

ONTOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTIVISM:  
NEGRI AND THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF A FUTURE  
COMMUNISM

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## ABSTRACT

As we find in *Empire* and *Multitude*, Antonio Negri's political project is a thoroughly Marxist analysis and critique of global or late capitalism. By modifying and updating Marx's conceptual tools, he is able to provide a clear account of capitalism's processes, its expanding reach, and the revolutionary potential that functions as its motor.

By turning to Negri's philosophical works, however, we find that this political analysis is founded on a series of concepts and theoretical positions. This paper attempts to clarify this theoretical foundation, highlighting in particular what I term "ontological constructivism" – Negri's radical reworking of traditional ontology. Opposing the long history of transcendence in epistemology and metaphysics (one that stretches from Plato to Kant), this reworked ontological perspective positions individuals – not god or some other transcendent source – as the primary agents responsible for molding the ontological landscape.

Combined with his understanding of *kairòs* (subjective, immeasurable time), ontological constructivism lays the groundwork for opposing transcendence and rethinking contemporary politics.

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## INTRODUCTION: THE INTERSECTION OF ONTOLOGY AND PRAXIS

Far from demanding an end to critical dialogue and discourse, the various political and social crises of the twenty-first century instead necessitate a return to the open theoretical discussions that were ubiquitous during the sixties and seventies. At the same time, a reexamination of the various conceptual paradigms that were previously deemed bankrupt or unnecessary is certainly a task that warrants attention and scrutiny. Interestingly, the demand for this *return* and *reexamination* is founded on a widespread paradox – that is, the simultaneous existence of two antagonistic phenomena: first, the reemergence of a geopolitical landscape defined by imperialism and war, and, second, the tendency, in North America at least, for passivism and indifference. Whereas political turmoil once acted as a motor for critique and analysis, a demand for “the radical transformation of the status quo,”<sup>1</sup> we now find it coupled with a pervasive social disinterest. Paolo Virno labeled the foundational modes of being that generate this paradox the “sentiments of disenchantment,” and suggested that they – that is, “Opportunism, fear, and cynicism,” – have begun to “*enter into production*, or rather, they intertwine with the versatility and flexibility of electronic technologies.”<sup>2</sup> If this is true, if disenchantment is a cancer in the heart of production and constitution, then the aforementioned call for a return to open discourse is all the more pressing.

Similarly, if Virno’s version of disenchantment has infected even the most basic modes of being, the primordial levels of experience and understanding that define our very existence, it will be necessary for our inquiries to start at a fundamental level – it will be necessary, in other words, to begin any political project with an ontological analysis. Luckily, any student interested in following this path will find invaluable

guide-posts in the works of Antonio Negri. His works surely illustrate the necessity for returning critical thought to its former status. In various ways, they also strip away the crippling misunderstandings that have turned words like ‘Marxism’ and ‘communism’ into political blasphemies. More important, though, is their emphasis on what Michael Hardt refers to as the “ontologically constitutive nature of practice.”<sup>3</sup> According to this concept, individual and collective action (I will use the term ‘praxis’ to highlight its political, constructive dimensions) is situated at the starting-point of being. The world, in other words, does not present a system of predetermined ontological patterns and categories, nor is it an ongoing product defined and constructed by a transcendent source. Conversely, being – the ontological fabric of existence – is generated and woven by the force of praxis. Whether it is by purely conceptual means, by, for example, the formation of new ideological perspectives, or by a tangible force in the material world – protesting, for instance – this form of praxis carves and inscribes unique patterns on the plane of existence, essentially constructing new forms and assemblages of being. For Negri, then, the term ‘ontology’ is less a branch of metaphysics designed to categorize objects and their varying degrees of reality; instead, it is a category that signifies the lack of hierarchy in the world around us and, simultaneously, the productive process whereby this reality is generated. A scientific analogue for this process is the manner in which super-massive objects create dimples and tears in the fabric of space-time, indentations that result in gravitational “force.”<sup>4</sup> In much the same way, praxis molds and reworks the fabric of reality, resulting in new arrangements and combinations. Although Negri never uses the term himself, it will be helpful to refer to this radical development as ‘ontological constructivism.’ ‘Constructivism’ may be a loaded term, especially in the philosophical

register, but it can be used here to simply signify the constitutive power of praxis, the manner in which human action *constructs* our physical and mental realities.

This particular union, the fusion of ontology and praxis, defines in large part the inventiveness of Negri's approach. As we will come to see, Negri's ontological constructivism posits praxis *as the engine of the production of being*. The importance of this concept is emphasized by Hardt and Negri in their collaborative works. In *Empire*, for instance, the authors map the similarities between their concept of constitutive action and a similar process in the works of Deleuze and Guattari: "Machines produce. The constant functioning of social machines in their various apparatuses and assemblages produces the world along with the subjects and objects that constitute it."<sup>5</sup>

The importance of ontological constructivism, even as defined so far in straightforward, embryonic form, needs only to be noted and remembered. The concept will act as an anchor and guide-post as we continue to analyze Negri's contribution to ontology, contrasting it with the prevalent, transcendent tradition and comparing it with other contemporary continental developments in the field. Further, the concept will provide the framework within which the idea of temporal constitution, or *kairòs*, can be explored. Overall, this form of constructivism (in both its general and temporal forms) provides the foundation for a possible or potential politics free from the overarching hierarchy and teleology of global capitalism. With this core concept, Negri has essentially constructed a philosophical basis for the development of a new form of social organization, a society wherein community, interaction, and innovation are defining characteristics that emerge from the "bottom" as opposed to the "top" (although this distinction becomes superfluous in a classless society). In other words, the formation of

social relations is governed by everyone, by the multitude of civilization, as opposed to being imposed by an abstract logic or governing rule. It is my contention that Negri is really the first political theorist to articulate the necessary conditions for this social transformation and the first philosopher to provide an ontological perspective that aids our practical pursuits against the extreme absurdities of the capitalist mode of production.

Conceptually, Negri's form of ontological creation is closely linked with a number of important ideas: Negri's interpretation of Marxian real subsumption; the concept of self-valorization; and territorialization in the Deleuzian context. As we gradually map these various ideas into a general picture of political protest and revolt against capitalist accumulation, it will be fitting to conclude with some remarks concerning the transition from philosophy to politics, from theoretical speculation to practical realization.

Negri's project is thoroughly and unquestioningly political in nature. Even his most philosophical work is really an attempt to provide us with the conceptual ammunition to effectively revolt against the ubiquitous injustices and absurdities that are a staple of our global political and economic landscape. With this in mind, tracing a movement from concept to act, descending not as Marx did into the "hidden abode of production" per se, but rather into the various nebulas and constellations of political protest and rebellion, will prove that Negri's thinking provides the fundamental tools necessary for fighting inequality and exploitation.

At the same time, it will gradually become clear that this "descent" is in actuality a horizontal movement. For Negri, turning philosophic thought into political action is not a matter of transitioning from the light of pure reason to the empirical world of



experience. On the contrary, his thoroughly materialist ontology effectively shows that these acts are tantamount – philosophy is political and politics is philosophical. Once transcendent thinking, the spectre of Enlightenment rationalism, is abandoned, moving from one to the other is more like swimming across an immeasurable, unbounded body of water.

## TRANSCENDENCE IN EPISTEMOLOGY AND METAPHYSICS

Before we begin concretizing the specific aspects of Negri's ontological approach, a brief detour regarding an opposing development in the metaphysical tradition is understandably crucial. We can turn to *Empire* for a starting point. Hardt and Negri argue that modern rationalism reaffirmed an ancient form of dualistic thinking by insisting on the existence of a form of mediation that essentially separates individuals from either a) the objects of experience, and/or b) God. As they put it:

...in every case mediation had to be imposed on the complexity of human relations. Philosophers disputed where this mediation was situated and what metaphysical level it occupied, but it was fundamental that in some way it be defined as the ineluctable condition of all human action, art, and association.

And later: "What is at play is a form of mediation, or really a reflexive folding back and a sort of weak transcendence, which relativizes experience and abolishes every instance of the immediate and absolute in human life and history."<sup>6</sup> According to this view, various Enlightenment philosophers found it necessary to insist on the need for mediating structures that are essential if the subjective agent is going to have any chance of understanding the outside world. In terms of epistemology, Kant is the focus of this critique.

The epistemological mechanisms Kant describes in the first *Critique* are a bridge between the subjective world of the transcendental subject and the objective world of *noumena*. Although the latter are never truly known, the *phenomena* the subject experiences directly are, as Kant clearly states, caused by things-in-themselves and therefore intricately connected to them (although we have no idea what form this connection takes).

By extension, it is clear that Hegel carries on the tradition of what we can call ‘epistemic mediation’ in his own work.<sup>7</sup> Here, rather than turning to imbedded mental structures for a filter of *a posteriori* data, he finds this mechanism in the form of socio-cultural norms and parameters. Joseph C. Flay deals with this topic extensively in “Time in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*.” He states:

Whatever we know, and however we know it, we know enframed within a *Zeitgeist*. Put in another way, what gives form to how we ‘receive’ and understand what we know is not pure ‘*Anschauung*,’ but a ‘*Weltanschauung*’ or *Zeitgeist* full of content. This is what truly forms the ‘between’ or *Zwischen* of our relation to the world.<sup>8</sup>

For Hegel, then, the knower, unable to understand the world in terms of a constant flow of particularized data, an uncertain, persistent, unintelligible wave of information, can only schematize this data into compartments and hierarchies arranged in coordination with the predominating *Zeitgeist*. This is the only way for the Hegelian subject to make sense of the world.

Flay’s statements can certainly take us this far, but a fuller account of Hegel’s epistemology is more elusive. The cryptic nature of the *Phenomenology* is largely to

blame for this; still, it is nonetheless entirely possible to excavate a comprehensive epistemological doctrine from the complexities of the text. According to Robert C. Solomon, for example, Hegel provides an inroad into his epistemology with the presentation of three central developments of Consciousness: “Sense-Certainty,” “Perception,” and “Understanding.” At a superficial level, Hegel is paraphrasing the various doctrines of his predecessors and contemporaries with the aim of exposing their inconsistencies and error, using the title “Sense-Certainty” to denote the concept of a “bare particular” that precedes the more complex act of conceptualization. Hegel finds this notion problematic. “Perception” is for Hegel the theory of knowledge determined to prove that the objects of experience are presented to us as assemblages of properties – all that we experience are the properties and never the objects themselves. Again, Hegel is unconvinced. Lastly, “Understanding” introduces the concept of an intangible “force” that exists as the metaphysical background to which properties are attached.

Hegel of course criticizes these positions for various reasons, but the content of Hegel’s *own* doctrine is, according to Solomon, not to be found in the criticism of these standpoints, but instead in his subsequent reaffirmation of their validity. On Solomon’s interpretation, Hegel understands these positions as sets of cognitive parameters that condition and determine our understanding of the world. In other words, the presentation and construction of these philosophical positions are acts of “self-confirmation”: “...knowing and philosophizing about knowing are self-confirming activities.”<sup>9</sup> To philosophize, then, is to construct a set of epistemological rules or categories that individuals utilize in their attempt to understand the chaos of experience. These “forms of consciousness,” although varied and mostly irreconcilable, are nonetheless perfectly

valid methods for understanding the unschematized world of empirical data: “The (‘absolute’) truth is that there are alternative and equally valid if not equally adequate ‘one-sided’ ways of looking at the world of human experience: the basic concepts of our understanding are determined in these various theoretical stances.”<sup>10</sup>

What Hegel has presented is in fact quite revolutionary – the existence of a form of epistemological (as opposed to ontological) constructivism, where the construction of epistemological doctrines determines the *nature of epistemology itself*. He has presented a world of diverse cognitive schemata that cannot be reduced to a single set of Kantian categories. For Hegel, there is no irreducible set of absolutely necessary categories, for they can easily be replaced if an opposing system of thought proves its worth and validity. If Solomon is implying that these various epistemologies form a central component of the *Zeitgeist*, then his interpretation runs parallel to Flay’s abovementioned statements concerning Hegel and knowledge. If they do not, Solomon and Flay are at odds concerning their interpretations. It seems, however, that the former is the case: Solomon’s understanding of mutually valid cognitive parameters exists as a subset of Flay’s *Zeitgeist* theory. Epistemological doctrines and their categories form a part of the overall cultural field that operates as the mediating factor between the subject and the world, the filter that is used to coordinate *a posteriori* data into comprehensible assemblages and arrangements. This revolutionary model of knowledge will be reexamined later (for it presents, astonishingly, certain similarities with Negri’s own views). For now, we can see that the statements made in *Empire* are indeed valid – Hegel’s epistemology, as innovative as it is, explicitly depends on a mediating factor.

While we can see that Hegel's version of epistemic mediation is different in form from the Kantian variant, their reliance on a structural filter or framework, one that bridges the gap between knower and known, subject and object, is for Negri and Hardt representative of a predominant trend in modern philosophical thought. Despite the fact that both Kant and Hegel contribute to the humanist project of granting unique metaphysical value to the individual, attempting to "...pose the subject at the center of the metaphysical horizon..."<sup>11</sup> their persistent devotion to what the authors call a 'transcendental apparatus'<sup>12</sup> drives a noxious wedge into the consistency of being, producing a rupture or tear in what will come to be known as the "flatness" of the ontological landscape. Their superimposition of epistemological filters onto the subject/object relationship strips the relation of its immediacy; the external object, as a result, retains none of the tangibility and closeness necessary for an understanding of being free from hierarchy and teleology. At the same time, this form of mediation is an instance of a larger movement and tendency in modern philosophy.

Transcendent logic can also be characterized by a form of mediation that separates the individual from God, the Absolute, Spirit, or any similar version of the concept. Just as Kant and Hegel utilize epistemological structures transcendent in nature, we will find that philosophical modernity is replete with instances of metaphysical structures that offer us more obvious examples of transcendence. *The Savage Anomaly*, Negri's pioneering interpretation of Spinoza, is a central work that will aid us in many respects. For now, it can serve as an inroad into the concept of metaphysical transcendence. In a section detailing Spinoza's removal of the oppositional relationship

between one and many, unity and plurality, Negri explains that this abolition is an anomaly:

The anomaly lies in the radically antifinalistic perspective of Spinozian philosophy; by finalism I mean (as does Spinoza) every metaphysical configuration that superimposes on the initiative of the multiplicity a transcendental synthesis.<sup>13</sup>

Finalism, in other words, is the tendency to impose a transcendent schematic over the heterogeneity of the material world. Beginning with the pre-Socratics, the nature of the relationship between unity and plurality has been perennial, and the varied attempts since this time to explain their coexistence and reciprocity have almost always taken the form of Negri's finalism. It will help, however, to briefly examine the first truly philosophical, rather than cosmological, articulation of this form of transcendent metaphysics, and although we are now drifting away from an analysis of modern thought, Plato's system can rightfully be interpreted as the historical foundation of this trend.

