

*A politics of the present:  
Negri's contribution to the critique of power\**

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**Introduction**

Antonio Negri's work has deep affinities with the theoretical revolutions in French thought in the 1960s and 1970s, the Spinozian and Nietzschean revivals, whilst avoiding the tendencies to absolute epistemological scepticism and political defeat, so characteristic of the New Philosophies. Biopower and Postfordism, as expressions of current political and economic developments, are the main objects of Negri's analysis; the body of concepts that are adequate to these objects are those of aleatory materialism, expressions of a different re-orientated content that have exploded their dialectical representations. That this content is that of the materiality of power is something we would like to demonstrate here.

One of Negri's strengths lies in his focus on the social form and relations of production whilst at the same time registering alternative modes of perceiving these relations as an attempt to break out of Hegelian and humanist Marxism. The immanent ontology of power is not derived from an analytically prior philosophical investigation but is the result of the deconstruction and reconstruction of concepts in view of finding those that adequately express the material relations of power that are the substance of society, as well as creating those that can operate within material practices of its subversion. Negri's contribution as a whole is a philosophical detour from this hierarchy, and an alternative designation that passes through the metaphysics of Spinoza, the philosophies of Nietzsche and Deleuze and engages in a continuous critical dialogue with the massive insights of Marx's analysis of capital, the preferred frame of reference of which is the Marx of the *Grundrisse*. This Marx is that of the tendency of the changing processes of relation between capital and labor, conceived as the struggle over social power and the law of value.

Despite his critique of Leninism, Negri's politics and theory attempt to evaluate political strategy in any given situation and are always a matter of intervention in the here **and now**.

Negri theorizes power from 'below' the guiding principle in much of his writings is the insistence on the role of constituent power in any politics of the prevailing social mode of production. His politics is always attuned to understanding the shifts in established power as the result of the creative, generative and constitutive power of people themselves.

Our argument states that the idea of power and its theorization is 'of the present' in that it is always a historical reality;<sup>1</sup> but also that the conflict in power relations and struggles ought to be treated immanently, as a matter of the here and now. This 'Umwelt of antagonism' opposes to the ideology of eternal returns and the antinomy of the synchronic of life and the diachronic of history, the ideas of dislocation and innovation (Negri, 2003). Power as authority (*potestas*) - even if bolstered by the tradition of thousands of generations - is only power because it is effected in the present.

### Total subsumption

One of the critical foundations of Negri's research is total subsumption, a development on Marx's discussion of formal and real subsumption (Marx, 1992, p. 1019-1038). Total subsumption is crucial to Negri's argument because it combines both of these approaches: that of a genealogy of the present and an ontology of immanent materialism.<sup>2</sup> Even though we recognize many similarities to other theories of the postmodern, whose deconstructive practice is itself paradoxically premised on the assumption of a meta change in the social, we argue that Negri's approach is radically different from these, since 'change' is understood through the analysis of the processes that preceded and produced it. Rather than theorizing technological developments and innovations as themselves causes of change, the central dynamic within society - the red thread of Negri's analysis - is understood as the developing contradiction and

<sup>1</sup> *The philosophers of the postmodern who assume communication as the exclusive limit of being declare the reality of communality. However, it is difficult to take their assertion positively. Their presupposition is really just an accomplished teleology - and that is all. Their research comes to a halt at the actual threshold of being, and they go no further. From this they derive the exhaustion of the ontological sphere, the end of history, an omnivorous tautology of demonstration. If communality yields to these conditions, it presents itself as the end of communality.* Negri, A. (2003).

<sup>2</sup> *The common name of historical praxis can only be a 'genealogy of the present', i.e. an imagination that brings to being what has been in the past, in the same way as it constitutes what is to come. The past is not interpreted but experimented.* Negri, A. (2000), p 43.

contestation between the creative activity and strength of people and the responsive mechanisms of regulation that feed off and limit its power (*potentia*). In contradistinction to the technologist or culturalist versions of the paradigm shift that tend to depoliticized the social, Negri's analysis cognizes it through first principles as political.

Total subsumption as the absolute domination of capital coincides with the interiorization of the outside. With nothing outside of capital left for it to colonize, exploitation and capital's expansion must assume a new intensive form. The import of total subsumption is really the end of an imaginary dialectic between inside and outside. For Negri and others who similarly understand modernity as a finished project, nature and extra-social elements are no longer:

*'seen as original and independent of the artifice of the civil order. In a postmodern world, all phenomena and forces are artificial, or, as some might say, part of history. The modern dialectic of inside and outside has been replaced by a play of degrees and intensities, of hybridity and artificiality'* (Hardt & Negri, 2001, p. 187).

The reality of this dialectical impasse is profound in that it provokes a radical reordering of our understanding of power. We will first look abstractly at this, and then consider the historical application of this idea before going on to place the critique of power in its immanent context.

### The Red Thread

It is ironic that, although Marx's *Das Kapital* was an argument against the objectification of capital as a thing and the positive attempt to deconstruct this appearance in order to demonstrate its reality as a relation between people, in the prevailing consciousness of the left the idea of capital has suffered an ideological objectification. Not only does capital appears as a separate and alien power, it is also theorized as such and, in some Marxisms, has itself replaced class as an expressive totality, resulting in the impossibility of cognizing power outside of adopting its perspective. In today's times, capital is seen as so powerful and complete that even the state is impotent to challenge it. It has been argued that Jameson's idea of postmodernism affects exactly this type of totalization (Kaplan, 1988). For Warren Montag, in Jameson there is no space for where opposition to capital might generate and the culturalist work of

Jameson is compared to the Beautiful soul in Hegel that withdraws from the world to preserve its perfect difference and sanctity (Hegel, 1977, p. 400).

