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From the age of immanence to the autonomy of the political: (Post)operaismo in theory and practice

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Abstract

This article critically examines the transition from Marx to Spinoza within Antonio Negri's postoperaist thought and explores a potential alternative rooted in Mario Tronti's concept of the 'autonomy of the political'. In Negri's postoperaismo, the embrace of Spinoza reevaluates Marx's critique of political economy through an optimistic lens, suggesting a tendency beyond capitalism. However, Negri's embrace of a Spinozian plane of immanence entails a problematic affirmation of what exists. The article argues that Negri's worldview, despite its beginnings, ends up resembling deterministic historical materialism. While critical theory exposes flaws in Negri's theory, it falls short in providing a practical alternative. Returning to Negri's interpretation of Spinoza's Political Treatise uncovers earlier arguments, rooted in paradoxes inherent to practical politics. However, reliance on the concept of the multitude highlights deeper issues in Negri's approach. Rather than adhering to postoperaismo or critical theory, the article suggests an alternative in Tronti's journey from operaismo, particularly in the concept of the 'autonomy of the political'. Notwithstanding critiques, this attempted liberation from Marxist determinism allows for a clearer confrontation with politics. The article concludes that Hardt and Negri's recent critical engagement with this concept advances their arguments but does not entirely overcome inherent limitations in their approach.

Keywords

postoperaismo, Negri, Tronti, Spinoza, critical theory, the political

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1. Introduction: Exiles, lost texts and turning points

Over the course of writing and revising this article, both its main inspirations, Antonio Negri and Mario Tronti, sadly passed away, leaving a legacy of militant struggle and radical theory. Through the twists and turns of their thought and practice, Negri and Tronti could sustain a lifetime's intellectual work. The suppleness of their theory, unafraid to respond to the demands of political action, generates through provocation and critique more productive disagreements and conversations than most other currents of contemporary thought combined. As well as a willingness to get their hands dirty with the forces of political action, their thinking and writing was marked by an equal willingness to dirty its hands with the forces of theoretical reaction, liberally learning from and engaging with the proximity of reactionary thought to political power. Whilst their derivation from anything intrinsic to a specific national 'difference' is hotly contested, there are identifiable themes core to the Italian 'living thought' of which Negri and Tronti are part, among them the ontological status of the negative, the immanent character of antagonism, and the intractable persistence of conflict.[1]

Both Negri and Tronti reckon with the 'source of [the] tradition' of 'Italian thought on politics', the 'Machiavellian point of view' that there is 'no reality other than the effectual one of the conflict between powers and interests', whereby 'true peace, like true justice, is not feasible in the earthly city…torn by instincts and desires'. Despite this shared foundation, Tronti traced a line Machiavelli–Hobbes–Schmitt from this starting point, and Negri traced his Machiavelli–Spinoza–Marx and Foucault. As we shall see, 'when faced with the impossibility of reconciling immanence and conflict, Tronti chose conflict; Negri, by contrast, chose immanence, sacrificing the political form of conflict in favour of the social being'.[2] It is this line running through their 'living thought' that this article focuses on.

The article first examines the implications for thought and practice in how Negri's appropriation of Spinoza, bolted onto revisionist interpretations of Marx, presents an immanentist view of social change hinged on the development of the forces of production and the new class subjectivities it brings into being. The basis for this reconciliation of Marx and Spinoza is an optimistic portrayal of the possibilities of social transformation. The theoretical reconstruction undertaken in this article surveys the philosophical resources through which this optimism is justified intellectually. In so doing, it focuses specifically on developments in Negri's thought which track his own life on the late-twentieth-century European left, specifically around a prison sentence bridging his reevaluation of Marx in his 1978 lectures on Marx's *Grundrisse,* and his later Spinozist turn, up to his later work with Michael Hardt.[3] This influence extends to Hardt and Negri's latest work, *Assembly*, offering a perspective to assess the significance and worth of a Spinozist reinterpretation of traditional Marxism in the current political and intellectual context.[4] We critically examine this legacy by initially adopting an approach inspired by Frankfurt School critical theory. Recognizing its limitations in translating theory into practical politics, we then turn to the evolving ideas of another of Negri's theoretical influences, Tronti. Although it received somewhat less commentary than his 'Copernican revolution' in the various responses to his recent passing, Tronti's notion of the 'autonomy

of the political' (hereafter AotP) serves as a robust counterpoint to several aspects of the postoperaismo that stemmed from his work. Revisiting this is especially pressing as this period of Tronti's work receives increasing Anglophone attention due to its relatively recent translation from Italian into English.[5]

The article contends that Negri's adoption of a Spinozian plane of immanence, where all social principles are considered ontologically equivalent, leads to a political stance that essentially endorses the existing world, reflecting it back upon itself. Purportedly constrained only by limits of its own self-valorizing creation, a political vision centered on the immanent power of the 'multitude' and similar subjectivities offers only passive resistance, affirming the very development it seemingly opposes. From unorthodox beginnings, Negri's worldview ultimately mirrors the determinism of historical materialism. Critiquing this perspective is essential as flawed theoretical understandings leave us without practical political resources to address contemporary capitalism's contradictions.