Plato was really the first to superimpose a rigid, prefigured metaphysical structure over the Heraclitian flux of the material world. In an attempt to synthesis Heraclitus' views with the Parmenidean doctrine of a unified and unchanging reality, he proposed the existence of a realm of universal Ideas. We gain access to this realm not through sense perception, not through the pursuit of empirical investigation and natural science, but through philosophic contemplation and *a priori* mathematics. Nonetheless, the intricacies of his doctrine need not be examined here. What is presently of interest is the resultant ontological dualism (or quasi-dualism) Plato set in motion. In order to make sense of *this* world, the world of human interaction, of politics and science, we must

understand it through the lens or optic of Platonic Forms. The grain of sand is unintelligible as an empirical entity. It gains lucidity, however, once we understand it as a substandard reproduction of the Idea that prefigures it, a simulacrum of a truer and nobler reality.

The most obvious counterpoint is that Plato did not really divide the universe into two separate, distinct ontological categories. He simply implied that there are different versions of the same reality, with corresponding ontological grades of being. This argument is certainly valid, and can be supported by his various references to the fact that the world of particulars, the natural world of the senses, is a kind of shadow of the ultimate reality of Ideas. This concept appears repeatedly throughout Plato's work, but nowhere is it provided with more lucidity and metaphorical brilliance than in the "Allegory of the Cave." Here, a group of prisoners are subjected to a puppet-show involving shadows cast on their cave wall. This is their reality, and their science involves the meticulous and analytic study of these ephemeral shadows, the classification of their forms and theories concerning their origins. Nonetheless, it becomes clear that, however futile their efforts, they are not trapped in a completely different reality, one sectioned off and segregated entirely from the Good. Shadows are a necessary part of the world, even if they are degraded replicas of some higher level of being.

The analogy is clear: the natural world of sense-perception is a shadow of a higher ontological plateau. When science deals with these shadows, it deals with particular objects of a lower ontological status, but there is an inextricable connection between Form and particular, and it would be erroneous to state that they exist in wholly

segregated realms. Thus, applying the term ‘ontological dualism’ to Plato’s metaphysical system could be misleading.

This may be true, but it hardly saves Plato from Negri’s application of the term ‘finalism.’<sup>14</sup> The end result of his quasi-dualism is still a devaluation of the material world. Even if he has connected his metaphysical framework to the world around us, the system itself still takes philosophical priority over the fleeting, multifarious shadows of sense, and this is exactly the form of transcendent metaphysics Spinoza and Negri are combating.

In *The Savage Anomaly*, Negri finds that Spinoza was instead able to discern the existence of only *one level of being*, the level associated with the material world of things. Any supposed higher realm of being is associated with a vague immateriality or transcendence. Here, then, the placement of ontological value is reversed. It is with the material world that one finds ontological primacy (indeed, one finds the *only* ontology). The world of sense-objects constitutes the very fabric of being, the raw material from which we may form and constitute various arrangements of resistance and opposition. Spinoza associates this ontological primacy with a form of power called *potentia* – the metaphysical foundation from which constellations of freely-created political and social action are founded. Any attempt to devalue this basis is associated with a form of Power, *potestas*, and can be considered illusory and transient. Any system that attempts to superimpose its ideals and parameters over the teeming flux of humanity and the material world is arbitrary and superficial. Even more, Plato’s world of transcendent Ideas is not merely devalued but negated – for Spinoza *it does not exist*.



As we can see, this “inversion of the metaphysical perspective” is a kind of materialistic reverse-Platonism where the metaphysical tradition of finalism is upended and reconfigured.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, Negri’s analysis of Spinozian thought has already bridged the aforementioned gap between theory and practice. The danger of transcendent thinking is that it lends itself to a form of Power – *potestas* – that relies on hierarchical structures. Platonic metaphysics, when transposed onto the political landscape, advocates the kind of top-down power structures prevalent in contemporary politics. Like Plato’s system, these structures devalue the everyday world of sense, the world of human interaction and politics, and trumpet their own artificiality and abstractness. Likewise, the aforementioned forms of Kantian and Hegelian epistemic mediation place artificial barriers between the individual and his surroundings, rendering the latter either unknowable (in the Kantian context) or distant and relative (in the Hegelian context). The result is that the world around us loses its immediacy and immanence, its rightful status as the ontological foundation from which all constructive acts of creation arise.

Considering the fact that Negri’s primary project is to unify the ontological tradition with the political concept of praxis, it is obvious why the various products of the transcendent tradition are oppositional and antagonistic. In the epistemological context, they are responsible for artificially separating the subject from the world of experience, creating an epistemic barrier that simultaneously renders action and production in the “world of things” a distant, elusive reality. In the metaphysical context, the tradition is responsible for producing a rupture or tear between different or even opposing ontological landscapes. This rupture may not take the form of a true dualism, instead presenting a kind of ontological hierarchy (as we see with Plato), but the problem still

exists: materiality loses its rightful status as the true source of construction. This much is clear, but for a fuller account of the problem and a better explanation of the nuances of Negri's approach, we can turn again to Hegel. While the brief analysis of Plato provided a clear and effective account of a "transcendental apparatus," in retrospect we can see that he is an easy target.

## 1. HEGEL AND NEGATIVE ONTOLOGY

The finalism inherent in Platonic metaphysics provides an entry-point into the discussion and critique of the predominant tradition of transcendence. It is important to note, however, that Platonism is by no means the *true* enemy of Negri's constitutive ontology. A more substantial and complex account of ontological constructivism is instead greatly facilitated by contrasting the details of Negri's approach with the overarching teleology of the Hegelian dialectic.

Hegel has certainly come to represent a strain of philosophy intricately connected to forms of political and ideological fascism. Whether this representation is justified or not is a complicated question deserving lengthy, independent analysis. As we continue forward, it will suffice to detail the manner in which Hegel provides, much like Plato, the ontological foundations for a *possible or potential fascism*. This potentiality is unique in that it is founded not on a single metaphysical system (as we find in Plato), but instead on an overarching, all-inclusive meta-theory or meta-philosophy – the dialectic.

Before we proceed in this direction, however, it is necessary to abandon our purely philosophical analysis to explain what many consider to be Negri's most significant contribution to political philosophy: the concept of Empire. According to the authors of *Empire*:

...we have witnessed an irresistible and irreversible globalization of economic and cultural exchanges. Along with the global market and global circuits of production have emerged a global order, a new logic and structure of rule – in short, a new form of sovereignty. Empire is the political subject that effectively regulates these global exchanges, the sovereign power that governs the world.<sup>16</sup>

Empire, then, is the dominant, hegemonic political organism that operates on a global level. It is a system of authoritative control that cannot be characterized by any single element of its constitution. It cannot, for example, be defined by imperialism or globalization alone. It does, on the other hand, contain a number of organizations or political components that, when taken together, represent a kind of multi-tiered, heterogeneous form of order that lacks the quality of centralization so frequently found in previous models of political authority. As we are told in *Empire*, its constitution is “pyramidal” and can be best described by detailing each level or tier of the structure.

At the uppermost level, the apex of the pyramid, global power is represented by the United States. Just below this superpower but still within the same tier, we find other powerful and influential nation-states that are bonded together by various affiliations. These nation-states operate alongside a group of transnational economic institutions – the International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organization, and World Bank – and can be considered to be one of the primary means by which global capital is controlled and directed.<sup>17</sup> According to Matteo Mandarini, this tier is analogous to the ancient system of monarchy that, along with aristocracy and democracy, comprise the model of mixed constitution that Polybius utilizes in his analysis of the Roman Empire.<sup>18</sup> The second tier of Empire’s pyramidal structure correlates to aristocracy and can be described as, simply, transnational capital: “This tier is structured primarily by the networks that transnational capitalist corporations have extended throughout the world market – networks of capital flows, technology flows, population flows, and the like.”<sup>19</sup> Along with these transnational corporations we find another set of sovereign nation-states with less overall influence than the primary nations in the first tier but with enough power to exert some

influence in regards to the overall flow of capital, communication, and technology. Lastly, the base of the structure is comprised of both subordinate nation-states with little to no global influence and organizations, such as NGOs, that “represent popular interests in the global power arrangement.”<sup>20</sup> The last tier is of course analogous to democracy.

This is the networked constellation of powers that comprise Empire and can be considered responsible for the various global exchanges we see today. Far from being material best suited for conspiracy theory, Negri’s concept of Empire is based on empirical observation. Detractors cannot argue that these various entities do not exist. All that Negri has done is arrange them in a structural model that gives us some sense of their relative authority and interaction while simultaneously articulating the fact that they all share some stake in the vast, complicated network of global power. What we have, then, is a non-univocal structure of authority that in various ways imposes order on the teeming masses of humanity. What we have is a material, political version of a transcendent apparatus, a kind of political finalism that in all likelihood finds its genesis in metaphysical transcendence. Negri has gone to great lengths to illustrate the hollowness – the empty formalism and structuralism – of Empire’s constitution. Indeed, one of the fundamental axioms of ontological constructivism is that political finalism (more specifically, Empire’s apparatuses of capture and command) are devoid of creativity, innovation, and progress, incapable of constructing the social field and therefore incapable of engaging in any act of ontological constitution.

Empire is instead completely dependent on the ontological energies that reside in the constructive acts of communication and interaction in the multitude.<sup>21</sup> It is here, with *potentia*, that the structure of reality is being organized. The polyvocal hierarchy of

command is certainly a form of Power (*potestas*), and indeed a versatile organism capable of defying descriptive analysis or formal interpretation, but nonetheless it is a kind of retroactive authority that folds back onto and subsumes the primary innovations that initially escape its grasp. Negri puts this quite eloquently in the sixth thesis of his “Twenty Theses on Marx,” and it will be beneficial to quote at length:

In effect, capitalist innovation is always a product, a compromise or a response, in short a constraint which derives from workers’ antagonism. From this point of view, capital often experiences progress as decline.

And it *is* a decline, or better, a deconstruction. The more radical the innovation is, the more profound and powerful were the antagonistic proletarian forces which had determined it, and therefore the more extreme was the force which capital had to put in motion to dominate them. Every innovation is a revolution which failed – but also one which was attempted. Every innovation is the secularization of revolution.<sup>22</sup>

Negri is quite clear on the matter: the revolutionary antagonism of the multitude is ontologically primary. It precedes the parasitical subsumption enacted by the logic of capitalism; indeed, it determines the form and nature of capitalism itself. With this in mind, it becomes clear that the contemporary age of the social worker, one defined by a shift *away* from factory-based labour and *towards* communication, knowledge, and interaction, is a product of resistance and revolution on the part of the multitude. The fact that these characteristics are central to the modern workspace illustrates not, as many would have it, the entrepreneurial genius intrinsic to our mode of production, or the metamorphosis of capitalism into a higher form based on its own internal dynamism, but

instead the revolutionary capacities and potentialities that belong to the multiplicity of social beings pushing for freedom and transformation. From this perspective, the development of capitalism into a totalizing reality is less a metamorphosis and more a transmogrification, a retroactive integration of the multitude's push for change that has resulted in newer, more elusive mechanisms of exploitation and power. However, at the same time this transition has revealed what Negri calls a "crisis" in capitalism's theory of value, an inability to schematize the newly developed social reality into an economic one, to "monetize" our collective capacity, or, to return to Negri's wording, secularize revolution. This crisis will occupy our attention more exclusively in a following section. For now, the main point is that Negri has established Empire (and capitalism, as its economic form) in antagonism to the act of ontological construction.

Empire will also serve us as the primary example of the connection between metaphysical and political transcendence, a useful illustration of the fact that abstract metaphysical finalism provides the conceptual paradigms and logistics for a version of concrete political finalism. Further, while for Negri the latter is a lifeless framework of power and authority (*potestas*), a pure abstraction, it must be emphasized (once again) that this form of Power is constantly combated by its antagonist (*potentia*) – the dynamic of political resistance supported by the ontological act of creative construction. Our brief detour into the Negri's analysis of Empire is therefore justified: it is the missing piece of a generalized puzzle that includes, on the one side, protest and revolution (supported by *real* ontology), and, on the other, hierarchy and Power (supported by abstract or pseudo ontology). Still, to expand this general schema and justify some of our ontological claims we must return once again to our analysis of Hegel.

## 1.2 MEDIATION

We have already seen that the concept of mediation appears in Hegel's epistemological views. To reiterate, *Zeitgeist* (and the epistemological paradigms that *Zeitgeist* includes) is the mediating factor between the knowledge-seeking subject and his object, the external world. In other words, the world is only known to us through the lens or filter of cultural norms and conventions. While Hegel's reliance on cultural context is certainly an important instance of mediation *within* his system, a closer look at the *Phenomenology of Spirit* reveals that mediation, far from being a side-note or tangent, is the glue that binds the entire operation of the dialectic together; it is the engine of the dialectical movement itself.

In the same manner that *Zeitgeist* mediates the subject-object epistemic relation, Hegel's movement toward the "absolute standpoint," a move analogized by the ascending of a ladder, likewise requires a mediating factor. In other words, Hegel may very well employ the term 'mediation' in various sections to illustrate Consciousness' relation to the outside world, but the very structure of the *Phenomenology's* argumentation, of Hegel's ascension toward an absolute standpoint, relies equally on mediation.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the Preface, especially the colourful metaphors Hegel consistently turns to:

The bud disappears in the bursting-forth of the blossom, and one might say that the former is refuted by the latter; similarly, when the fruit appears, the blossom is shown up in its turn as a false manifestation of the plant, and the fruit now emerges as the truth of it instead. These forms are not just distinguished from



one another; they also supplant one another as mutually incompatible. Yet at the same time their fluid nature makes them moments of an organic unity...<sup>23</sup>

As made explicit by this imagery, Consciousness' movement toward an "absolute standpoint," its *Bildung*, entails what Hegel calls a "labor of the negative." Opposing and contradictory theses must be worked through, just as the fruit-form of the plant supplants its blossom-form. The blossom-tree is worked through; it is a necessary stage for the emergence of fruit. In this sense, it acts as a *mediator*. To pursue Flay's line of thinking, each stage of the blossom-tree is unconditionally necessary for progression, and, concordantly, this progression entails *Arbeit*, a process of working through. Thus, each stage of the plant (or each developmental phase of the individual) is a mediator; it mediates between a lower and higher junction, just as epistemic mediation bridges the gap between knower and known.