Maybe the staid argumentation of *Das Kapital* - its stricture in the form of the Hegelian *darstellung* - to some extent furnishes support to these perceptions.<sup>3</sup> *Das Kapital* charts the development of capital emerging from within itself, as its own object.<sup>4</sup> Indeed in its structuralist rendering both capitalists and workers are respectively the 'functionaries' or 'bearers' of capital's relations - there is a lot of evidence in the later Marx to support this reading. The dialectics of contestation, struggle, limitation and overcoming with which the *Grundrisse* is replete, appear in the three volumes of *Das Kapital* with an apparently stultifying objectivism. Hence, Negri is intoxicated with the *Grundrisse*. It makes stand out 'the primary practical antagonism within whatever categorical foundation'.<sup>5</sup> Though singing a familiar tune (Cleaver, 2000 and Lebowitz, 1992) for Negri, *Das Kapital* represents the attempt to elucidate the system from above, from the perspective of capital itself. Counterpoised to this is a political insistence on the necessity of a view from 'below' (Negri, 1996 and 1996a). There is no question about where Negri stands with respect to orthodox schools of Marxist thought, although at times there are similar concerns. He is concerned with the social form of value and the form of labor that creates it. Yet far from fixing the value form to an essence of capital, Negri constantly tries to identify where and why the law of value is in crisis, and the movements within the relations themselves that determine new configurations of labor. The object of Negri's Marxism has not been to hypostasize

<sup>3</sup> We by no means seek to detach Marx from Hegel in the manner of Althusser or follow the post-Keynesian ridicule of all that 'Hegelian stuff and nonsense' offered by the likes of Joan Robinson. Marx's debt to Hegel is there for all willing to see it. Negri's point here is more that the Hegelian frame of presentation adopted by Marx in the writing of capital from a synchronic point of view limits our capacity to cognise the motor of class struggle in the formation of capitalist relations.

<sup>4</sup> There is ample evidence that Marx was never sure from what perspective to elucidate his views on the capital relation (see Arthur's 'Against the logical historical method; dialectical derivation versus linear logic', in Mosley & Campbell (eds) (1997). The vacillation between highly charged political passages and the objectively scientific parts can only in part be attributed to the dialectics of the content itself. For all the subsequent attempts to rationalise Marx's procedure - be it Hegelian or structuralist, diachronic or synchronic - it is necessary to point out that even for Marx there was no single way of arriving at the nature of capital, as much as for Hegel the development of the absolute could have taken a different route. Thus so much of Marxism and marxology has preoccupied itself with the attempt to derive from a proper notion of method, the correct political line. In our understanding of power and the critique of its mechanisms today, these debates only take us so far. Negri's intervention *Marx beyond Marx* in its own way has done much to explode the prejudices attached to *Das Kapital* and reintroduce into the field of inquiry the radically subversive and immanent dimension to Marx's own thought, where the project of deconstruction of the bourgeois categories of value is intertwined with the cognition of the social processes that were reconstructing an alternative society: the real social processes that were affecting a crisis in the law of value.

<sup>5</sup> 'I do not need to plunge into Hegelianism in order to discover the double face of the commodity, of value; money has only one face, that of the boss.' Negri (1991), p. 23.

the law of value but to continuously deconstruct it, both in theory and practice.<sup>6</sup>

For a number of postmodernists, this deconstruction has produced or aided a move away from the consideration of economic conflict over social power. Yet for Negri it is the reverse, because the law of value is the site of conflict, wherein capital, through measure, attempts to reduce human beings to homogeneous simple labor.

This focus on labor and sensitivity to its changing forms mean that Negri's politics do not find themselves in the peculiar position of looking outside of the capital relation for the subject that will transcend it. The view from above, whether the economic objectivism or the idea of total commodification in the Frankfurt School, has the tendency to cancel out subjectivity from within the capital relation. That Marx himself made this mistake in *Das Kapital* - to the point that Negri can argue that Marx's theory of value was really a theory of the measure of value - has lead Lebowitz and others to accuse Marx of an unhealthy collusion with the bourgeois categories of political economy.<sup>7</sup> That both modernists and postmodernists draw apocalyptic conclusions from the reality of total subsumption makes Negri's reconsideration of production all the more welcome. Undeniably capital has power, but the substance of its power is never anything but the productive power of people.

For Negri the basis of the relentless expansion of capital since the 1960s is the conflict internal to capital itself, because the need of capital to colonize the

<sup>6</sup> 'The theory of value as a theory of categorical synthesis is a legacy of the classics and of the bourgeois mystifications which we can easily do without in order to enter the field of revolution'. Negri (1991), p. 23.

