

In conversation with Toni

My impression is that if we assume, as Negri does, economic production as a central category, it may not be so easily thought as political and thus effectively transformed into a political category. Instead, as Dardot and Laval argue, it might be helpful to theorize more fully the category of "institution," which properly belongs to a juridical-political lexicon [Dardot, Pierre-Laval Christian, *The New Way of the World: On Neoliberal Society* (London: Verso, 2014)]. In Negri's perspective, the hyperpolitical paradigm tends to overlap with the impolitical paradigm, with the political plane never quite coming into sharp focus. The question arises whether a supposedly activist perspective does not, in fact, imply the risk of its quietistic reversal. In other words, why political action if labor processes are objectively already being transformed?

In Negri's work, which deploys a Spinozian model that is highly inflected by Deleuze's plane of immanence, it is ontology that makes possible the transfer from the economic to the political conceptual realm. Production is part of existence, referring at once to life and nature; it is *production of life* in the subjective and objective sense of the phrase (produced by life and productive of life), but the transit from ontology to politics remains problematic, as does the immediate reference to a nature without artifice, that is to say, free from the work that institutes it. While it is possible to think, as Deleuze does, a radically affirmative ontology, things seem less easy from a political perspective. We should not -- and here I include myself and my own work -- confuse an affirmative point of view with the erasure of the reality of the negative. The negative exists. Indeed, in many ways, it appears to dominate the contemporary scene. The negative must be faced, contained and even reversed, but it cannot be disavowed. Not even Spinoza could disavow it: *omnis determinatio est negatio*. Despite his undisputed distance from Hobbes, as well as from Rousseau and Hegel, to whom he is sometimes compared, Spinoza upheld the bond of determination to the reality of the negative. Similarly, Machiavelli, on whom Negri has written extensively, feels the burden of the negative in all its power, and his lexicon is completely dependent on the indelible reality of conflict and on the notion of

limit, which, by contrast, is excluded from a wholly affirmative discourse on pure immanence *à la* Deleuze

To be sure, constituted power should always be related to and opposed by constituent power, as Negri taught us in one of the landmark books of the late twentieth century [A. Negri, *Il potere costitutente. Saggio sulle alternative del moderno* (Rome: Manifestolibri, 1992); English version: *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999)], which represents one of the sources of the new theoretical wave internationally known as *Italian Thought*. But the main (and still unresolved) philosophical and theoretical problem of Negri's text remains its articulation of (but also its difference from and opposition to) the paradigm of sovereignty with which it nevertheless shares the category of decision. How does sovereign decision differ from constituent decision? Is an including decision possible which does not, at the same time, also exclude something? Can decisions transcend the inside/outside divide? Is it possible for constituent power to disavow the question of the outside? What would a world without an "outside" be? Would it be like *Empire*: an immanence without either inner or outer thresholds? Once again, we are left with the unresolved problem of the negative. But my impression is that the "outside" cannot be denied because denial would be, in the final analysis, a negative category.

For decades, Negri's thought has been, and still is, a rather powerful philosophical, political and theoretical *dispositif*. We would do well to engage it with an awareness of the limits not only of Negri's work, to which we are indebted, but, above all, of our own.

A rejoinder to Roberto

You claim that my ontological perspective obstructs the transit to the political, but I don't get it. Ontology does not preempt reality: reality has to be made. There is no ontological continuity between February 1917 and October 1917; whatever continuity exists there is created by risk and political action, and results from a traversal of what you call the negative that owes nothing to it. By contrast, the assumption of an "outside" weakens and defeats political practice. Once we assume a transcendental sovereign principle (such that

it might suit every manifestation of an orderly and productive social life) or an ineradicable negative, a fundamental impediment or a radical evil, we simultaneously acknowledge the need for a *kathecon*. An affirmative and constituent thought of immanence that rests on an ontology of the common (this is the missing link in your response) is always already political. To speak of sovereignty in conjunction with the multitude means to give voice to what is common and to stress cooperation. After the crisis of the factory-based workers' movement, this kind of sovereignty has been revived, for some decades now, by a cognitively empowered proletariat. In conjunction with this, I wish to make two points. First, the political challenge today is to transform the growing hegemony of the cognitive worker into an actual potential that cuts across the entire workers' class. Despite the opinion of contemporary populists, the challenge is not limited to certain social groups but extends to the whole society insofar as the latter is understood as a society put to work. The challenge therefore concerns social production as a whole especially when the extraction of value englobes and redefines exploitation too (both the old Taylorist industrial type of exploitation and the new type driven by information technology). Secondly, the difficulty you have in envisioning a new pattern of differences within the multitude seems related to the idea of unity, which you continue to think in Hobbesian terms, with the principle of organization reducing difference to unity (and I do feel rather Deleuzian in emphasizing this criticism). How does one envision a new class formation?, you ask? Only organized militant action will tell us and, perhaps, only a plan for a universal guaranteed income will steer us in that direction, considering, however, -- it goes without saying -- that what is difficult is not impossible: the substance of the negative is not dialectical, it's simply negative. The negative will always be there because it is the void, that is to say, what is not constructed through human agency.

To conclude, you say that "today there is a great return to the negative," that "war is the new constituting principle," and that "the *nomos* of the earth once again becomes partition," arguing that "the nation-state remains the only subject of the constitutionalization of those private relations that govern the global financial market." It seems to me that you can make this argument only if, in giving voice to the negative,

you disregard the constituting perspective. The above turn of mind is exactly what the constituting principle abhors. If, in fact, we assume that we are upholding war in order to defend private property and that this trend privileges the nation over globalization, what follows is not a return of the negative but simply a greater urgency to oppose what you call the negative and I call the cause of war, that is to say, private property and the nation-state.

Truth is always partial; in other words, always in common. It is therefore a matter of opposing the return of the nation-state for a variety of reasons linked to globalization. First, globalization, with the assumption of market freedom, has nevertheless enabled millions of people to exert their "right to escape" poverty and meant relief from poverty for many other millions of people in Third World Countries. Secondly, globalization and new technologies, despite the forms of subjections that they instate, have connected humanity. Finally, globalization has upturned traditional relations of domination revealing their corruption and pervasive crisis on a planetary scale. For these reasons, times seem ripe for a global revolution. To put it differently, we can now hear the individual names of liberation in the language of the common, and this is something that you and I probably agree on.