It becomes increasingly clear that the overall structure of the *Phenomenology* can be considered in terms of mediation. For this very reason Hegel claims at the outset of the Preface that philosophical prefaces are superfluous: they are bankrupt in that the very act of explaining "aim" and "result" at the outset of a philosophical system ignores the necessary process of labour, the working through of antithetical perspectives: "the aim by itself is a lifeless universal, just as the guiding tendency is a mere drive that as yet lacks an actual existence; and the bare result is the corpse which has left the guiding tendency behind it."<sup>24</sup> Thus, as Hegel works through the various arguments of the text, the necessity of mediation is the glue that binds the quasi-unrelated sections together: it subsumes the polyvocal expressions of the *Phenomenology* under a singular, guiding act

of *Bildung*. This is all quite clear, especially given the fact that Hegel's phraseology becomes anomalously illuminative and lucid when discussing the labour of the negative.

What is also clear is that the very structure of the *Phenomenology* is a textual representation of the dialectic itself. As history moves closer to its reunion with the Absolute, oppositional views are synthesized and restructured. In political terms, the monarchies of Europe were a necessary stepping stone for the emergence of democracy. The monarchical system mediated the process of dialectical progress. In this sense, every idea, every system of thought or headway into a subject, exists as a bridge in the service of teleological progress. It is this very focus on teleology and mediation that anchors the entire system, and without this focus it seems that the labour of the negative crumbles and is rendered incoherent. Mediation, the motor of dialectic progress, is the lynchpin of the entire operation.

Another look at the Preface will help crystallize this matter. Hegel distinguishes between two forms of thought which he terms 'speculative' and 'ratiocinative,' and expresses their difference in terms of a subject-predicate language-form. As the conventional cognition of the natural sciences, ratiocinative thought attempts to understand the world in terms of an axiomatic subject, a fixed and stable entity to be predicated in numerous ways:

Usually, the Subject is first made the basis, as the *objective*, fixed self; thence the necessary movement to the multiplicity of determination or Predicates proceeds. Here, that subject is replaced by the knowing 'I' itself, which links the Predicates with the Subject holding them.<sup>25</sup>

Speculative thought, on the other hand, abolishes the need for a universally fixed subject, and instead employs each predicate as a subject in and of itself (although the term ‘subject’ is largely inadequate). The subject passes over into the predicate as the latter becomes a better, fuller expression of the essence hitherto unexpressed. Likewise, this newly formed predicate will also be transformed by the next, and so on *ad infinitum*: the subject “has been sublated; and, since in this way what seems to be the Predicate has become the whole and the independent mass...”<sup>26</sup>

A contemporary mathematical model of this process is found with the Markov chain: a mathematical sequence or strand of calculations where each number is determined by the one before it. Similarly, the following calculation is based upon the one before *it*, so that what one is presented with is a string of calculations (a mathematical ladder), a sequence that also models the notion of mediation discussed above. Each number is a mediator for the next, just as each predicate is a step along a never-ending chain of predicates, the flower is a more adequate expression of truth than the seed, and every moment in Hegel’s dialectic is part of some larger structure of mediation where a higher level of Consciousness is the final product.

Of course, Hegel does not necessarily consider the process of mediation (as it is construed here) an abandonment of previous expressions of truth: they continue to exist as parts, as aggregates, of the next expression. Hegel expresses this in his belief that “The True is the whole.”<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, it seems impossible not to imagine that particular aspects of the overarching system, previous mediators, are not done a fundamental injustice by way of this progression toward an “absolute standpoint.” They

have been used for some higher purpose, assimilated but not quite the same: the seed is an aggregate-aspect of the flower, but it has lost its own unique existence, its in-itself.

### 1.3 MEDIATION AS MISUNDERSTANDING

Like many theorists, Hardt describes the abovementioned Hegelian process as a “negative movement,” an ontology based on antagonistic opposites, on otherness and discord. At the same time, it becomes apparent that this negative movement, this reliance on mediation and teleology, rests on certain ontological assumptions. More specifically, Hegel, like Plato and Aristotle before him, assumes the existence of ontological gradation – the idea that objects and entities display varying grades or levels of reality. As discussed earlier, Platonic finalism posits that, while the material world of particulars is certainly real, it is nevertheless a diluted or distilled version of reality analogous to shadows. Forms, on the other hand, exhibit a higher degree of reality and are considered the true and worthy objects of intellectual pursuit. Plato’s ontology therefore disfranchises the material world and renders our most immediate and practical pursuits – political action, for instance – mere shadow-play when compared to purely a priori contemplation.

Hegel may not disfranchise the material world (at least not in the same way), but he does certainly create levels of ontological gradation. Since Hegel’s negative movement is one towards the absolute standpoint, towards an ultimate version of reality and perfection, the levels that precede this point in time are diluted forms of an eventual and unavoidable ontological plateau. The machine that eventually produces perfection must first produce inferior versions, must produce seeds, for example, before flowers, or children before men. Driven by mediation, what we see in Hegel is a form of linear

temporal development at the ontological level. As time marches forward reality is constructed as the by-product of dialectical conflict and synthesis. Whereas in Plato we are given a simpler account of things, a universe divided into two static, stationary degrees of reality (synchronic), Hegel presents a dynamic account of ever-increasing, ever-improving gradations of being (diachronic). It is for this reason (primarily) that the Hegelian dialectic stands as the true enemy of Negri's account of Spinozistic constitution, for, much like Empire itself, the teleological march of mediation is presented as a *shifting dynamic of production*.

To claim that Empire is the direct descendent of Hegelianism would be somewhat misleading. Late capitalism – and the various political entities that redeploy its logic – is the end-product of a long series of developments in the social and political spheres, a sequence of social and technological advancements. Most of this goes on without any recourse to theory. It would *not* be misleading, on the other hand, to propose the existence of a very specific connection between Empire and transcendent theory *in general*. If finalism is as prevalent as Negri claims, if the superimposition of abstract structure and form is a relatively ubiquitous affair in our intellectual pursuits, then surely the politico-economic reality of late capitalism is intricately connected to the long history of transcendent thought that now exists as a kind of governing rule. In this sense, we can legitimately establish the very real and material connection between transcendent thought in theory and transcendent structure in reality. The fact that Hegel's negative ontology occupies a rather esteemed position in the former category makes it clear why the capitalist's tendency to trumpet the "end of history" sounds so very Hegelian.

In opposition to this tradition, Negri's reliance on Spinoza and his refusal to accept mediation and difference asserts his alternative ontology as both a radical, subversive departure from the tradition and a foundation for political action and improvement. As we see in *The Savage Anomaly*, Negri appropriates Spinoza's fundamental distinction between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*. Spinoza uses the terms to exemplify two different facets in nature – first, *natura naturans*, the active, productive element in nature, the engine or motor that produces being, and, second, *natura naturata*, the finalized product of nature, the modes. Interestingly, a less revolutionary Spinoza could have delineated this distinction in accordance with previous models of ontological difference and gradation. He could have, for instance, construed *natura naturans* as a process of ontological production that reaches, like Hegelianism, for an absolute end-point. As a result, he would have relegated this facet of nature to a lower status, a lesser, diminutive level of reality. At the same time, this hypothetical Spinoza would have perhaps championed *natura naturata* as a final cause, a correlate of the Hegelian Absolute or Platonic Form. This would have been in line with the tradition of metaphysical finalism so prominent in philosophy's past. This would have provided yet another form of finalism capable of being molded and transformed into a political structure sharing similar characteristics.

Instead, Spinoza defines *natura naturans* (production) and *natura naturata* (product) as two aspects of the same substance, two facets in complete, simultaneous harmony. As a result:

God is the inversion of transcendence, even while being simple logical transcendence. God is the world that constitutes itself. There is no mediation;

the singularity represents the unique real horizon. God lives the singularity.

The mode is both the world and God.<sup>28</sup>

Whereas many philosophers (Leibniz, for example) present traditional concepts of God (i.e. Gods that operate outside the parameters of everyday existence), Spinoza, sidestepping the religious conventions of the West, offers a more complex view: nature as the wellspring of existence, the constant force pushing toward actuality. Everything that is, in this sense, everything that we as individuals see, is operating according to the mechanism of nature: everything is an artifact of God's infinite production. Concurrently, in the form of *natura naturata*, modes are not only the products of this active mechanism of creativity, of the "spontaneity of being," but part of its totality. Negri puts this nicely by calling attributes and modes the "legislation of being," and by this he simply means the organizing principles whereby the univocal nature of *natura naturans* turns polyvocal, where that which is unitary and whole is seemingly sectioned-off and structured. This is no paradox. Spinoza's metaphysics is in complete harmony with its own implosion of a) the univocal thrust of productive force, and b) the fact that, "The world is therefore the versatile and complex combination of singularities."<sup>29</sup>

It is not that one leads into the other (i.e. the singular becoming the manifold via a process), but rather that the singular and manifold coexist from the beginning, are ipso facto the same. To say otherwise would be to turn Spinoza's radically new and rebellious system into a philosophy of transcendence.

This is precisely the association Negri is combating in *The Savage Anomaly*. Spinoza's *Ethics* presents the reader with an ontology of level surfaces (or flatness), a metaphysics of anti-transcendence, and it is for this reason that his philosophy is best

equipped to provide the conceptual tools for an effective critique of capitalism and its manifold apparatuses.

#### 1.4 Beyond Hegel

The question remains as to whether or not Negri – and by extension Spinoza – has managed to bypass the fundamental problem presented by Hegel's dialectic. As Hardt points out, taking a position that is in any way anti-Hegelian is paradoxically and simultaneously Hegelian. In other words, oppositional, anti-Hegelian doctrines are subsumed within the dialectical movement of negativity – they are positioned as an intellectual development within the parameters of Hegelian logic and are therefore merely theories that have a small role in Consciousness' progress. Continental post-structuralism has surely been immobilized by this impasse. But perhaps their dilemma is a result of an inability or unwillingness to position themselves *contra* Hegel in ontological terms, to set themselves against the dialectic not as this or that theory but as a radical reworking of the ontological landscape in its entirety. Post-structuralism is notorious for its apparent contempt for philosophical foundations, for a deliberate movement away from (and deconstruction of) the anchoring, ontological rudiments that support the vast majority of our philosophical assumptions.

By disregarding foundation, however, it is possible that Hegel wins automatically: the dialectic is built on the sturdy foundation of negative ontology; it is supported by the contention that reality is composed of disharmonious elements that, after a period of antagonism and conflict, synthesize into new arrangements awaiting future conflict. This process continues indefinitely. For Hegel, the negative is not an abstraction but the very nature of reality; therefore, if anti-Hegelianism is possible it must set itself against Hegel



in ontological terms and prove that the dialectic is constructed on the basis of a series of ontological misunderstandings. In this way, a theory can be posed as the antithesis to the Hegelian dialectic *in toto*, not to this or that theory falling under the umbrella of the dialectic.

While Hardt's "The Art of Organization" does not present this specific solution to the problem, it does provide a comprehensive analysis of the antagonism between Spinoza's immanent, materialist ontology and the Hegelian variant – negative ontology. In an early passage, Hardt outlines Hegel's attack on positive being:

Since Spinoza's being is absolutely positive, since in Spinoza pure being does not actively negate nothingness and does not proceed through a negative movement, it lacks the fundamental difference which could define its real existence ... Negation cannot merely be passively 'thought away', Hegel maintains, but it must be actively engaged and really negated – this is the role of the process of determination. Consequently, finally, inevitable, because Spinoza's being is not held different from nothingness as its opposite, it dissolves into nothingness...<sup>30</sup>

The legitimacy and accuracy of this critique is beside the point (although Hegel, it seems, would have to prove the irreconcilability of purely positive being and difference). It seems quite clear, however, that if negation can indeed be "thought away," then the entire edifice of Hegelianism and negative ontology could no longer stand as an infallible meta-theory impervious to critique and opposition. If Negri's interpretation of Spinoza does not provide the immediate ability to negate negative ontology, at the very least it provides

the conceptual tools to “think away” the dialectic and deconstruct the harmful political realities that too readily emerge from its conclusions.<sup>31</sup>

## 2. CREATIVE PRODUCTION

While our analysis of Hegel has plainly defined the lines of conflict and antagonism in terms of philosophical heritage, it becomes clear that dividing ontological doctrines into two camps – transcendent and immanent – does a fundamental disservice to the variety and assortment of these perspectives. Nowhere is this clearer than with the obvious polyvalence of Hegel's own doctrine, or Spinoza's for that matter; still, our central claim is that certain ontological frameworks have a tendency to support certain political perspectives. To use an example, Spinoza's development of a "flat" or anti-hierarchical ontology naturally develops and facilitates a politics of anti-transcendence: the characteristics of the ontological doctrine carry over as a foundation or support into the political expression or representation of this doctrine. Before explicating in detail the manner in which Negri's interpretation of Spinoza provides the foundation for what he terms a "constituent republic," a brief evaluation of the opposite phenomenon – the transition from transcendent ontology to transcendent politics – is perhaps in order. We have already examined this transition in general (noting the manner in which the entire tradition of transcendent ontology provides the conceptual paradigm for corresponding political structures); nonetheless, a specific example of this transition will aid an understanding of the relationships between various forms of finalism.

### 2.2 THE PITFALLS OF LAZZARATO'S NEO-MONADOLOGY

In my view, despite good intentions and dedication to a political cause in line with Negri's, Maurizio Lazzarato's "From Capital-Labour to Capital-Life" provides an explicit example of this transition. Lazzarato's investigation utilizes a Leibnizian, monadological framework to explicate the means by which modern enterprises produce,

first and foremost, worlds that envelope the worker and consumer. On this view, before the production of concrete goods comes an intangible process whereby the corporation produces – via advertising and other forms of communication – a specific world, one manufactured in such a way so as to effectively execute what he calls “incorporeal transformation.” In his words:

...the enterprise does not create its object (goods) but *the world within which the object exists*. And secondly, the enterprise does not create its subjects (workers and consumers) but *the world within which the subject exists*.<sup>32</sup>

What is important here is the idea that in the contemporary age of mass advertising and mass marketability, the most efficient way to market products, to incur revenue, is to first of all manipulate the way that people think, to manipulate the sensibilities of individuals in such a way that they buy into the world of the product. This, then, establishes the fundamental importance of “incorporeal transformations”: the consumer’s sensibilities and dispositions must be manufactured before any concrete production of goods can take place, before items and products can be created that match the nature and constitution of the subject.