<sup>7</sup> '[Marx's] theory of value is really a theory of the measure of value.' Hardt & Negri (2001), p. 355. We do not fully agree with this point of view, because we take seriously the idea that Marx used measure in a way similar to Hegel's in the Shorter Logic. In *Theories of surplus value*, Marx treats the theory of value not as an external pre-established criterion of measure, but as the immanent standard and substance of value. In the Hegelian dialectic measure is understood as qualitative quantum. In measure Hegel finds an identity between quantity and quality. Something 'lurks behind' quantitative changes which makes measure an antinomy. The example Hegel uses in the Shorter Logic is the ancient Greek problem of whether the addition of a single grain makes a heap of wheat. At what point does a quantitative change equal a qualitative change? There is for Hegel a necessary qualitative aspect to measure which has ontological relevance. In ratios, which are relative kinds of measure (quantitative ratios), 'quantity seemed an external character not identical with Being, to which it is quite immaterial. The contradiction of quantity then, is that it is an 'alterable, which in spite of alterations still remains the same'. The resolution of this contradiction is not just to return to quality as if that were the true and quantity the false notion', but 'an advance to the unitary truth of both, to qualitative quantity, or measure.' For Hegel measure is implicitly essence. See Hegel's *Encyclopaedia Logic* §105-111 (end of the first subdivision of Logic). If Marx was using this notion then Negri's charge does not fully hold because measure is but a stage in developing the substance of value. Yet Negri is correct to characterise Marx's method as modernist in this sense.

outside is due to the resistance inside the capital relation to its attempts to reduce the value of labor.<sup>8</sup> We could say that 'Empire', as a world historical actuality, arises when the consequent drive of capitalist social power to colonize the outside is complete. This tendency is given by contradictory elements within the capital relation: the overproduction/under-consumption problem, namely the tension in capital wherein the need to de-valorize labor power reduces the market for its products amongst those consumers internal to its relation (i.e. wage laborers). This is not a new problem, in many ways the whole discourse of postmodern Marxism hangs on this question. However, what makes Negri's argument stand out is its capacity to treat total subsumption politically without having to abandon politics. For many, the totalization of capital relations entails either an abandonment of anti-capitalist politics in the face of their perceived impotence and futility, or the celebration of this or that conciliatory political project, often consisting in the reinvention of a public sphere or the power of consumer choice. For Negri, on the contrary, totalization of capitalism makes communism an immanent historical possibility.<sup>9</sup> How can this be so?

The answer lies in the fact that capital does not expand in spite of class struggle but as a direct consequence of it. For Negri, each development in capital's re-structuration is a consequence of its need to contain class struggle. Capital's laws are always in crisis, because in essence they rely on an imposition of social power upon subjects whose needs and desires always expose work, power and command as exterior limitation and exceed them. Capital does not reign supreme over labor as a transcendental force but is in a continuous battle within society to allow for its valorization, to stem the crisis of the law of value. Total subsumption is not a defeat for the working class but signals a new form of class composition. Interiority does not equal defeat but a change in the site of struggle (Negri, 1988, p. 209).

Shifts in capitalist form of production (and, as we shall see, in the political form of the state) in turn are premised upon the struggle with the working class; the drive to exploitation and technical development aim to negate both

<sup>8</sup> 'Capital itself is the moving contradiction, (in) that it presses to reduce labor time to a minimum while it posits labor time, on the other side, as sole measure and source of wealth. Hence it diminishes labor time in the necessary form so as to increase it in the superfluous form; hence posits the superfluous in growing measure as a condition - question of life or death - for the necessary.' Marx (1973), p. 207.

<sup>9</sup> 'The current stage of the development of class struggle (of the social worker in the real subsumption), new technical conditions of proletarian independence are determined within the material passages of the development, and therefore, for the first time, there is the possibility of a rupture in the restructuration which is not recuperable and which is independent of the maturation of class consciousness.' Negri (1996), p. 165.

the subversive power of workers and the struggle over wages, as well as the ideological conflict. This complex is termed the couplet 'workers struggle /capitalist development' and was the theoretical product of, amongst others, Mario Tronti and the Regulation School (Negri, 1996a, p. 178). But how can productive primacy be conferred upon a repressed and estranged subjectivity? The simple answer is that productive activity, activity that produces a surplus, is the basis of all civilized human life. Capital is dependent upon this expenditure of energy and through the disciplinary factory form had previously attempted to channel this power into its own quest for valorization. Therefore, rather than seeing capital as the primary force from which labor forms in defensive opposition a political form that is in turn repressed by capitalists' social power, productive subjectivity can be seen as primary and that which capital is dependent upon. The innovation of the exploiter class of authority and regulation is secondary and produces effects that in turn determine the form of class subjectivity.<sup>10</sup>

By insisting upon this, the Negrian view can be placed in contradistinction to the whole host of positions which we see as wrongly adopting the 'perspective' of capital in the vacuum of epistemological perspectivism (the expressive totality) left by the decomposition of humanist Marxism and the deconstruction of standpoint theory.<sup>11</sup>

Since Negri's first writings, the dialectic that places ontological primacy on the productive, laboring, desiring, self generating but relational subject is the challenge or alternative to modernity: this is 'materialism' (Hardt & Negri, 1994, p. 20). Ever positioned in the view from below, and true to his own prescriptions of viewing the political nexus of productive subjectivity, Negri's work from the 1960s to today charts the unknown, lambasted and denied waters of this subversive power of materialism.

<sup>10</sup> We could suggest that Chris Arthur in describing capital as the negation of its negation, or 'labor as not-value', fixes the priority of capital in this way. See his *Marx, orthodoxy, labor, value*. PSAMSG, 1999, Sussex.

