “the state is not the only seat of politics” (305). Other components by their actions undermine the power of the State, and in this sense, it seems to us useful to the economy of the chapter to recall at least two of them mentioned again by Mezzadra and Neilson.

The first is finance: it should be noted how “markets and financial institutions transform and limit the powers of the state” (302). The second is platforms, and in particular so-called “infrastructure platforms” such as Amazon (Van Dijck, Poell, De Waal 2018). In Mezzadra and Neilson’s interpretation, with the automatic decisions made by the software or algorithms that constitute them, they interfere

“with the organisation of society, the production of societies and even the production of decisions that have direct public consequences [...]. It is not simply a matter of overcoming politics through economics [...]. Rather”, the authors conclude, “the challenge is to radically rethink both politics and economics under conditions in which the boundary between the two spheres has been continually tested and violated” (Mezzadra and Neilson 2020: 30-131).

In short, Marxian literature has for many years been questioning the relationship between State and Capital and the interference and intrusions of the latter in areas generally recognised as exclusive to the former. With a tendency that found considerable acceleration in the 1970s, first the large multinational corporations and then the new subjects coming from the digital world such as Amazon, explicitly began to dictate certain policies to the Leviathans themselves.

Conclusion: Amazon as a Power

Amazon, and more generally all the high-tech companies such as Tencent and Alibaba (China), Microsoft, Google, Apple or Meta (USA), Mecadolibre (Latin America), etc., are unicorns, companies that started out as start-up and came to be worth trillions of dollars, structuring themselves as business empires with global ambitions. Amazon, in particular, is characterised not by its striving to conquer

the market, but by making itself “the market”, monopolising one or more crucial areas by resorting to specific development policies and basing its success on an unscrupulous assemblage of financial investments, the use of new technologies (algorithms, automation, digitalisation, etc.), original ways of organising the workforce, and the ability to use State political power to its own advantage (especially in evading taxation).

Amazon and the Big Tech are thus emblematic actors of contemporary capitalism, and act as *de facto* political subjects, as powers, in a double sense. On the one hand, they define themselves as infrastructures, exercising material power to direct the societal flows of goods, information, knowledge, and capital. On the other, they act as real political actors in overlapping/competing/substituting prerogatives that previously belonged to the ‘public’. Moreover, Amazon-capitalism on the one hand echoes certain historical characteristics, represented by ante litteram multinational corporations such as the East India Company and the large commercial enterprises up to the monopolies of the early 20th century – those of a capitalism driven by the excessive power of private actors. On the other hand, the current model is defined by a variety of discontinuities that should not be underestimated, with respect, for example, to the penetration into daily life on which their operations are based, the spatio-temporal extension in which they operate, and the level of technology they agitate.

Investigating Amazon is thus an exercise that sheds light on the *modus operandi* of some of the most incisive forms of contemporary power, with respect to its ability to synthesise different operations of capital, the construction of imaginaries and the governmental authority it wields. This exploration also shows the multifaceted nature of these actors, which can be described as tech companies (a company that produces digital technologies), as service platforms (logistics and web) or as infrastructures (material and IT). Amazon assembles several factors: logistical rationality, technological innovation, and digital services. This allows it, along with a few other companies, to play a decisive role in the expansion of contemporary capitalism to the point of directing its development. It is no coincidence that the company founded by Jeff Bezos is one of the standard-bearers of the new course of digital and green capitalism – the green digital capitalism that expresses both a new discursive formation and a new socio-material structure characterising the current configuration of development. For Amazon, in fact, ‘sustainability’ is a major market opportunity, and the company itself declares that the environmental crisis represents an opportunity to promote economic growth as a solution to ecological destabilisation.

Amazon-capitalism should also be grasped in its capacity to open new frontiers of accumulation, which also means the creation of new spatialities. Indeed, in this chapter we have listed the thousand levels of which companies like Amazon are constituted, continually multiplying the layers on which they act. A stack of intertwined spatialities that moves from the new space race to the digital metaverse, from the trans-oceanic and trans-continental corridors of the mobility of goods to the infrastructures of last mile logistics, in a space-time vortex in which the boundaries between what was considered material and what was thought immaterial are blurred, hybridised, mixed up, to the point of rendering obsolete the material/immaterial dichotomy and to strain the capacity of imagination to grasp the complexity of these new articulations.

On the other hand, Amazon is building a cloud metropolis, a planetary metropolis that operates in the contemporary augmented territoriality as if it were freely malleable, manipulable, reprogrammable at will, surfing the unevenness of tax exemption proposals between States, pitting local administrations against each other to secure greater benefits, engaging in intense lobbying and propaganda, exploiting its global economic power against local actors. Territories tend to become immense logistical hubs towards a machinised urban future that gives a glimpse of the imaginary that Amazon aims to create: a world of its own, a totality in which (beyond corporate propaganda) the aim is not full automation,

but rather the fusion of technology with human labour. A workforce transformed into industrial robots that makes the cyborg an everyday reality of the working world.

This brings in the perspective on which we want to close our argumentation. Indeed, we think that research on Amazon should investigate the ambivalences of this model. In addition to the disturbing features of the becoming-cyborg of labour-power, we should not forget how the cyborg can also be a liberogenic dimension, as Donna Haraway imagined decades ago. More generally, a critique of the Amazon model that is limited to the (albeit just and necessary) report of working conditions in the company, hyper-consumerism, ecological impact, tax avoidance, and the concentration of power and wealth, risks losing sight of some potential for other purposefulness. Amazon, and more generally the current platform capitalism, for instance, operates a radical simplification of the socio-technical universe, which while on the one hand tends to impoverish the human experience on the other hand democratises the possibility of access to new technologies. The automated circulation of information, the basic *modus operandi* of platforms, the use of enhancing information would have said Romano Alquati, has a fundamental difference from the past: the surveillance and operationalisation of information allows the incorporation of fixed capital into everyday life in an environmental and widespread manner. However, this issue should not only be seen in terms of the discipline on the bodies it produces, but also on the side of the ambivalent extension of the action of the bodies themselves, which increases human agency with potential for transformation in unpredictable directions. The pipelines of which Amazon is composed are in other words possible fields of contention and terrains of struggle and transformation, spaces in which counter-logistics, strikes, struggles, but also scenarios of counter-use of its power circulate or can circulate.

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