This is certainly becoming the hegemonic form of production: the ubiquitous focus on marketing and advertising is testament to its dominance. It may be helpful, nonetheless, to turn to an example of Lazzarato’s:

Three years ago, Alcatel, a large French multi-national announced that it would let go of its eleven production factories. This separation between the enterprise and the factory is an extreme case, but one that is becoming more and more common within contemporary capitalism. In the great majority of cases, these

two functions are integrated, but I would argue that their separation is emblematic of a deep transformation within capitalist mode of production.<sup>33</sup>

Yet this focus on the corporation's principal construction of reality (a reality primary to the action of the worker and consumer) seemingly leads us away from Hardt and Negri's fundamental thesis that capitalism is a vampiristic logic that merely feeds off of the ontologically primary production of the multitude. This notion is furthered by Lazzarato's conclusions that, for example:

Here we are facing a paradigmatic change that we cannot capture if we start from the concepts of labour, of praxis. Indeed, these concepts could give us a false image of what production is today: the process we have just described [the process of incorporeal transformation] precedes all organizations of work (and non-work).<sup>34</sup>

Lazzarato's analysis seems to lead us towards a notion that capitalism and its various institutions are creative figureheads, the centers of ontological production and the cores of subjectivity. Capitalism, in this sense, is the force at the hegemonic axis of movement, a divot in space with enough gravitational force to coordinate the activities of other interstellar bodies.

At an initial glance, the link to Leibnizian metaphysics only extends this conclusion. For Leibniz, every soul (nomad) is already imprinted with its own future, already theologically stamped with the seal of its own fate.<sup>35</sup> In other words, since God is timeless and therefore all-seeing, the future of every individual is already encoded within its own constitution.

In Leibniz's words,

...the notion of an individual substance includes once and for all everything that can every happen to it [...] by considering this notion, one can see there everything that can truly be said of it, just as we can see in the nature of a circle all the properties that can be deduced from it.<sup>36</sup>

After considering this, we can draw an easy parallel between Lazzarato's notion of "incorporeal transformation" and Leibniz's form of soft determinism. Like an all-knowing, all-powerful corporate-head imprinting products with the stamp of eternity, the Leibnizian God infuses the universe into each and every monad.

For Lazzarato, corporations imprint workers and consumers with the signature of their own idiosyncratic worlds; the logic of the enterprise, in other words, is "...inscribed in the souls and bodies..."<sup>37</sup> of the men and women necessary for the company's longevity and functionality. We see this form of corporate metaphysics everywhere. Is it necessary to conclude, however, that the creativity inherent in this process is ontologically prior to the multitude's actions and reactions? Will it be necessary to admit that capitalism is an autonomous entity capable of constructing worlds independent of the individuals that inhabit them?

It seems apparent that adopting a Leibnizian framework to understand the nuances of modern production leads to an affirmative answer. Conversely, Lazzarato's own analysis (although hitherto portrayed as supporting a notion of corporate creativity) navigates beyond this impasse.

### 2.3 LAZZARATO BEYOND LEIBNIZ

One of the means by which Lazzarato resists the above dilemma is the concept he terms “the cooperation between minds.” Here, the fundamentally Leibnizian construal of the constitutive primacy of marketing strategies and corporate creativity is reversed: “Cooperation between minds expresses a power of co-creation and co-realization which means, in this specific domain, the capacity of creating and realizing (free) software.”<sup>38</sup> Labour – and here labour should be understood in the broadest sense possible – is not secondary to the conditions corporations employ to mold human productivity to their own ends, not inferior to the hierarchical process of incorporeal transformation so integral to the functioning of modern capitalism. Indeed, the situation is the complete reverse: corporate enterprises operate first and foremost by vampiristically feeding off the vast expanse of common goods that are produced by human labour in general. They do not form and direct this labour; they do not twist and manipulate its constitution in any primary way – they merely benefit from its inherent creativity by introducing it into the global market and incurring profit. In other words, they attempt to viciously transmogrify the common into something private:

Cooperation between minds, unlike cooperation in the Smithian and Marxian factory, produces public, collective or common goods: knowledge, language, science, culture, art, information, forms of life, relations with oneself, others and the world etc. We distinguish common goods and public or collective goods as understood in political economy. Indeed, the former are not only like water, air and nature etc. – ‘goods’ of all – but rather created and realized like the modalities that Marcel Duchamp uses to speak about artistic creation. A

work of art is indeed for one half the result of the activity of the artist and for the other half the result of the activity of the public (which looks at it, reads it, or listens to it).<sup>39</sup>

This is precisely the interpersonal, creative dynamic that defines the productive capacity of the multitude – constructive power that is the ontological force behind society in general.

When considering the metaphysical tendency of enterprises to create worlds, Lazzarato explains that the invention of these worlds is primary, while the actual production of the goods or services that coincides with them is in fact a *reproduction*, a material simulacra of a corporate reality. This is certainly true: the worker-monad (to use Lazzarato's Leibnizian terminology) operates within the world created by God, and all of its creative endeavors are conditioned to some extent by its transcendent origins. With our newfound understanding of the cooperation between minds, however, we can analyze the process from an elevated vantage-point. We now see that the multitude's production of common goods – science, culture, language – precedes the corporate process of world-making. The latter process, then, is *ersatz* in nature: it is the true reproduction, a reprocessing of pre-existing goods in some other form.

Any marketable product is always formed out of the collective knowledge that made that product possible in the first place, and that knowledge, as Lazzarato effectively points out, is intrinsically common: "A common good," he states, "is inexchangeable because of its indivisible and inappropriable nature."<sup>40</sup> How do you divide a concept? How do you consume an idea? Unlike the factory-goods hegemonic in Marx's analysis, contemporary production is beginning to revolve around the paradigm of intangible



‘goods,’ around what Hardt and Negri term “immaterial labour,” “labour that creates immaterial products, such as knowledge, information, communication, a relationship, or an emotional response.”<sup>41</sup>

This is precisely why the contemporary market is seeing increasingly absurd examples of ownership claims. Aware of the newfound significance and profitability of intellectual products, corporations are quick to secure the ownership rights of any idea capable of earning revenue. Considering, however, what Lazzarato says about the nature of common goods, it becomes apparent just how preposterous and counter-progressive such claims are.

*Ideas never develop in vacuous environments.* Even Kant, notorious for crafting the first *Critique* in isolation, could not have achieved what he did without interacting with the philosophical concepts developed by his contemporaries. He was, after all, not only an astute critic of the metaphysical tradition, but a great synthesizer of the disparate epistemological systems. Hardt, Negri, and Lazzarato make it explicitly clear where they stand on the issue; furthermore, their respective treatments of common goods and labour are completely in line with one another.

The only difference, then, and the only grounds for critique, is the dissimilar philosophical paradigms they operate within. Lazzarato moves beyond the limitations of his own philosophical framework by employing the notion of ‘cooperation between minds,’ and by insisting on its ontological predominance. Before moving on to examine the manner in which a Spinozian context is better suited to encompass such an insistence, it will help to first examine an argument that *may* support a correlation between Leibniz’s thinking and a focus on collective productivity.

In “From Capital-Labour to Capital-Life,” Lazzarato explains:

As Tarde rightly saw, Leibniz allows us to escape from the dilemmas involved in the relationship between individual and collective, and thus both from individualism and holism, since the collective and the social (the world in Leibniz’s language) are included in the individuality of the monad.<sup>42</sup>

In the context of Leibnizian metaphysics, this is perfectly accurate: utilizing God as a kind of transcendent anchor for his entire system, Leibniz is able to move beyond the bifurcation between individual and collective. This is in part due to his explication of God as an atemporal being possessing an omniscient knowledge of every possible perspective of the universe. The universe, in other words, can be viewed from many angles, but God’s view is the sum of every possible angle, potential or actual, past or future. For every perspective, though, God creates a corresponding substance. As explained in his *Discourse on Metaphysics*:

The result of each view of the universe, as seen from a certain position, is a substance which expresses the universe in conformity with this view, should God see fit to render his thought actual and to produce this substance.<sup>43</sup>

Therefore, every substance contains its own radically singular and thoroughly idiosyncratic universe – this is the substance’s individuality. On the other hand, these separate universes are harmonious with one another: they correspond in such a logical way that, for instance, communication and collective observation are possible, or, in Leibniz’s words, “...in the same way that several people who have agreed to meet in some place at some specified time can really do this if they so desire”<sup>44</sup> – this is the substance’s collective facet.

Obviously, then, Leibniz is successful in combining individuality and collectivity – the univocal and polyvocal – in a single substance: a monad. What seems to render his progress unfitting for our current purposes, however, is his abovementioned reliance on a transcendent anchor. The opening two sentences of his *On the Ultimate Origination of Things* claim:

Beyond the world, that is, beyond the collection of finite things, there is some One Being who rules, not only as the soul is the ruler in me, or, better, as the self is the ruler in my body, but also in a much higher sense. For the One Being who rules the universe not only rules the world, but also fashions or creates it; *he is above the world*, and, so to speak, extramundane, and therefore his is the ultimate reason for things.<sup>45</sup> [emphasis added]

This is a formulation of the ‘principle of sufficient reason,’ the centerpiece of his entire philosophy. Everything is related in a causal network, but it is nonsense to assume there is no transempirical cause supporting the entire structure: God is this cause; his is, in other words, the sufficient reason for all things.

In returning to our previous considerations, however, we can see that this emphasis on God’s transcendent status is the very reason Leibnizian metaphysics provides problems when applied to contemporary politics and economics. Indeed, we have already seen this in terms of the analogy between God’s inscription of the universe in the monads and the corporation’s inscription of its world in the worker and consumer. By following the analogy to its logical conclusion, we inject our contemporary political-economic landscape with a noxious dose of transcendent philosophy, thereby attributing a

kind of omnipotent status to corporate entities devoid of any unique creativity or productive capacity.

## 2.4 BEYOND THE INDIVIDUAL/COLLECTIVE BINARY WITH SPINOZA

Spinoza likewise bypasses the division between the individual and the collective, and surprisingly does so in a manner quite akin to Leibniz, although differing in some principal respects. It may be helpful, then, to turn to an example utilized by Leibniz, and modify it accordingly to explain the manner in which Spinoza's outlook differs. The example is simplistic, but an effective place, I believe, to begin. To emphasize the disjunction between God's theocentric perspective and the narrower, anthropocentric perspective of monads, Leibniz employs the example of a city. God sees the city in its totality, every angle, every dark alley and rooftop is accounted for; indeed (although this makes things more complex) he sees every possible city, the way the city could be in an infinite number of permutations. Alternatively, monads only see the city from a single point of view; one monad sees something the other does not – say, the side of a building – while, conversely, the other sees one side of the same building missing from the other's standpoint. This is the Leibnizian picture of things.

Spinoza's God/nature, rather than perceiving the entire city, rather than "looking down" upon it from some transcendent plateau, *is* the entire city. We, as individual modes of God's attributes (thought and extension) are the bits and pieces of the city; we are separate buildings, but nonetheless simultaneously belonging to the overarching cityscape, to nature – but this is only one dimension of Spinoza's view of nature, what was previously described as *natura naturata* (nature natured). His other, *natura naturans* (nature naturing), signifies the active, productive principle of God or nature, something

Negri, in *The Savage Anomaly*, calls the ‘spontaneity of being’: pure productive force, the ontological motor of the world. In Negri’s words: “This given complex of being is the element in which we live, the fabric from which all is woven”<sup>46</sup> – and later,

Every sign of abstraction is taken away; the category of being is the substance, the substance is unique, it is reality. It is neither above nor below reality, it is all reality. It has the scent and the tension of the world, it divinely possesses both unity and plurality. Absolute being is the surface of the world.<sup>47</sup>

This, then, is the central (although not only) aspect that divides the two philosophers being considered. As we can see, Spinoza’s eschews a conventional, religious interpretation of nature in favour of a materialistic view that elevates the world of objects as the only possible ontological category. Again, it is this materialism that directly contradicts the tradition of transcendence and pinpoints Spinoza’s positive ontology as the possible foundation for a future political system free from capitalist rule.

## 2.5 TIME-AS-MEASURE

In terms of our analysis of Negri, we can now move from an abstract understanding of constitutive production, the concept of being as a product of human action and understanding, to a more concrete notion of a specific kind of ontological constructivism as it exists in the context of temporality. For Negri, time plays a defining, central role, both in the political register (time as a qualitative measure) and in purely philosophical terms (time as a phenomenological horizon). Once again, temporality in both of these senses is shown to be fundamentally related and inseparable.

We can turn to the opening sections of Negri’s “The Constitution of Time: the timepieces of capital and communist liberation” for a foundation regarding temporal

constitution. He begins by explicating the idea of time as quantitative measure. In the period of Fordist production, the period of what Negri calls the “mass worker,” time can be seen as an external unit of measure that quantifies the work day and assigns value to any given product. The work day, then, is obviously divided into temporal quantities (hours, days etc) and the products of this labour-time are assigned a use-value according to the traditional Marxist formula: a labourer spends, for example, an hour manufacturing a product, and this product’s value is assigned according to the time-quantity itself. The shoe that takes an hour to manufacture is therefore equivalent to the shirt that also takes an hour to make. Simply, each object is valued according to the labour-time that is materialized in it.

This simple conception of time is problematized by the phenomenon of *real-subsumption*. Once we transition away from the Fordist model of production into the era of the social worker, it becomes apparent that work-time and leisure-time are indistinguishable. The labourer can no longer retreat to a home away from capitalist accumulation, away from the necessities and demands of corporate production.<sup>48</sup> We can point to several examples to illustrate this point, but it is more important to note that, since the hegemonic form of production no longer hinges on a corporeal object (car manufacturing, for example) and instead relies on knowledge and ideas, workers stop producing the former at the end of the day but never cease producing the latter. Capitalist organizations are aware of this fact and consequently demand the continued, uninterrupted creation of knowledge-based products regardless of the time of day (this reality is surely one of the fundamental observations linking various forms of neo-Marxist theory together). Therefore, capitalist accumulation has invested itself in every

aspect of life to such a degree that we can no longer consider the existence of an *outside* to the capitalist modality – this is the reality of real-subsumption.