<sup>11</sup> The rendering absolute of capital's power is only an affect of the temporary defeat of the struggle against it: *'From Robespierre to Stalin, from the revolts of the 1920s to those of the 1970s we have often witnessed the desire for transformation end up in terrorism. Victorious or vanquished, conducted by the state or small groups, it really makes no difference - in every case it signals the blockage of revolutionary action and it is always in the figure of a retreat, perhaps a resentment, the symptom of a defeat, the desperate resistance against an adversary that is felt to be stronger. We do not want any of this. Consequently social democracy is posed as a means of avoiding this tragedy. But we do not want this either. In effect we think these defeats were no inevitable and we will try again. Our task then is to recognise defeat and not be defeated.'* Negri (1996a), p. 172.

Three main periods of capitalist restructure and class re-composition are outlined below. Perhaps the most familiar is the period of the mass worker, which coincides with the Fordist regime, preceded by the professional worker/artisan and superseded by Postfordism which tries to find its political resolution in 'Empire'. Most of Marx's analysis of labor and capital corresponds to the period of the emergence of the mass worker.<sup>12</sup> The struggles that unfold during this period cause the emergence of the figure of the 'social worker' and amounts to the deconstruction of the category of the 'mass worker', both theoretically and within the social field so to speak. The generation in power today emerged at this juncture; it is the dreams and nightmares of the 1960s and 1970s we now have to deal with.

#### **Fordism, factory society, discipline and the State form**

With the emergence of factory society, the artificial separation between political and economic constitution loses effectivity. No mediation is necessary; accumulation is its own discipline. The state as the executive organ of capital represents the direct negation of single capitalists, in favor of the class interests of capital. It embodies the 'political law of collective capital'. Capital becomes synonymous with the general interest.

*The 'democracy of labor' and 'social democracy' both reside here: they consist of the hypothesis of a form of labor that negates itself as the working class and autonomously manages itself within the structures of capitalist production as labor-power. At this point capitalist social interest, which has already eliminated the privatistic (sic) and egoistic expressions of single capitalists, attempts to configure itself as a comprehensive, objective social interest.* (Hardt & Negri, 1994, p. 62)

Thus the post-war revolutionary import of socialist principles in the political constitution of states is annulled. In fact, organized labor comes to facilitate the restructuring of the capitalist class.

*As an organized movement the working class is completely within the organization of capital, which is the organization of society. Its watchwords and its ideological and bureaucratic apparatuses are all elements that are situated within the dialectic of bourgeois development.* (Hardt & Negri, 1994, p. 61)

<sup>12</sup> Negri argues that Marx's conceptions of political economy belong to this period. The definition of the mass worker '...represents a certain qualitative solidification of abstract labor (a high level of subjective awareness of abstract labor)'. Hardt & Negri (1994), p. 210.

At the point where capital is identified with the common interest of society, an inversion occurs in the realm of social phenomenology wherein the labor nexus appears as the strength of capital's valorization and the basis of society itself. This is reflected in the incorporation of principles such as labor being the source of all wealth - that Marx incidentally had already taken up in the *Critique of the Gotha programme* - being instantiated as a principle within Bourgeois political economy (Negri calls the integration of this reformism the 'constitutionalization of labor'). This notion is progressively deconstructed in the 1960s and the following years, when the factory regime is attacked by workers throughout the West. Against the tyranny of both Trade Unions and the Party, we witness the birth of autonomism and the creation of resistance cultures that refuse the very ideology of social democracy, organized labor and their motto: 'Arbeit macht frei'.

#### **Society of control, biopower and immaterial labor**

The traditional centres where disciplinary techniques are deployed (class, party, school, nuclear family, wage labor) are in crisis (Foucault, 1994). Disciplinary rationality is substituted by more efficient, economic, discrete and implicit procedures aimed at governing people. In Foucault's analysis, disciplinary rationality finds its first application in society during the C19th, with the emergence of the social insurance systems in France (Foucault, 1978). These prefigure a science of control based on the prevention of risk and enacted under the auspices of the security of the life of the population. Biopower takes life as its object and is fully operative within the workings of the modern state as political economy becomes the essence of governmentality. For Negri total subsumption operates at the level of biopolitical production because production has subsumed life itself, but as society becomes a diffuse factory, it also becomes a school, a hospital, a prison and an army.

Discipline is only one application of biopower, which is complemented and increasingly substituted by a science of control that is applied in a series of preventive strikes. Control functions by means of: a predictive medicine (with no doctors nor patients), where society is treated as a reserve of diseases and individuals as carriers of pathologies; an 'education' or life long learning where each individual is compelled to remain productive and his thought disciplined throughout life; a surveillance that is not used for finding evidence of crime but rather as a tool for recognizing human bodies and behavior, pro-

filling them and inserting the information into databases. Every individual who acts suspiciously becomes a carrier of criminality.<sup>13</sup>

This move towards control societies also causes a re-territorialization of the place for struggle. The retreat of disciplinary institutions opens spaces of 'abandonment', ghettos, refugee camps, where bare life is at the mercy of the lawless management of the Polizeistaat, which acts on the basis of a permanent state of exception.<sup>14</sup> Within the social sphere it reinvents the private from the traditional realm of liberty to being the very site of innovation for control. Whereas the factory society corresponded to the Fordist mechanisms of labor exploitation, which attempted to homogenize labor and break down the power of the professional worker, the society of control responds to the productive laborers' line of flight away from the centralized machinic channelling of human energy and its demands for more out of life.

Biopower entered history at this very point, where the political boundaries of disciplinary techniques force the masses to realize their subjectivity outside the spaces delineated by political right. The problem of governmentality changes from the question of 'what original juridical rights can sovereign power be founded upon' to 'what are the effects of the exercise of governmentality itself'.

Population replaces territory as the object of sovereign power. The legitimacy of the state ceases to be challenged from outside and the juridical discourse on the boundaries of sovereign power is replaced by a focus on the art of governing bodies in economic and efficient ways. Thus biopower turns the ancient right to 'take life or let live' into a power to 'foster life or disallow it

<sup>13</sup> 'Factories formed individuals into a body of men for the convenience of a management that could monitor each component into this mass, and trade unions that could mobilise this mass resistance; but businesses are constantly introducing an inexorable rivalry presented as healthy competition, a wonderful motivation that sets individuals against one another and sets itself up in each of them, dividing each within himself. Even the state education system has been looking at the principle of "getting paid for results": in fact, just as business are replacing factories, school is being replaced by continuing education and exams by continuous assessment (control). It's the surest way of turning education into a business. In disciplinary societies you were always starting all over again (as you went from school to barracks, from barracks to factory), while in control societies you never finish anything -business, training, and military service being coexisting metastable states of a single modulation, a sort of universal transmutation.' Deleuze (1990), p. 179. <http://www.nadir.org/nadir/archiv/netzkritik/societyofcontrol.html>

<sup>14</sup> 'Empire is not formed on the basis of force itself but on the basis of the capacity to present force as being in the service of right and peace. Empire operates on the terrain of crisis, in the name of the exceptionality of the intervention there is the creation of a new right of the police.' (Hardt & Negri, 2001, p. 29); 'Wars are no longer waged in the name of a sovereign who must be defended; they are waged on behalf of the existence of everyone; entire populations are mobilized for the purpose of wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity: massacres have become vital.' Foucault (1998), p. 137.

into the point of death'. Foucault writes: *'this power was without question an indispensable element in the development of capitalism; the latter would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production'* (Foucault, 1998, p. 138).

Given the new encroachments of the value producing regime, the manifold struggles that sought time and space for the enjoyment of life were forced to form new solidarities and experiment with new models of cooperation that in the Postfordist period have become increasingly necessary to capitalist valorization itself. By reworking the theory of value based upon Adam Smith's and Marx's notion of productive labor, Foucault's radical critique of sovereignty and the Deleuzian celebration of the plurality of creative moments of refusal, Negri has found a theoretical position from which to view Postfordism at its limits.

During the 1970s, pitted against a powerful labor force the crisis state was a constant reality. However, the virulence of its struggle to contain the democratic aspirations within organized labor forced the extension of struggle to move away from the very site wherein the conventional apparatus of power had been exercised. Disciplinary power was productive of subjectivities within institutions; it had a 'place'. As these institutions broke down, so too did the social protocols of representation, negotiation and delegation. It is in these diffuse moments that the qualitative transition in the nature of labor, class composition and political legitimacy takes place.

The period of technological innovation enterprise that came to be theorized as globalization was generally either seen as an indication of capitalist piece-meal social engineering and its attacks on the welfare state or, on behalf of the Left, as necessitating a conciliation to state-led social reforms. What is missing from this picture is the real subject of this innovation, the working class whose informal solidarities and genuine autonomous modes of communication had provided the basis on which new methods of production could be instantiated. *'The political composition of the proletariat is social, as is also the territory where it resides; it is completely abstract, immaterial, and intellectual, in terms of the substance of labor; it is mobile and polyvalent in terms of its form'* (Negri, 1996a, p. 156).

What Negri calls the informatization of the economy comes to be theorized as the result of these changes in the quality of labor. The Italian tradition of

Operaismo links the notion of immaterial labor to the move from Fordist to lean production or Toyotism, where prior to being manufactured, a product must be sold. The main requirement for the introduction of this model is the establishment of a system of communication between production and consumption, between factories and markets. The kind of immaterial labor involved in the industry primarily entails the transmission of data, which dictates that an increasing proportion of capital must be invested in increasing the power of communicative techniques, corresponding to the increasingly cerebral nature of labor. Alongside this we witness the birth of management and information that attempt to find methods to both exploit and contain this autonomous production of subjectivity and social cooperation. Crucial to the operaismo critique of the political economy of these new sectors were an interrogation of new thinking in labor policy making and the study of industrial relations. What is generalized at the level of social cooperation occurs through the particularization and differentiation in each sector.<sup>15</sup>

*Robert Reich calls the kind of immaterial labor involved in computer and communication work "symbolic-analytical services"- tasks that involve problem-solving, problem-identifying, and strategic brokering activities. This type of labor claims the highest value, and thus Reich identifies it as the key to competition in the new global economy. He recognizes, however, that the growth of these knowledge-based jobs of creative symbolic manipulation implies a corresponding growth of low-value and low-skill jobs of routine symbol manipulation, such as data entry and word processing. Here begins to emerge a fundamental division of labor within the realm of immaterial production.* (Hardt & Negri, 2001, p. 289)