This expansion of capitalism to the point that it subsumes within it all aspects of existence and life has several repercussions. Of interest here is the fact that it renders purely quantitative time a manifest absurdity. Negri himself articulates the absurdity by stating “When the entire time of life has become the time of production, who measures whom?”<sup>49</sup> Measure, then, is “...flattened onto the process itself.” It no longer has the benefit of exteriority, the distance and difference necessary for a purely quantitative consideration of labour. Time-as-measure can continue to operate, but only as a tautology that reduces everything to units of time, all the same, all redundant.

This “aporia,” as Negri calls it, is inherent in the writings of the “orthodox Marx.” Only with Marx’s more revolutionary works – the *Grundrisse*, for example – do we find that he is able to comprehend and transcend the tautology of time-as-measure. In Negri’s words:

...alongside the abstract development of social mediatization and of the subjectification of abstract labour, time itself becomes substance, to the point that time becomes the fabric of the whole of being, because all of being is implicated in the web of the relation of production: *being* is equal to *product of labour: temporal being*.<sup>50</sup>

What could previously be considered, in a pejorative sense, the “tautology of time and life” is therefore resurrected as a newfound understanding, a new sense of time not as measure but as substance<sup>51</sup> that “cleaves to reality.” We will return to the concept of time-as-substance, but first it will be necessary to underscore what Negri believes to be

the radical, subversive nature of what we can term a *phenomenological* concept of time, a temporality divorced from a purely economic or purely logical construal.

In a brief section situated again at the opening of "The Constitution of Time," Negri posits two historical trajectories. First we have time in the theological tradition. In this context time is a mere roadblock or impasse in the way of understanding an atemporal, transcendent reality. For theological scholars dedicated to the analysis of transcendent being, time is an incompatible variable, an illusion unique to the material world. Negri decides not to discuss Plato in detail (although he does quote him); nevertheless, considering our previous and partial analysis of Platonic metaphysics as a form of finalism, it will perhaps help to return once again to his theories. As we know, Plato construed the material world of particulars in terms of a diluted, degraded form of reality. Time plays a part in this. The material world is at least partially associated with the incomprehensible flux described by Heraclitus: the transition of one season to the next; the constant fluctuation of natural phenomena from one state to the other; all of these occurrences owe their confusion and non-uniformity to the persistent flow of time. Plato successfully married the Heraclitean flux with Parmenidean uniformity and "oneness" by connecting the degraded material realm to the higher ontological sphere of the Forms. Here Parmenides' insistence on the illogical nature of change and multiplicity finds a home; Platonic Ideas resurrect the concept of the timelessness and univocality of the world.

Theological time is represented in this idea, and although Negri passes over the example, we can see that the ontological dualism inherent in Plato is reiterated in various forms by subsequent thinkers:



When the practice of theory is directed simply towards the constitution of the transcendent, time is non-existence. Time is multiplicity. Time is a theological scandal. Time is rebellious. Time is only resolved by transcendence and constraint.<sup>52</sup>

The competing trajectory – the *materialist* tradition – is fundamentally different but at the same time guilty for ignoring the substantive, subjective nature of time. According to Negri, “For centuries, time has been thought of – materialistically – from within the categories of space.”<sup>53</sup> The materialistic tradition has with few exceptions insisted on construing time as secondary or subordinate to the geometric rigidity of spatial configurations.

Negri does, however, find some value in certain strains of materialistic thought. Specifically, both Newton and Kant represent for him an attempt at providing a separate, independent, and self-contained expression of temporality. In his words, Kant reads the temporal realm as “the *envelope* of the order of temporal events,”<sup>54</sup> detaching temporality from the geometric, spatial association lauded by many rationalistic thinkers. Still, for Negri Kant does not go far enough: his use of time as a context or form for cognition still retains elements of spiritualistic, theological thinking, elements that neglect to realize the full potential of temporality as a phenomenological modality. It is nonetheless interesting to note that his brief details concerning Kantian thought return full circle to his Marxist analysis.

By sidestepping the conventional, established approach of both theological and materialist interpretations, Marx finally presents time as the mode of production of being, as the expression of being’s very substance. The Kantian “envelope” is quite similar:

time is neither a straightforward measure of quantified segments (as with the “orthodox” Marx); a queer anomaly or incalculable variable (as with the theological approach); or a mere consequence subservient to geometric space (as we see in what Negri calls “materialism”). Time is instead an “*Umwelt*” that encompasses our creative abilities and facilitates our constitutive actions: it runs hand in hand with our creative capacity epitomized in the very act of ontological constructivism. For a fuller account of the connection between these concepts – the aforementioned constructivism and Negrian temporality – we will be greatly benefited by Negri’s “*Kairòs, Alma Venus, Multitudo: nine lessons to myself*,” and an interpretive tool in the form of Cesare Casarino’s “Time Matters: Marx, Negri, Agamben, and the Corporeal.”

## 2.6 TIME-AS-SUBSTANCE

*The Constitution of Time* has provided us with the basic parameters of the philosophical debate on time. As Negri sees it, as with the two competing ontological traditions, temporal concepts can be divided into two antagonistic trajectories (the division in fact corresponds to the ontological categories). Time-as-measure is epitomized in the various traditions that partake in the abstract attempt at superimposing a geometric or spatial structure over the phenomenology of time. In political or economic terms, Negri points to the capitalists’ tendency to quantify the aforementioned temporal *Umwelt*, to divide the work-day into calculable proportions that can be exchanged and measured (in Marxian terms, this superimposition is necessary so as to divest labour of its use-value and convert it to exchange-value, to make labour a marketable commodity). In philosophical terms, Negri points to the various forms of materialism that refuse to consider time as anything but subordinate to spatial concepts.

On the other end of the spectrum, we have already established – at least in embryonic form – the basis of what can be considered Negri’s revolutionary time, the time of production, of constitution, of substance and social being – an irreducible temporality that exists as subjective phenomena rather than cold, mathematical, and independent *noumena*.<sup>55</sup> Here we find ourselves on the cusp of a truly communistic understanding of time; we begin to realize the concept’s importance and also understand its relative tendency to be undervalued by political theorists and philosophers alike.

Casarino similarly underscores both the importance *and* undervaluation of a new concept of time by beginning “Time Matters” with a quote from Agamben:

The original task of a genuine revolution ... is never merely to ‘change the world,’ but also – and first of all – to ‘change time.’ Modern political thought has concentrated its attention on history, and has not elaborated a corresponding conception of time. Even historical materialism has until now neglected to elaborate a concept of time that compares with its concept of history. Because of this omission it has been unwittingly compelled to have recourse to a concept of time dominant in Western culture for centuries, and so harbour, side by side, a revolutionary concept of history and a traditional experience of time.<sup>56</sup>

This orthodox, Western tradition is of course the selfsame tradition Negri emphasizes with reference to materialism. Casarino has his own terminology: he refers to the dominant mode as the “Aristotelian-Hegelian conception of time,” a temporal modality focused on a,

“...lack, negation, and destruction that conspires against the works of human history by bringing them down to ruination and reducing them to a heap of dust

– a time against which humans must fight tirelessly by spatializing, measuring, and quantifying it.”<sup>57</sup>

His reference to Hegel is particularly relevant to our discussion. In line with our previous interpretations, Hegel’s grand narrative built on negation and conflict (and final causes, as with Aristotle) can be considered, in temporal terms, as a prime example of time-as-measure. By segmenting our past into definitive moments of historical conflict and synthesis, by operating *from above* to develop a superimposed schematic that organizes human striving, cooperation, and *Bildung* into moments that exist as mediating steps for the genesis of something higher, the dialectic is certainly guilty of denying the experience of time its constitutive, affirmative qualities, of replacing a purer, fuller account of time (phenomenological time) with a transcendent and abstract structure.

Casarino builds his interpretation of the opposing tradition – what we have been calling time-as-substance – on the shoulders of a revolutionary temporality implicit in the articulation of Epicurean atomism, and, more specifically, Althusser’s interpretation of it. The details of this inspired interpretation are unnecessary for the matter at hand; needless to say, while Negri finds the foundation for constitutive or phenomenological time in the work of Spinoza and, more concretely, Spinozian substance, Casarino and Althusser trace the subversive strain of temporality to the contingency inherent in the atomistic “creation story.” With the deviated course of the atom that caused their paths to swerve and intersect, temporality comes into being; it springs to life out of the formless, atemporal stream of parallel paths and symmetry. As Casarino puts it: “Within this paradigm, time and history are not inimical to each other ... there is no other time outside of a fully human and fully historical time.”<sup>58</sup> And later: “The realm of freedom ... is always

already being constituted here and now in our daily struggle to live the events of our lives as fully contingent and yet urgently necessary at one and the same time...”<sup>59</sup> It becomes obvious that, despite their reliance on divergent philosophical paradigms, Negri (in “The Constitution of Time”) and Casarino (in “Time Matters”) are tracing the outlines of a mode of temporality free from overarching teleology and the transcendence endemic to both Hegelian-Aristotelian temporality and the varieties of metaphysical finalism discussed above.

Nonetheless, we should be careful when drawing parallels. After all, Casarino’s thesis is that Negri and Agamben fall short of a fully realized articulation of time-as-substance, and that this failure is based on their inability to connect time to a concept of corporeality:

In both Agamben and Negri, an attempt to formulate a revolutionary theory of time leads to and ends with the question of corporeality. While both thinkers declare this question to be essential for such a reconceptualization of time, they ultimately fall short of attending to its demanding singularity: their projects are – if in different ways – at once indispensable and insufficient for the symbiotic articulation of a revolutionary time and a revolutionary body, that is, for the production of communism.<sup>60</sup>

What Casarino is suggesting is an inability to link phenomenological time to tangible, concrete phenomena in the material world, to draw a substantial connection between – to put it a certain way – the *subjective* experience of time and the *objective* reality of collective action and praxis. He goes to Marx to look for this correlation, and while his findings are certainly legitimate (brilliant, even), I think it is still possible to find a

comprehensive view *within* Negri, even if only implicitly. Indeed, our analysis thus far has been following a transition from Negri's ontology of immanence to temporality as a mode or iteration of immanence, an example of the anti-transcendence so central to Negri's entire output. At the same time, our intention has been to come full circle by positing praxis – real, corporeal action – as a natural extension of phenomenological time and thereby connect with our opening explanation of ontological constructivism. The path is straightforward: we move from ontological constructivism (immanence) to temporal constructivism (phenomenological time) to corporeal constructivism (praxis). With this last transition we will be able to see that Negri has already provided us with the tools to marry temporality to corporeality.

## 2.7 TIME-AS-PRODUCTION

In “*Kairòs, Alma Venus, Multitudo: nine lessons to myself*,” Negri revives the classical term *kairòs* and uses it in both its original manner (to signify qualitative time in opposition to *chronos*, linear/sequential time) and as a term synonymous with the abovementioned vocabulary – productive time, constitutive time, and phenomenological time. All of these terms essentially represent the same concept; that is, time as a qualitative field of immanence, a mode of being that refuses sequence and measure. As Casarino puts it:

For Negri, the temporality of production – that is, the time most expressive of our productive and creative energies – is at once a temporality that cannot be measured as quantity and yet the temporality that capital endeavors to quantify and to measure all the time so as to control it and employ it in the extraction of surplus value.<sup>61</sup>

We have already considered the process by which capital imposes geometric structure and unity over the heterogeneity of temporal experience. What is important to note is that, despite the almost interchangeable nature of these various names, Negri does use *kairòs* to represent a specific characteristic of time that may be absent when he employs the other terms. Specifically, "...*kairòs* is the instant, that is to say, the quality of the time of the instant, the moment of rupture and opening of temporality. It is the present, but a singular and open present."<sup>62</sup>

*Kairòs*, then, is the *here and now*, the fissure between past and future that defines our moment to moment cognition – a kind of *temporal event horizon*. While this unique characteristic ("being on a razor's edge," "the restlessness of time") certainly sets *kairòs* apart, we can see that, as mentioned, it is simultaneously a reiteration of previous concepts. In "The Constitution of Time" Negri referred to time as an "envelope" that contains our experience of the world. This is certainly the case here, for time is "...at once *measure* and *matter*, *form* and *substance*."<sup>63</sup> It is both the context wherein our experiences take place (his affinity for certain aspects of Kant's first *Critique* becomes apparent) and the very substance of those experiences. But the reason *kairòs* is fundamental for our understanding of constitution and production is that, unlike the other terms, the emphasis on the moment, the instant, transitions very smoothly into our attempt to fold corporeality into the framework of time itself. This is because Negri qualifies this experience not as simply the moment where the present passes over into another present and so on ad infinitum; he qualifies the experience as the precise moment when being is produced in its various permutations and assemblages, when the actions of individuals determine the nature, structure, and texture of reality (the moment is therefore

simultaneous with praxis). It is not just the event horizon that absorbs the future into its own stream; it is the event horizon that molds and transfigures the entire ontological landscape. It is, in the simplest terms, the moment of creation.

For Negri, this concept of temporality is absolutely fundamental. While its importance is certainly an artifact of its relation to production and phenomenological experience, it would not be an overstatement to suggest that *kairòs* is the lynchpin or centerpiece of Negrian ontology. Indeed, if Descartes' methodological skepticism produced the cogito as an Archimedean point, an irrefutable axiom, we can easily draw an analogy regarding Negri's use of *kairòs*.<sup>64</sup> However, pursuing this analogy, we can see that some differences apply, for Negri's understanding of time is even more deep-seated, more fundamental, than Cartesian subjectivity:

For subjectivity is not something that subsists: it is – on the contrary – produced by *kairòs*, and (as we shall see) depends on the connection of monads of *kairòs*. Subjectivity is not before but after *kairòs*. Subjectivity, should one attempt to construct it, is not identifiable other than through the path that leads from the 'here' to the materialist field, and it is precisely on this route that it is produced.<sup>65</sup>

While Descartes begins with an understanding of the self, an experience of the necessity of one's own existence, Negri hinges his entire ontology on the experience of the fullness of being. As Negri points out, subjectivity, like everything else, is a product of this primary and fundamental process. *Kairòs* produces not only the material landscape of objects and their relations, but also the subjective landscape in its fullness and totality. In this sense, we can posit *kairòs* as both the centerpiece of Negri's ontological work and



the full and final articulation of temporality that exists in only embryonic form in *The Constitution of Time* (as constitutive/phenomenological time).

Furthermore, it is essential to underscore and reiterate the concept's relationship with what has been previously termed 'ontological constructivism.' With *kairòs* we find the most substantial and developed articulation of the intersection of ontology and praxis: "We call this process – that is expression of *kairòs* – 'ontological *praxis* of truth'. To say *praxis* is to say force that constructs, or transforms the thing into the name and the name into the thing."<sup>66</sup> Here, the simplest act of creation (a linguistic act) is defined, and Negri consistently refers to its primacy so as to highlight the importance of his interpretation of time. At the temporal event horizon – the very edge of being – the community of "monads of *kairòs*"<sup>67</sup> perform the linguistic act of assigning a name to an object, of producing a "common name" that accurately reflects its reality. This "adequation of name and thing" represents for Negri the construction of communal reality in the form of a shared lexicon, an ontological act in the purest form.

It becomes clear that Negri provides the example of naming to illustrate the comprehensive scope of *kairòs*, for the fundamental act of naming is ontologically constructive in the same way that the more tangible and noticeable acts of rebellion or protesting are. These acts weave new assemblages into the fabric of existence and are therefore acts of creation, acts of ontological construction. In the same way that there is no "outside" to Empire's process of valorization and accumulation, in phenomenological terms there is certainly no "outside" to *kairòs*, no act that does not occur within its boundaries (praxis is therefore an act that takes place within the context of *kairòs*). For scientific and technological production it is the same: "Sciences and technologies are the

tools of *kairòs*, they are born and develop within life and produce the *to-come* on the edge of time.”<sup>68</sup> It is in this way that Negri solves Casarino’s problematic of time and corporeality. The material world is embedded within time as its product. It is an artifact of the “being on the brink” or “being on the razor’s edge” that is *kairòs*.

### 3. SUBJECTIVITY

Solomon's analysis of Hegelian epistemology provided us with another example of the form of mediation central to the Hegelian project. To reiterate: the outside world is ineffable and elusive unless the subject employs a set of epistemological categories to organize empirical data into comprehensible arrangements. There is no irreducible and absolutely necessary set of categories, no cognitive filters that are intrinsic to the very nature of human consciousness (as we find with Kant). Instead, we find a kind of epistemological plasticity in Hegel's assertion that Consciousness generates its own set of rules and parameters, its own internal logic. The result of this ability is that philosophical speculation does not find the *truth* regarding our relationship with the world, but instead creates that relationship by providing a set of concepts that act as epistemological rules – again, we find that “...knowing and philosophizing about knowing are self-confirming activities.”<sup>69</sup>

As stated before, this view represents what can be called a form of epistemological constructivism. It is obvious that Hegel is relying on what we termed ‘epistemic mediation’; however, it is equally obvious that his constructivism – whereby subjects construct their own cognitive rules by philosophizing – differentiates itself from various other forms of idealism. Upon further inspection, we can also see that Hegel's constructivism correlates, at least superficially, to the Negrian form of ontological constructivism that has been so-far presented as a defining element of Negri's revolutionary ontology and the centerpiece of the potential emancipation from the rigid structures of Empire and what Negri calls the process of “capitalist structuration.”

At this point clarity is cardinal: in line with previous statements, Hegel's philosophy still stands as the chief and central antagonist to the subversive, immanent tradition of ontology articulated by Spinoza and rearticulated by Negri. The dialectic is still the clearest example of diachronic finalism<sup>70</sup> – a forced superimposition of rigidity and structure over and above the ontological primacy of collective thought and action. Further, the temporality inherent in this overarching system also continues to stand as an example of quantitative time, time-as-measure. Casarino definitively makes this case. Despite these convictions, it is nonetheless impossible to ignore the fact that Hegel's claims carry some ontological weight. Unlike Kant, he refuses to conceal the “real world” behind a veil that separates *phenomena* and *noumena*, refuses to fall back on the empiricist's urge to distinguish between experience as a “mental event” and the external object as an objective reality.

Solomon references this inherent ontology in two passages. First, he refers to the fact that many interpreters designate Hegel's epistemology the “ontology of knowledge,” and second, he makes the interesting statement that, “It is Hegel, before Marx, who insists that the point of philosophy is to change the world, although he would add that to understand it *is* to change it.”<sup>71</sup> These statements are somewhat elusive, but combined with the rest of his analysis, it becomes clear that Hegel's epistemological constructivism is not simply an act of constructing a cognitive horizon, but an ontological act of constructing a reality. As Consciousness matures, competing epistemological paradigms mature along with it. These paradigms do not provide increasingly more precise tool-sets that enable the subject to perceive reality; on the contrary, the tool-sets are the entire point of the dialectical movement. They are the world that is changing and shifting with

the development and maturation of being – this is one of the defining elements of Hegel's absolute idealism.

It becomes apparent, then, that Hegel's epistemology is, according to my interpretation of Solomon's analysis, at least superficially parallel to Negri's concept of ontological constructivism. Hegel still preoccupies himself with a theory of epistemic mediation, and this preoccupation groups him with Kant in regards to transcendence in the epistemological context, but it is Hegel's focus on phenomenology, on the analysis of Consciousness' experience of the world, that produces a theory of knowledge sharing some basic similarities with the Negrian approach.

The fundamental similarity is that an investigation into the nature of subjectivity procures certain facts about the nature of the material world – and vice versa. Solomon's work has already made this apparent in the context of Hegel. At the same time, it has made it apparent that a better understanding of the political landscape of our contemporary age has already been facilitated by our analysis of *kairòs* and its constitutive elements. If *kairòs* is defined in part as the moment of creative construction, the moment the subject constructs the ontological landscape, then it follows that the specific characteristics of *kairòs* – as a precursor to subjectivity – are incorporated into the material landscape itself. This parallelism is hardly revolutionary: it simply means that the constructive agent imprints the world with certain subjective aspects. It is this point – the parallel between subjectivity and corporeality – that can provide an inroad into an examination of various political realities and their connection to the above discussion.

### 3.2 THE MULTITUDE AND THE HEGEMONY OF IMMATERIAL LABOUR

*Kairòs*' status as a precursor to subjectivity has been discussed above. In "Kairòs, Alma Venus, Multitudo," Negri makes it clear that *kairòs* precedes the development of subjectivity, and it is therefore misleading to refer to *kairòs* as the home of personality or epicenter of feeling and emotion. With this in mind, it is clear that ontological constructivism is an act of subjective as well as objective construction, or, to put it another way, a creation of various mental and physical assemblages. If this is the case, subjectivity is not reducible to a group of universally shared characteristics (as we find in the predominant tradition), but instead exists as a shifting set of tendencies and potentialities that are constitutive of (and constituted by) the material landscape (again we can point to similarities with Hegel's epistemology).<sup>72</sup>

It remains to be seen, then, what specific mode of subjectivity is hegemonic in our contemporary age. Our analysis has so far drawn a connection between *kairòs* and the act of ontological construction, but it has not yet characterized the subjectivity that is a product of this process. The term 'multitude' has been used to signify, in straightforward fashion, the new political subject under capitalist rule. In reality this is an oversimplification – 'multitude' also designates the newly-developed revolutionary subjectivity that defines the political and economic realities of life in the age of global capitalism.

In regards to the straightforward definition of the multitude as a political subject, Hardt and Negri differentiate between this new subject and various antiquated political categories. In the preface for *Multitude*, for instance, they explain that:

As a first approach we should distinguish the multitude at a conceptual level from other notions of social subjects, such as the people, the masses, and the working class. *The people* has traditionally been a unitary conception. The population, of course, is characterized by all kinds of differences, but the people reduces that diversity to a unity and makes of the population a single identity:

‘the people’ is one. The multitude, in contrast, is many<sup>73</sup>

This is the central aspect of the authors’ new political subject: its irreducibility. Unlike previous political categories – categories designed to be unified and subsequently “represented” – the multitude is simultaneously unified and disparate, univocal and polyvocal. It cannot be simplified as a single, homogenous subject, or overly diversified and diffused as a collection of disharmonious and heterogeneous idiosyncrasies. It becomes immediately clear that Hardt and Negri are presenting an unconventional theory: subjectivity is defined as a fundamentally collective entity, a node within a larger matrix or a more substantial and expansive chorus. Also, Negri’s remarks concerning a community or collective of “monads of *kairòs*” becomes more intelligible: subjectivity is not produced autonomously – that is, in seclusion from the outside world and other subjects living within it – but rather in concert with these subjects, in a reciprocal relationship with their own productive capacities.

The authors are obviously cognizant of the concept’s departure from the Cartesian tradition:

Our point of departure is our recognition that the production of subjectivity and the production of the common can together form a spiral, symbiotic relationship. Subjectivity, in other words, is produced through cooperation and

communication and, in turn, this produced subjectivity itself produces new forms of cooperation and communication, which in turn produce new subjectivity, and so forth.<sup>74</sup>

Indeed, this reciprocal subjectivity could not be further from Descartes and Kant. It is possible, however, to point once again to similarities with Hegel's epistemological views (the construction of cognitive paradigms that in turn influence the creation of more paradigms and so on) and continue to cement his unusual status as both an antagonist (in terms of his metaphysical finalism) and a possible progenitor (in terms of his phenomenology). Nonetheless, the point remains that what can be called the collectivity of the multitude, its communal and reciprocal nature, is another defining element of its constitution.

Lastly, the multitude can be defined in terms of the social knowledges and meanings it incorporates, the vast repository of immaterial wealth that is openly shared by the cooperation inherent in the multitude's organization. This "innumerable multiplicity of powers and social knowledges"<sup>75</sup> is another illustration of the fact that the multitude is a cohesive unit capable of producing and sharing information. As a product of its collectivity, it constructs a vast reservoir of technico-scientific knowledge made available as common goods. As we have seen, Lazzarato defined this knowledge as the products of the cooperation between minds, and that is certainly a legitimate definition. Other authors utilize Marx's term 'general intellect' to designate this immaterial wealth, while still other employ the more recent 'mass intellectuality,' "the collective intelligence and accumulated intellectual powers that extend horizontally across society."<sup>76</sup>



It is important to note that, whatever term is employed, the concept of immaterial goods as a defining characteristic of the multitude leads us back into an analysis of the reciprocity between the constructive agent and the material field. To put it another way, the multitude's capacity to produce and share constellations of knowledge goes hand in hand with the actual existence of immaterial labour as the hegemonic form of production in capitalist society. The multitude's formation of a collective subjectivity presents itself as the ontological reality that in turn "instructs" the formation of mechanisms of capture and control that inevitably contain its revolutionary potential. Thus, mass intellectuality is largely put to use in the service of capital, in the service of accumulation and exploitation.

At the same time, it is also true that immaterial labour – the labour that produces the cultural, informational aspect of the commodity – provides a kind of revolutionary potential that is unique to the "social worker." Again, this potential is a product of the multitude's organizational constitution, its inherent capacity to communicate and construct.

### 3.3 THE GENEALOGY OF REVOLUTION

Now that we have defined the multitude in terms of its *irreducibility*, *collectivity*, and *mass intellectuality*, we can turn to Negri's three phases of capitalist development to better understand the position of the multitude within a historical lineage. At the same time, this analysis will lead us towards a fuller account of Negri's "constituent republic," the conditions required for its formation, and the relationship between this republic and the roles of *kairòs*, ontological construction, and the multitude.

Negri divides the industrial revolution (and, in general, the overall development of capitalism) into three distinct phases. The first phase begins in 1848 with the birth of “large-scale industry”: “...the worker is for the first time treated within the command of machinery and becomes an appendage of the machinery itself.”<sup>77</sup> Despite being intricately tied to the factory process, the newly organized “professional worker” has an in-depth understanding of the entire productive cycle and is therefore not completely alienated from the products of labour. The fact that Negri ties the beginning of this phase to the European revolutions of 1848 is a reminder that, once again, the development of capitalistic processes is not independent but instead a reactionary subsumption of a primary social development. Once again, the economic transformation in the mode of production finds its genesis in a thoroughly social phenomenon.

The second phase of development begins with the Russian revolution of 1917: It can be characterized as follows: ... From the point of view of laboring processes, there is a new technical composition of the proletariat, and that is a type of labor force made completely abstract with respect to the industrial activity to which it is attached and, as such, the labor force is reorganized by Taylorism. Great masses of workers, who are thus ‘dequalified,’ are inserted in labor processes which are both extremely alienating and complex. The ‘mass worker’ loses the knowledge of the cycle.<sup>78</sup>

The mass worker is in this phase alienated from the products of labour to the highest degree. The mathematical fascism of the Taylorist model of production strips labour of any substance or joy and relegates workers to positions of banality and blind subservience. Just as the first phase ends when the mode of production reaches a kind of

illogical absurdity (the increasing demand for material goods and employment), the period of the mass worker ends in a similar crisis (with the computerization of society and corresponding open lines of global communication).

According to Negri, this crisis ushers in the age of the social worker which starts in the years following the Parisian revolution in 1968. The proletariat is no longer forced to comply with the increased abstraction of labour; instead, the situation is inverted. The social worker is overexposed to the conditions of work and expected to understand all facets of the corporate process. Finally, the social worker's labour is increasingly defined by the hegemony of immaterial labour, the production of immaterial products, or, more precisely, the production of "...ideas, symbols, codes, texts, linguistic figures, images, and other such products."<sup>79</sup> It is with this development that the emergence of the multitude is confirmed. In Negri's interpretation, 1968 stands as the moment when a set of revolutionary potentials and demands for the reconfiguration of labour coalesced into a new form of subjectivity.

As stated, the transition from one developmental phase to the next is characterized by a crisis, the point at which the *mode of production* (capitalism) is incapable of managing the *forces of production* (tools, scientific knowledge etc.). When the former becomes an absurdity in the light of the latter, when the logic of capitalism can no longer adequately subsume the nuances of the social sphere, a transition into a new phase of economic development is imminent. According to Negri, various conditions already point to an imminent and inevitable transition – for example, the inability of the preexisting theory of value to account for the abolition of the distinction between labour time and leisure time.