<sup>15</sup> Marazzi provides an insightful analysis from a macro-economic point of view of, amongst others, the policies and works of Robert Reich (Secretary of Labor under Clinton and author of *The work of nations*) and Paul Romer. In relation to Reich, Marazzi notes: *The economist's reasoning runs more or less like this: the globalization of the economy does no longer allow one to refer ownership of capital to the national composition of the means of production. For instance, a Ford is the result of partial and combined activities that are dispersed around the globe and concerted within global webs, where what matters is efficiency and the productivity of communication. The car that results from this process of production is a composite of parts produced in different nations, by means of a capital of multinational ownership. However, what is lost as a consequence of the de-nationalization of capital ownership (i.e. the means of production, constant capital) is recuperated at the level of ownership of immaterial labor, of the control of knowledge production. The denationalization of physical-material capital is counterbalanced by the nationalization of knowledge, and the command on its organization. 'Buy American' means from now on: 'Valorise American knowledge'. Nationality, according to Reich's reasoning, is recuperated through a strategic investment in activities that create more value, i.e. immaterial activities that characterise the Postfordist mode of production. The income generated by immaterial activity must be nationalised in order to deal with the unemployment of the unskilled American labor-force and reduce the disparity of income between skilled laborers and the working poor without inhibiting the comparative advantage of the US. American pride ought to function as solidaristic glue: when compared with competitive countries, the greater wealth generated by greater productivity and skill of immaterial labor provides the fiscal means to temper the deterioration of the life conditions of unqualified and defeated American people.'* Marazzi (1999), p 90-91.

As a new social form of productive activity, immaterial labor refers broadly to two different modes of labor.

*As regards the 'informational content' of the commodity, it refers directly to the changes taking place in workers' labor processes in big companies in the industrial and tertiary sectors, where the skills involved in direct labor are increasingly skills involving cybernetics and computer control (and horizontal and vertical communication). As regards the activity that produces the 'cultural content' of the commodity, immaterial labor involves a series of activities that are not normally recognized as 'work' - in other words, the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and more strategically, public opinion.* (Lazzarato, 1996)

The idea that immaterial labor directly produces the capital relation, this was clandestine in the disciplinary regime, changes the phenomenology of capital and the substance of its social power. Immortal workers are primarily producers of subjectivity.

*If production today is directly the production of a social relation, then the 'raw material' of immaterial labor is subjectivity and the 'ideological' environment in which subjectivity lives and reproduces. The production of subjectivity ceases to be only an instrument of social control (for the production of mercantile relationships) and becomes directly productive, because the goal of our post-industrial society is to construct the consumer/communicator - and to construct it as 'active'. Immortal workers (those who work in advertising, fashion, marketing, television, cybernetics, and so forth) satisfy a demand by the consumer and at the same time establish that demand.* (Lazzarato, 1996)

This third aspect of immaterial labor is what constitutes its 'affective' character. Affective labor is that 'embedded in moments of human interaction and communication'. It acts wherever human contact is required; it is essentially involved with 'producing social networks, forms of community and biopower. What is created in the networks of affective labor is a form-of-life (Hardt, 1999).

Affective labor ends the dominating tendency of reducing human activity to the same measure of value as this was only appropriate in a time when labor

was outside of capital and needed to be reduced to labor power:<sup>16</sup> as biopolitical production is directly involved in the production of social relations, it becomes coextensive with processes of social reproduction. The attempt to totalize command over this form of labor is the basis of the biopolitical, as it requires the interiorization and reproduction of control mechanisms within subjectivities. This might appear to be the ideal scenario for capitalist valorization but in reality it turns every question of power into a question over life.

### Total subsumption and the political in Empire

Under total subsumption, understood as a colonization of the inside and outside by global capital, it is impossible - even analytically - to detach economic and political power. A critique of power must entail a critique of labor. So the significance and determination of the total subsumption of society also resides in the de-actualization of conventional political space, most importantly the nation state as the locus of democratic power.

Here lies the end of the liberal myth of the autonomy of the political, or the separation of the public from the private, wherein the individual regarded the public as his outside. In this conception, *'the outside is the place proper to politics, where the action of the individual is exposed in the presence of others and there seeks recognition.'*<sup>17</sup> There is no antecedent and discrete rights-bearing individual, and when Negri explains the demise of the public-private distinction, characterized by the deficit of the 'political', Guy Debord, situationiste extraordinaire, is the explicit point of reference (Debord, 1995). The public sphere proper evaporates as: *'The spectacle destroys any collective form of sociality - individualizing social actors in their separate automobiles and in front of separate video-screens - and at the same time imposes a new mass sociality, a new uniformity of action and thought.'* (Hardt & Negri, 2001, p. 322)

<sup>16</sup> See Negri (1996). Negri makes an interesting point here, that the notion of socially necessary labor time referred to pre-existing communal norms of consumption and standard of life. So when interior to capital, this measure becomes perfunctory - beyond measure. We could ask when does a playstation or a tv become a necessary condition of life and how could we ever claim to quantify needs in these terms.

<sup>17</sup> *'In imperial society, the spectacle is a virtual place, or more accurately, a non-place of politics. The spectacle is at once unified and diffuse in such a way that it is impossible to distinguish any inside from outside - the natural from the social, the private from the public. The liberal notion of the public, the place outside where we act in the presence of others, has been both universalised (because we are always now under the gaze of others, monitored by safety cameras) and sublimated or de-actualised in the virtual spaces of the spectacle. The end of the outside is the end of liberal politics.'* Hardt & Negri (2001), p.188-189.

When all aspects of life are subsumed by capital, all forms of action become immediately meaningful to the reproduction of that society: they are all socially productive.<sup>18</sup> Historically, the 'autonomy of the political' satisfied the need to fill in the ideological gap left by the 'demise of class politics' and attempted to repose in Kantian 'universalistic' terms a potential or actual political space that lay above interests. In other words, in their own conciliation to the power of the state, a disillusioned New Left substituted the politics of interests for the politics of identity and thus sought to redefine for the new regime of governmentality a workable ideology of the disinterested state.