In light of Negri's interpretation of history, then, it becomes possible to define the multitude as a historical agent demanding transition and change, a revolutionary subjectivity revolting against the various absurdities and injustices of our contemporary landscape, one dominated by the invasion of capital into every aspect of social life (*real subsumption*). If *kairòs* acts as the centerpiece of Negri's understanding of ontology and time, real subsumption stands as the most essential concept in relation to his politics. This is not to say that the latter acts, like *kairòs*, as a foundational mode of being and is therefore positive and constructive. Instead, real subsumption is the social reality that defines our political landscape and cultural horizon. Negri's understanding of the political sphere, in this sense, is a product of his understanding of the tendency for capitalist processes to expand and appropriate all aspects of life. It is this reality that Negri continuously sought to articulate and understand, and because of this it can be seen that his other concepts orient around this initial interpretation.

We have already dealt with this concept in some detail; nevertheless, it will perhaps help to reiterate some basic tenets. As Negri repeatedly asserts, there is no outside to Empire. This is because Empire, as a new form of polyvocal sovereignty tied to capitalist accumulation, expands so as to include within its own structure every aspect of social existence. In Mandarini's words:

Empire operates by folding back over and appropriating the productivity of the multitude, 'stripping from the social process of productive cooperation the command over its own functioning [...] closing social productive power within the griddings of the system of Power.'<sup>80</sup>

It is clear then that the dominating form of capitalism is one defined by expansion and appropriation. As explained earlier, Negri posits the ontological force of the multitude (*potentia*) as the antagonist to this form of expansionism and hierarchy (*potestas*), but we can now proceed to analyze in more detail the specific forms these revolutionary potentialities can take, and, perhaps more importantly, how they are conditioned or determined by the totalizing grasp of real subsumption.

Throughout *Multitude* – not to mention their other works – Hardt and Negri consistently underscore the fact that, despite their apparent disharmony, contemporary resistances are unified in a complex network-structure. In other words, postmodernity has witnessed the genesis of a new form of opposition, a form that transcends the two varieties of resistance that dominated modernity. The protests and revolts of the twentieth century were either a) oriented around a unifying identity/purpose, or b) heterogeneous and disjointed. In the case of the former, the more traditional mode, “organization is based on the identity of the struggle, and its unity is organized under central leadership, such as the party.” Here the examples are numerous, and hardly need mentioning. As concerns the latter, revolts largely epitomized by movements concerning race, gender, and sexuality, the emphasis is clearly in binary opposition to the traditional paradigm: the focus is on independent, self-ruling factions with no central, anchoring management.<sup>81</sup> Today’s resistances bypass the binary either/or of modernity by being simultaneously homogenous and heterogeneous, centered and disconnected, univocal and polyvocal. The authors reference the 2001 revolt in Argentina as an example: it was both a product of Argentina’s specific history and, in the context of macroeconomics, incorporated in the global struggles against “...the neoliberal policies of the IMF.”<sup>82</sup> In

light of this, it can be seen that the postmodern form of resistance – the network resistance of the multitude – is a product of a new set of social, cultural, political, and economic circumstances, and is therefore emblematic of a genealogical transferal, an epochal transition that has sent us spiraling into a new era defined in part by a new set of potentialities.

To continue this line of inquiry, it is worthwhile to quote the appearance of a similar idea in *Empire* at length:

We ought to be able to recognize that this is not the appearance of a new cycle of internationalist struggles, but rather the emergence of a new quality of social movements. We ought to be able to recognize, in other words, the fundamentally new characteristics these struggles all present, despite their radical diversity. First, each struggle, though firmly rooted in local conditions, leaps immediately to the global level and attacks the imperial constitution in its generality. Second, all the struggles destroy the traditional distinction between economic and political struggles. The struggles are at once economic, political, and cultural – and hence they are biopolitical struggles, struggles over the form of life. They are constituent struggles, creating new public spaces and new forms of community.<sup>83</sup>

The claim that contemporary rebellions are, no matter what their content, always directed towards the same opponent is, at least on a superficial level, highly puzzling. Hardt and Negri are essentially claiming that, for example, a student rebellion against tuition fees is intricately tied to a feminist protest against abortion legislation. The claim, however, gains some legitimacy in the context of real subsumption. If capitalist accumulation has

expanded so as to invest itself in all forms and modalities of existence as a negative influence, a rebellion against a local issue is simultaneously a rebellion against the global issue of capitalist expansion. The student enticed to revolt against tuition fees is simultaneously rebelling against the capitalist mechanisms that determine those fees (i.e. he is revolting on both the local and global levels).

As has been shown in the preceding argument, these revolts are at the same time the expressions of cooperating modal-points of *kairòs*, or as Negri phrases it, a community or society of *kairòs*; that is, individuals involved in the ontologically constitutive act of praxis. As stated before, Negri's entire project is a reaffirmation of the fact that ontology cannot be divorced from social construction and that the fabric of reality is produced, not from above, but from the lower depths of social interaction and creation. His insistence that the constitution of our ontological horizon is a fundamentally social and collective act is the overriding reason that his philosophical and political views work in perfect concert and the reason that his analysis of our ontological landscape provides the philosophical foundations for an improved political landscape.

## CONCLUSION: CONSTITUENT REPUBLIC

By returning to a brief analysis of our contemporary political conditions it is hoped that a general picture of Negri's philosophical and political approaches has been accurately sketched. As far as a "constituent republic" is concerned, it is understood that the preceding work has left the concept ambiguous and unclear. This is a direct result of the fact that Negri's project is primarily aimed at, first, the neo-Marxian examination of late capitalism's processes and Empire's overall structure, and, second, the theoretical establishment of a new political subject. This dual approach is evidenced in a series of political and theoretical dichotomies: Empire/multitude, *potestas/potentia*, transcendence/immanence, bourgeoisie/proletariat, capitalism/communism, and so on. This is not to say that Negri is a slave to dualistic thinking; in fact, his theoretical work successfully deconstructs a number of false dichotomies, such as the mythology of the antiquated democracy/communism binary that plagued the era of the Cold War and poisoned potential avenues for political discussion and debate.

What is instead being suggested is that Negri's focus on the conflict between ontological immanence and abstract transcendence permeates the entirety of his work. In its most general and abstract articulation, this dualism functions as a kind of organizing principle, an interpretive tool that can clearly delineate the function and position of his core concepts. At the same time, the dualism betrays his Marxist heritage – the exclusive focus on proletarian revolt against capitalism and its institutions. More importantly, what is certain is that these dualisms, at least on the political level, are capable of being deconstructed in the act of revolution against the side of Power or *potestas*. It is this potential for revolt and subsequent freedom that lends the project of neo-Marxism and



other political alternatives (for in Negri's mind, they are linked) an air of urgency and resolve that is lacking in other philosophical pursuits.

To return to the concept of a constituent republic, to the hypothetical future of post-capitalism, although Negri only provides the possible conditions for this transition instead of the actual political constitution itself, we are nonetheless provided with some relatively vital information in "Constituent Republic." First, Negri defines the constitution passed down by our ancestors: "To be specific, since the 1930s, in the countries of the capitalist West, there has begun to develop a constitutional system that we would call the 'Fordist' constitution, or the laborist Welfare State constitution."<sup>84</sup> This agreement was based on an understanding between the working class (seeking a welfare system) and the "national bourgeoisie" (seeking workers and, more generally, industrial progress). In other words, the constitution is based on a "contract" between the owners of the means of production and the workers who employ those means of production on a daily basis. In line with the increasing demands of the capitalist system and the developing requirements of the worker, the constitution went into crisis (according to Negri, it becomes problematized in 1968).

In his words:

The juridico-constitutional system based on the Fordist compromise, strengthened by the constituent agreement between the national bourgeoisie and the industrial working class, and overdetermined by the conflict between the Soviet and U.S. superpowers (symbolic representations of the two conflicting parties on the stage of each individual nation) has thus run out its time.<sup>85</sup>

This, then, is the state of our modern constitution – it exists as an outmoded representation of a previous era. The beginnings of a new republic will therefore have to be inaugurated by the formulation of a new constitution that represents the realities of modern production and the social relationships that are intrinsic to this mode.

Negri goes on to explicate the characteristics of the “new proletariat,” a task that he and various associated authors have pursued since their time in Italy. According to Negri, “The political task of arriving at a definition of the post-Fordist proletariat is by now well advanced. This proletariat embodies a substantial section of the working class that has been restructured within processes of production that are automated and computer controlled.”<sup>86</sup> His point is that the social reality of immaterial labour demands a reevaluation of Marx’s limited category *proletariat*. It must be expanded, in other words, to include everyone struggling under the hegemony of capitalist rule, everyone engaged in the act of self-valorization and ontological construction. This is just one example of Negri’s attempt to “modernize” Marx. Indeed, the latter does come equipped with a plethora of pejorative baggage, some of which is deserved (the position’s obvious Eurocentricism) and some which is not (the ignorance and conceptual confusion linking it to, for example, National Socialism). Needless to say, one of Negri’s primary tasks is to reinterpret and reformulate Marxist theory and make it compatible with modernity, make it capable of confronting the reality of global capitalism. Whether he has been successful – or whether this task is even achievable at all – is a difficult question.

Negri’s conclusion in “Constituent Republic” is that the ideal society must paradoxically avoid a finalized constitution altogether. It must pursue the ideal of continual constitutional reproduction:

The constitutional paradox of the constituent Republic consists in the fact that the constituent process never closes, that the revolution does not come to an end, that constitutional law and ordinary law refer back to one single source and are developed unitarily within a single democratic procedure.<sup>87</sup>

Indeed, a future republic will have to be *founded* on the creative tendencies of the multitude, on its network formation, reciprocity, and mass intellectuality. At the same time, contemporary revolts (and, in general, disillusionment) point to the demand for a political system free from transcendent hierarchy, free from the hollow abstractions of capitalist accumulation and the parasitical nature of Empire. A post-Fordist constitution will have to be based on these fundamental insights.

Negri provides a conceptual toolbox capable of pushing for this political transformation, a set of theoretical positions that consistently emphasize the primacy of the political subject over and above the various forms of political and philosophical finalism that have dominated much of Western thought since Plato. As explained above, varieties of philosophical transcendence take one of two forms: either a version of epistemic mediation that abolishes the immediacy of the subject's relationship with the world (as we see most obviously in Kant) or a version of metaphysical transcendence that superimposes an abstract schema over the material world, relegating the latter to a position of lesser ontological status (as we see most obviously in Plato and Hegel). Negri's central concept of ontological constructivism provides an alternative model that escapes the pitfalls of hierarchy and abstraction. Here, reality is not constructed from above but from below; it is constructed by the collective action of subjects engaged in the struggle for autonomy and self-valorization.

This is absolutely central to Negri's work – revolution and insurrection are the purest instances of the formulation of subjectivity. As Negri puts it, "...the deconstruction of value is the matrix of subjectivity."<sup>88</sup> The critique of Power and its hollow logic is simultaneously the construction of an antagonistic subjectivity that finds its revolutionary potential in the process of labour itself. This was one of Marx's keenest insights – that "living labour" resides in the heart of the capitalist monopoly as the epicenter of community, innovation, and entrepreneurial insight, that this labour is an independent, autonomous force capable of achieving true freedom and true democracy.

Negri has also shown that the irreducible unit of *kairòs* – as the moment of creative construction and the foundation of subjectivity – refuses the structuralism of quantitative time as both an economic theory of value and a purely philosophical position. Instead, the temporal horizon or *Umwelt* is advanced as the phenomenological alternative to the various attempts at understanding temporality according to linear, mathematical models.

These three concepts – *kairòs*, ontological constructivism, and multitude – are the defining elements of Negri's ontology and the very core of his political approach. As explained at the outset, they connect praxis and ontology in a manner that renders the conventional distinction between theory and practice unintelligible.

Hardt defines self-valorization as,

...an alternative social structure of value that is founded not on the production of surplus value but on the collective needs and desires of the producing community ... Self-valorization is also conceived in a more philosophical

framework as the social processes that constitute an alternative and autonomous collective subjectivity within and against capitalist society.<sup>89</sup>

As epitomized in this definition, the concept of self-valorization, a concept that was integral to the Italian intellectual movements of the sixties and seventies, encompasses the entirety of not only Negri's pursuits but the resistances and revolutions of a wide range of academic and non-academic struggles against the mode of capitalist valorization. In fact, to position oneself *against* capitalism at all is to contribute in some way to the process of constructing alternative social forms and structures that damage the integrity of capital itself. As social development pushes forward, it is entirely likely that we will witness a rupture in the system of totalizing control as it reaches its limit and is incapable of folding back, in a retrospective fashion, onto the ontologically primary constructions and arrangements of the multitude. Marx believed he would witness this crisis – he was, of course, wrong. But Marx was mistaking infantile capitalism for a form of mature, developed capitalism. Our version of global or late capitalism may not be the end of the system, but it surely represents a fully developed phase of the mode of production.

Again, real subsumption renders almost any resistance a resistance against capitalism. If capitalism has invaded all aspect of the social sphere, then a rebellion against any part of life is a rebellion, at least in part, against capitalist processes. In “A Resistance Role for Marxism in the Belly of the Beast,” Maivân Clech Lãm comes to a similar conclusion concerning the seeming disharmony and irreconcilability of our revolutionary pursuits:

By now, however, we are all entrapped by the single world-system, variously called late, global, or global industrial capitalism. Our critiques of it therefore

spring necessarily from a place of contamination and at least partial accommodation. Nevertheless, all of the entrapped became so via different histories, subsist in different compartments of the belly, and have different knowledges of the tormentor which, if pooled, could enhance their ability to so irritate the beast as to hopefully make it cough them up and expire.<sup>90</sup>

The universality of our contemporary dilemma, the fact that the entire social sphere exists in the belly of the beast, renders our efforts necessary and connected. The network structure of the multitude (described above) also suggests that a kind of subjective interconnectedness is rendering our political conflicts increasingly universal: if the individual subject is determined in part by the subjectivities surrounding him, if his nature is defined communally (as it is with the multitude), then perhaps we are witnessing the genesis of a new kind of struggle. This will not make the struggle any easier to contest. Above all else, these dilemmas perhaps necessitate the continued pursuit of philosophical trajectories that oppose themselves to transcendence in its various forms.