In this sense, reformist political movements that seek to recreate the public sphere as the political arena are reactionary because they produce a language of legitimacy that would be otherwise left to the facile, vacuous and arbitrary discourse of the management gurus of Postfordist capital. In the present the idea of the autonomy of the political could only be some form of liberalism, in so far as it could only function in the parameters outlined in Marx's critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, through the separation of decisions about the community from our existence as productive agents. Liberalism, however, can never really sever the political from interest: in fact it appears to reorganize it. The distinction between communitarianism and classical liberalism is a phoney one because both share the aim to construe the political as a sphere that can be separated from the economy. In essence they are both imaginary theoretical solutions to a practical problem: there is no balance between rights and duties, nor are there true communities that an impartial and neutral state can give a special treatment to.

The analysis of production in terms of social cooperation re-politicizes the politics of interest in non individualist terms, purifies it of its moralist tendencies, whilst also refusing to reduce battles over interest to matters of identity politics, no matter how much agents describe their own actions in these terms. We recognize that the relations of social movements to the state are ambigu-

<sup>18</sup> But at this point the spectacle exists and is theorised by Debord as a separation, as force that appears to be generated from above or outside of the social nexus: *'The phenomenon of separation is part and parcel of the unity of the world, of a global social praxis that has split up into reality on the one hand and image on the other. Social practice which the spectacle's autonomy challenges, is also the real totality to which the spectacle is subordinate. So deep is the rift in this totality, however, that the spectacle is able to emerge as its apparent goal. The language of the spectacle is composed of signs of the dominant organization of production, signs which are at the same time the ultimate end products of that organization.'* The Hegelian problematic emerges for all to see: *'The spectacle cannot be understood either as a deliberate distortion of the visual world or as a product of the technology of the mass dissemination of images. It is far better viewed as a Weltanschauung that has been actualised, translated into the material realm - a worldview transformed into an objective force.'* Debord, (1995), p. 12-13.

ous. Whilst they provide an opportunity for the state to repose itself as arbitrator in neutral terms, they also look for institutional recognition, which is control in operation within a liberal context.<sup>19</sup> That is why Negri's insistence on reposing labor politics in non-identity terms is crucial, as is his emphasis on production and the corresponding recognition that the production of subjectivities and identities occurs fully under the generalized form of command appropriate to capital. In so far as these movements are political in a subversive and transformative sense, they are absolutely embedded within the social determinations of their subjectivities.

*'Today the working class has all but disappeared from view. It has not ceased to exist, but it has been displaced from its privileged position in capitalist economy and its hegemonic position in the class composition of the proletariat. The proletariat is not what it used to be but that does not mean it has vanished'* (Hardt & Negri, 2001, p. 53).

The displacement of the industrial working class occurs through the neutralization of its productive role in capital's attempt to sever its dependence on the agency of labor. The category of the proletariat is expanded to be read as the whole class of people who internally sustain capitalist relations of production and are subject to its discipline.

Power should never be solely presented from the perspective of limitation: power is equally *possibility and capacity*. The form of domination of constituted power is always contextualized in the possibilities of resistance that it opens up and to which it reacts, and is never reducible to the mask that power itself wears. The formal exercise of power is only ever set in motion in response to the creative energy it tries to contain.

The radical immateriality of Postfordist labor creates Empire in response to its lines of flight, exodus and refusal, the sensuous movement, miscegenation and diversification of the productive subject. Capital in its bloodthirsty expansion, its cooption of the outside, falls prey to its greatest adversary yet: the multitude, the living breathing mass, which it would destroy itself to conquer.

At the level of labor, the productive subject that constitutes the political form of Empire has social cooperation as its absolute basis. Networks of infor-

<sup>19</sup> On this issue, see also Foucault's interventions on homosexuality, the dangers of institutionalization and gay rights movements in Foucault (2001), p. 157-173.

mation and communication form the marrow of every element in the synthesized and globalized productive space. Immaterial labor and affective labor are the basis for the collapse of mediation: justification becomes an immanent affair.<sup>20</sup> The myth of a realm of public space as negotiating ground finally decomposes. The social state in its traditional guise sweats under the burden of the management of differentiating subjectivities to the point of dehydration. The form of capital's command over labor in biopolitical production is a sinister state where the new slogan of Western societies is that we should all 'become subjects'.<sup>21</sup> Participative management is a technology of power, a technology for creating and controlling the subjective processes. But productive cooperation is at once indispensable and destabilizing for Postfordist production.

The object of power has become life itself, which is why for Negri politics is ontological. Empire represents a network of power relations governed by a mixed constitution. The thesis of Empire describes an order where the nation state is increasingly ineffective as a means for the ordering of subjectivities and Empire points to a trans-national and abstract order of political right and force that has no centre and functions through networks even though certain of its elements have a privileged position of power.<sup>22</sup> Responses to capital would

<sup>20</sup> *'What the theories of power of modernity were forced to consider transcendent, that is, external to productive and social relations, is here formed inside, immanent to the productive and social relations. Mediation is absorbed within the productive machine. The political synthesis of social space is fixed in the space of communication. This is why communications industries have assumed such a central position. They not only organise production on a new scale and impose a new structure adequate to global space, but also make its justification immanent. Power, as it produces, organises: as it organises, it speaks and expresses itself as authority. Language, as it communicates, produces commodities but moreover creates subjectivities, puts them in relation, and orders them. The communication industries integrate the imaginary and the symbolic within the biopolitical fabric, not merely putting them at the service of power but actually integrating them into its very functioning. [...] It is a subject that produces its own image of authority. This is a form of legitimisation that rests on nothing outside itself and is reproposed ceaselessly by developing its own language of self-validation'* Hardt & Negri (2001), p. 33.