In the context of *this* project it has only been possible to compare Negri's approach with a small number of oppositional theories, thereby gaining some insight into the conflict and antagonism at the heart of Negri's output. What has been excluded with this choice is the more constructive act of tracing a philosophical lineage of historical perspectives that exist within what can be called the 'subversive' tradition of ontology, metaphysics, and epistemology. Of course, Negri's debt to Spinoza is impossible to ignore, but there are clear similarities with (to name a few) Epicurus, Machiavelli, and Heidegger, and the project of clearly tracing lines of influence and correspondence would be anything but superfluous. Indeed, in the face of the predominance of the established,

canonical traditions in philosophy (some of which have been outlined here) the exploration of an alternative philosophical history would be of great value.

At the same time, an attempt to put some of Negri's concepts to practical use in the political sphere could provide interesting results. More specifically, pointing in the direction of an effective critique of a capitalistic institution like the IMF is increasingly plausible, at least from the Negrian standpoint. Indeed, it is possible to trace the outlines of such a critique from the analysis thus far. There are two central aspects of this outline: a) the IMF (or any other supranational economic institution) is an economic organization operating according to a top-down model transcendent in nature. Its mandate since its inauguration at Bretton Woods has been to impose an alien economic logic (largely in the form of neo-liberal privatization) on economies lagging behind the global tendency towards a supranational market. This attempt at transcendent operation, like the corporations that operate the same way, runs contrary to the primacy of the multitude's constitutive, biopolitical production. Lastly, b) privatization itself violates – in a very direct way – the nature of common goods and immaterial labour. Therefore, institutions that advocate such an agenda are ignoring the genealogical shift that has made cooperative, immaterial labour the new hegemonic form of production. Unfortunately, this is only the brief framework of a critique-in-progress, but its potential effectiveness is strongly aided by the philosophical underpinnings provided by Negri's immanent ontology.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Paolo Virno. “The Ambivalence of Disenchantment”, in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics (Theory Out of Bounds)*. eds., Michael Hardt and Paolo Virno, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 14.5.

<sup>2</sup> Paolo Virno. “The Ambivalence of Disenchantment”, p. 14.5.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Hardt. “The Art of Organization”. Visited: 15 September 2006.

<http://www.duke.edu/~hardt/Dissertation/INTRO.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Of course, this analogue merely serves as a loose comparison. Still, astrophysical observations of this kind can add some lucidity to Negri’s ontological observations, and their usefulness has been employed by various authors – like Deleuze and Guattari – in an attempt to shed light on various “postmodern” concepts and trajectories.

<sup>5</sup> Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt. *Empire*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 28.

<sup>6</sup> Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt. *Empire*. p. 78-79.

<sup>7</sup> Negri and Hardt do not follow this line of critique in *Empire*. They instead consider Hegel’s overarching structure, his ontological movement toward Absolute Being, the defining example of ontological transcendence: “It is true that Hegel restores the horizon of immanence and takes away the uncertainty of knowledge, the irresolution of action, and the fideist opening of Kantianism. The immanence Hegel restores, however, is really a blind immanence in which the potentiality of the multitude is denied and subsumed in the allegory of the diving order.” (Hardt/Negri *Empire* 82) Nonetheless, considering the thrust of their critique of Kant, Hegel’s epistemology is equally suspect.

<sup>8</sup> Joseph C. Flay. “Time in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*”. p. 266.



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<sup>9</sup> Robert C. Solomon. "Hegel's Epistemology", in *From Hegel to Existentialism*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 25.

<sup>10</sup> Robert C. Solomon. "Hegel's Epistemology". p. 27.

<sup>11</sup> Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt. *Empire*. p. 80-81.

<sup>12</sup> Regarding this term, Hardt and Negri seem to, at least in *Empire*, use 'transcendent' and 'transcendental' interchangeably. To avoid confusion, I will adhere to the Kantian distinction which has become commonplace, using 'transcendent' to signify metaphysical phenomena that transcend ordinary experience (e.g. Plato's Forms) and 'transcendental' when referring to the a priori conditions for the possibility of experience (e.g. Kant's categories).

<sup>13</sup> Antonio Negri. *The Savage Anomaly*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 130.

<sup>14</sup> In *The Savage Anomaly*, Negri does not offer any examples. Still, considering his description of the term and the kind of philosophical approach Spinoza was reacting against, it will be safe to posit Plato as a target of the critique.

<sup>15</sup> Antonio Negri. *The Savage Anomaly*. p. 133.

<sup>16</sup> Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt. *Empire*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001). p. xi.

<sup>17</sup> Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt. *Empire*. p. 309.

<sup>18</sup> Matteo Mandarinini (ed). *Time for Revolution*. (New York: Continuum, 2003), p. ix.

<sup>19</sup> Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt. *Empire*. p. 310.

<sup>20</sup> Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt. *Empire*. p. 311.

<sup>21</sup> The term ‘multitude’ will be defined in more detail in section 3. For now, the term can be seen to signify the group of political agents struggling in concert against capitalistic exploitation. The term serves a fundamental role in Negri’s work: it is his primary term for “the masses” or “the people,” but it carries none of the political baggage of these more conventional categories. The multitude, as a concept, is also situated alongside a specific (and revolutionary) concept of subjectivity, but this aspect will be dealt with in section 3.

<sup>22</sup> Antonio Negri. “Twenty Theses on Marx”, in *Marxism Beyond Marxism*. eds., Saree Makdisi, Cesare Casarino, and Rebecca E. Karl, (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 158.

<sup>23</sup> G. W. F. Hegel. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> G. W. F. Hegel. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. p. 12.

<sup>25</sup> G. W. F. Hegel. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. p. 37.

<sup>26</sup> G. W. F. Hegel. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. p. 37.

<sup>27</sup> G. W. F. Hegel. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. p. 11.

<sup>28</sup> Antonio Negri. *The Savage Anomaly*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 65.

<sup>29</sup> Antonio Negri. *The Savage Anomaly*. p. 60.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Hardt. “The Art of Organization”. Visited: 15 September 2006.

<http://www.duke.edu/~hardt/Dissertation/Berg1.htm>

<sup>31</sup> This solution to the problem is tentative. A dedicated Hegelian could argue than any solution – whether it be ontological or not – is capable of being subsumed by the totalizing nature of Hegel’s system. The argument seems to continuously fall back on the

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question of whether Hegel's system is truly a meta-theory and whether Hegelianism itself is included within the dialectical movement.

<sup>32</sup> Maurizio Lazzarato. "From Capital Labour to Capital Life". p. 188.

<sup>33</sup> Maurizio Lazzarato. "From Capital Labour to Capital Life". p. 188.

<sup>34</sup> Maurizio Lazzarato. "From Capital Labour to Capital Life". p. 191.

<sup>35</sup> It should be emphasized, however, that Leibniz avoids the problem of determinism by emphasizing the difference between *certainty* and *necessity*: just because future events are deemed certain (i.e. a substance contains within itself its own pre-set life, its own future) does not mean that such events are necessary (i.e. it is equally possible for one event to happen as opposed to another): "Everyone grants that future contingents are certain, since God foresees them, but we do not concede that they are necessary on that account." (Leibniz 12)

<sup>36</sup> G. W. Leibniz. "Discourse on Metaphysics", in *Discourse on Metaphysics and Other Essays*. trans., Daniel Garber and Roger Ariew, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1991), p. 12.

<sup>37</sup> Maurizio Lazzarato. "From Capital Labour to Capital Life". p. 188.

<sup>38</sup> Maurizio Lazzarato. "From Capital Labour to Capital Life". p. 197.

<sup>39</sup> Maurizio Lazzarato. "From Capital Labour to Capital Life". p. 199.

<sup>40</sup> Maurizio Lazzarato. "From Capital Labour to Capital Life". p. 199.

<sup>41</sup> Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt. *Multitude*. (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004), p. 108.

<sup>42</sup> Maurizio Lazzarato. "From Capital Labour to Capital Life". p. 193.

<sup>43</sup> G. W. Leibniz. "Discourse on Metaphysics". p. 15.

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<sup>44</sup> G. W. Leibniz. “Discourse on Metaphysics”. p. 15.

<sup>45</sup> G. W. Leibniz. “On the Ultimate Origination of Things”, in *Discourse on Metaphysics and Other Essays*. trans., Daniel Garber and Roger Ariew, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1991), p. 41.

<sup>46</sup> Antonio Negri. *The Savage Anomaly*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 45.

<sup>47</sup> Antonio Negri. *The Savage Anomaly*. p. 52.

<sup>48</sup> In *Empire* and *Multitude* the authors primarily employ the term “biopower” to emphasize the specific manner in which the new version of sovereignty – Empire – has invested itself in every aspect of life, including reproduction.

<sup>49</sup> Antonio Negri. “The Constitution of Time”, in *Time for Revolution*. ed., Matteo Mandarini, (New York: Continuum, 2003), p. 29.

<sup>50</sup> Antonio Negri. “The Constitution of Time”. p. 33.

<sup>51</sup> The term ‘substance’ is used here in a limited fashion to signify not the traditional metaphysical Substance (the component part or parts of reality) but only the fact that time is a substantial component of experience and, more broadly, existence. Negri employs the term in the same manner.

<sup>52</sup> Antonio Negri. “The Constitution of Time”. p. 29.

<sup>53</sup> Antonio Negri. “The Constitution of Time”. p. 30.

<sup>54</sup> Antonio Negri. “The Constitution of Time”. p. 31.

<sup>55</sup> The Kantian use of “noumena” is useful at this point simply to signify a vast distance from subjective processes. For Kant, the thing-in-itself is unknowable precisely because it does not appear within the fundamental context of space and time. The materialist

interpretation construes time, similarly, as a kind of noumena, as chronological sequence divorced from experience and subjectivity.

<sup>56</sup> Cesare Casarino. "Time Matters: Marx, Negri, Agamben, and the Corporeal". p. 185.

<sup>57</sup> Cesare Casarino. "Time Matters". p. 186.

<sup>58</sup> Cesare Casarino. "Time Matters". p. 188.

<sup>59</sup> Cesare Casarino. "Time Matters". p. 188.

<sup>60</sup> Cesare Casarino. "Time Matters". p. 196.

<sup>61</sup> Cesare Casarino. "Time Matters". p. 190.

<sup>62</sup> Antonio Negri. "Kairòs, Alma Venus, Multitudo: nine lessons to myself", in *Time for Revolution*. ed., Matteo Mandarini, (New York: Continuum, 2003), p. 143.

<sup>63</sup> Antonio Negri. "The Constitution of Time". p. 24.

<sup>64</sup> The similarity with Descartes' use of the term "Archimedean point" is loose. Negri does not posit *kairòs* as an irrefutable truth (although he would hardly disagree with its legitimacy). The concept does, however, act as the fundamental support of his ontological views, and in this sense we can reference its similarity to the *cogito*.

<sup>65</sup> Antonio Negri. "Kairòs, Alma Venus, Multitudo". p. 162.

<sup>66</sup> Antonio Negri. "Kairòs, Alma Venus, Multitudo". p. 151.

<sup>67</sup> Negri employs this interesting phrase to emphasize his idea that each individual's *kairòs*, each arrow of time, is, like a monad, irreducible and capable of entering into harmonious collections and arrangements. As we will see, Negri's understanding of community and politics is in part founded on this idea.

<sup>68</sup> Antonio Negri. "Kairòs, Alma Venus, Multitudo". p. 154.

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<sup>69</sup> Robert C. Solomon. "Hegel's Epistemology", in *From Hegel to Existentialism*.

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 25.

<sup>70</sup> The terms 'diachronic' and 'synchronic' were employed in the second part of the introduction to distinguish Hegelian from Platonic finalism. The former presents a form of ontological gradation that changes and shifts over the lifespan of Consciousness' development and maturation: it is therefore diachronic. Plato's prefigured structure of Forms is timeless and unchanging: it is therefore synchronic. The terms are mainly utilized in linguistics but their general meaning can be applied here.

<sup>71</sup> Robert C. Solomon. "Hegel's Epistemology". p. 28.

<sup>72</sup> The concept of *kairòs* as a moment of unrealized potential, the birth of a specific subjectivity and ontology, shares some similarity with the Deluzian concept of the Body without Organs. The later is construed, primarily in *A Thousand Plateaus*, as the virtual aspect of the body, the body before it is configured into a specific arrangement of habits and movements. In a similar respect, *kairòs* can be interpreted as the virtual aspect of subjectivity.

<sup>73</sup> Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt. *Multitude*. (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004), p. xiv.

<sup>74</sup> Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt. *Multitude*. p. 189.

<sup>75</sup> Antonio Negri. "Twenty Theses on Marx", in *Marxism Beyond Marxism*. eds., Saree Makdisi, Cesare Casarino, and Rebecca E. Karl, (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 159.

<sup>76</sup> Michael Hardt. *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics (Theory Out of Bounds)*. eds., Michael Hardt and Paolo Virno, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 262.3.

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- <sup>77</sup> Antonio Negri. "Twenty Theses on Marx". p. 154.
- <sup>78</sup> Antonio Negri. "Twenty Theses on Marx". p. 155.
- <sup>79</sup> Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt. *Multitude*. p. 108.
- <sup>80</sup> Matteo Mandarini (ed). *Time for Revolution*. (New York: Continuum, 2003), p. 17.
- <sup>81</sup> Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt. *Multitude*. p. 217.
- <sup>82</sup> Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt. *Multitude*. p. 216.
- <sup>83</sup> Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt. *Empire*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 56.
- <sup>84</sup> Antonio Negri. "Constituent Republic", in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics (Theory Out of Bounds)*. eds., Michael Hardt and Paolo Virno, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 214.5.
- <sup>85</sup> Antonio Negri. "Constituent Republic". p. 214.5.
- <sup>86</sup> Antonio Negri. "Constituent Republic". p. 216.7.
- <sup>87</sup> Antonio Negri. "Constituent Republic". p. 220.1
- <sup>88</sup> Antonio Negri. "Twenty Theses on Marx", in *Marxism Beyond Marxism*. eds., Saree Makdisi, Cesare Casarino, and Rebecca E. Karl, (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 159.
- <sup>89</sup> Michael Hardt (ed.). *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics (Theory Out of Bounds)*. eds., Michael Hardt and Paolo Virno, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 262.3.
- <sup>90</sup> Maivân Clech Lãm. "A Resistance Role for Marxism in the Belly of the Beast" in *Marxism Beyond Marxism*. eds., Saree Makdisi, Cesare Casarino, and Rebecca E. Karl, (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 256.