<sup>21</sup> Berardi (2001) portrays the human condition of immaterial workers: *'Depression starts emerging at a time when the disciplinary model of behavioural management, the rules of authority and conformity to the laws that assigned to social classes and sexes a destiny, fell apart in the face of norms that incite each person to individual initiative pushing her to be herself. Because of this normativity, the entire responsibility of our lives is placed upon us. Depression then presents itself as an illness of responsibility in which the feeling of inadequacy/insufficiency predominates. The depressed is not worth it; he is tired to have to become himself'*.

<sup>22</sup> *'Some significant macroeconomic effects follow from the new mobility introduced by capital's global disciplinary paradigm. The mobility of populations makes it increasingly difficult to manage national markets (particularly national labor markets) individually. The adequate domain for the application of capitalist command is no longer delimited by national borders or by the traditional international boundaries. Workers who flee the Third World to go to the First for work or wealth contribute to undermining the boundaries between the two worlds. The Third World does not really disappear in the process of unification of the world market but enters the First, establishes itself at the heart as ghetto, shantytown, favela, always again produced and reproduced. In turn, the First World is transferred to the Third in the form of stock exchanges and banks, transnational corporations and icy skyscrapers of money and command'* Hardt & Negri (2001), p. 253-254.

be reactionary if they were to attempt to formalize or even disassemble the social cooperation that forms its basis.

### Critique of Power

We have now reached the Negrian idea of power, or application of politics. A decentred yet dynamic idea that sees expression and productive activity as cause and self determination confronting external limitations or attempts to govern it. The actuality of the political as ontological reaffirms the dynamic properties of being as politics when life itself is the object of power.

When it comes to the question of value the political project of Negri & co. arrives at a form of 'orthodox Marxism' which orthodox Marxism through its conventions would never reach. It derives the revolutionary configuration of subjectivity from the social form of value and the mode of production. It reflects the tensions within the capitalist form by recognizing the subjective forces that capitalism at once invokes and tries to limit. Crucially then constituent power is not constructed in contradistinction to economic life. A theory of alienation is not required because there is no ontological separation: what we do is what we are. The peculiar form of current capitalist demands for producing a marketable product makes creative subjectivity a requisite for valorization. Capital is forced to employ the total capacities of the worker - albeit a possibly depraved or limited form - in order to realize value. Demand as social and biopolitical need and desire entails that capital needs to enact society - and thus is subservient to it - in order to produce. Hence under Empire, where a general form of social command is necessary for capital to produce, labor is crucially constituted prior to capital. Thus civil society, as the system of needs within bourgeois economy, is absorbed into the state.<sup>23</sup>

### Technologies of the common

Negri's notion of the common and Foucault's idea of technologies of the self can aid our project to point towards the possible configurations of a theo-

ry of power and resistance to the society of control. In several writings, Negri asserts that the common cannot be theorized today in terms of a public sphere or goods. The common today, for Negri, is primarily the common of exploitation. However, the multitude is a 'group of singularities whose instrument for living is the brain and whose productive force consists in cooperation'. The question posed in relation to the common then becomes one of what forms of self government modern subjectivity can exercise. Here self government is seen in terms of a mode of creative resistance to forms of subjectivation that are immediately valorized by contemporary capitalism. This is the operative field of subjectivity. However, if one is to take the theoretical accomplishments of the reconfiguration of the category of subjectivity seriously, the notion of the self needs to be clearly distinguished from that of the individual in order to move beyond the sovereign subject as the central point of political analysis. For this reason, we take the common to name the subjectivity proper to Postfordist production, and its political activity as one of creation of forms of life and language. The latter is the very means of reproduction of subjectivity today, of value, affect, as well as power relations.

Negri's politics of the present cannot but defend an immanent materialist ontology. Immanence must not seen as a totalizing conspiracy of power, but as an approach to social reality that recognizes that power is what it does, and in this respect there cannot be a 'Theory of Power', but only a critique and subversion of its operations in the present. Negri's contribution - a purple rhapsody in red - is a powerful intervention in this project.

In the fertile soil of the here and now, there is no need for us to pose our project in negative terms. The project of making the common is a coming together and a generative act that must refuse the internalization of limits and project itself in knowledge and politics as collectivity, openness and creation without regrets.

<sup>23</sup> This is a complicated and problematic thesis: the very moment when civil society is only apparent in political form, when each social power is annulled and obliged only to find meaning in the form of the state, the modern liberal state suffers a crisis of its representative democratic principles: *'Political representation by means of the social mediation of parties is considered obsolete in the sense that it looks towards a mechanism of delegation that is formed in society (as a reality different than the state), that is verticalised in the state (as a reality different from society), and that selected political personelle (as a reality different than the rational administrative mechanism). This type of representation was adequate to a modern liberal society in which the subsumption of society under capital was not yet accomplished.'* Hardt & Negri (1994), p. 271.

## Notes

\*Disclaimer: this text is copyleft and can be used, reproduced and disseminated in any manner. However, to take it as a definitive exposition on the subject in the title would be to malign the spirit in which it was written; as a momentary consolidation of developing and at times conflicting points of view. We have quite unashamedly used Negri's views as a sounding board for our own, and it is quite possible that during this exercise we have at times inadvertently misinterpreted his thought.

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