We trace the influence on this worldview of a tendency to derive meaning from lost, unfinished, and posthumously published texts, initially by Marx (the *Grundrisse*, a blueprint for *Capital*) and later by Spinoza (particularly his *Political Treatise*—hereafter *PT*). Notably, this preoccupation encompasses texts typically written in exile—Marx's in London, Spinoza's in Amsterdam—mirroring Negri's own exile, first in prison and later Paris. These texts often mark turning points or untaken paths in a thinker's trajectory. Machiavelli's *Prince* also aligns with this pattern, arising from the consigliere's effective exile from politics in the quiet of the countryside.[6] These experiences of exile resonate with Negri's own situation, shaping turning points during his spell in prison and away from Italy, attempting to explore untaken paths projected in earlier texts. Initially, Negri's vision of the future is drawn from Marx's 'Fragment on Machines', a section of Marx's *Grundrisse* forecasting a reduction in human labor due to the rise of new technology.[7] Negri's Spinozist interpretation of the Fragment recognizes as a current reality what Marx's posthumously published notebooks viewed as a distant future.[8]

This empirical gambit is backed by an ontological and philosophical analysis that rejects dialectical interpretations of a mediated reality in favor of advocating pervasive immanence and immediacy. This forms the foundation for assessing the specific historical circumstances where, the networked sociality and cooperation in modern production resist organization and representation. In contrast to its mediating role in class struggle during Keynesian-Fordism, money can no longer mediate the 'uncontained, overflowing force' of the power wielded by the multitude, a force that 'wells up from the field of social conflict', surpassing all limits. These philosophical and empirical assertions imply advocacy of a specific political praxis, exemplified in Hardt and Negri's recent book *Assembly*. A broader critique of the concept and practice of mediation, in favor of radical immediacy, is expressed through calls for direct democracy and openness to diverse forms of knowledge. This rejects traditional forms of political mediation, asserting that politics merely serves as a 'surface' obscuring what truly matters in social life itself. Hardt and Negri mock the impersonal 'mediatory apparatus' characterizing power and the suspension of social conflict in bourgeois society.[9]

These ideas have gained traction within a political landscape marked by widespread defeats for the left in many countries. It thus becomes crucial to revisit their origins to

comprehend their foundational assumptions, contradictions, and consequences. The primary focus of the article is on exploring the roots of these ideas in Negri's turn to Spinoza. While this inclination is evident in his writings from the late sixties, it fully takes shape after his 1978 lectures on Marx's *Grundrisse*. This transformation is most clearly articulated in his 1980 writings on Spinoza, produced during his time in prison and published in English as *The Savage Anomaly*, and later in the collections *Subversive Spinoza*, *Spinoza for Our Time* and *Spinoza: Then and Now*.[10] Negri's imprisonment, accused of involvement in the kidnapping and murder of Italian Prime Minister Aldo Moro, marks a 'radical break' between his early Marxism and subsequent adoption of Spinozism. Due to an irreconcilability between his evolving thoughts and Marx's law of value, as outlined in the *Grundrisse* lectures, Negri turned to Spinoza for conceptual coherence. Spinoza provided a 'justification' for Negri's political and philosophical stance and the reevaluation of Marx within a wider political project.[11] The innovative synthesis in *Empire* fulfils the trajectory anticipated in Negri's earlier prison-era work. The adoption of Spinoza's idea of self-valorization and the 'creativity of desire' serves as a lens to reexamine Marx's concepts of class and social change.[12] It also signifies a significant shift from operaismo centered on class struggle to the postoperaismo that later asserted its supersession.

The main part of the article examines the convergence of Marx and Spinoza in Negri's work on four key issues: the transition from an operaist politics of struggle to a post-operaist politics of celebration; the concept of immanence and its 'affirmationist' supersession of antagonism; the disavowed dialectic between forces and relations of production; and the impact of a philosophy of pure immediacy on political mediation. Utilizing tools from the Hegelian tradition of Frankfurt School critical theory—another product of the experience of exile under persecution and the incubation of alternative intellectual paths it tends to foster—the article explores the implications of these ideas and their critique for contemporary left politics.

While critical theory furnishes resources for theoretically critiquing Negri's post-operaismo, its dialectical intricacies lack a solid foundation for a practical or political alternative. In the quest for such resources, we initially revisit Negri's interpretation of Spinoza's *PT*, a facet less discussed in existing critiques of Negri's work than his collaborations with Hardt.[13] This gap is notable as the exploration of Spinoza's unfinished text offers a more nuanced and earlier presentation of many later arguments. It preserves a sense of the paradoxes and contradictions inherent in practical politics, a dimension largely absent in widely read and euphoric book-length interventions from *Empire* to *Assembly*.

However, the emphasis on a particular conceptualization of the multitude highlights deeper problems in Negri's approach. Rather than postoperaismo or critical theory, the article proposes seeking an alternative in the development of operaismo found in Tronti's work, particularly his adherence to the AotP from the seventies onward. This theoretical turning point offers a departure from traditional Marxist determinism and enables a clearsighted engagement with politics. Additionally, it presents a distinct and more openly 'political' interpretation of the Hegelian legacy than critical theory. However, we note some salient criticisms of the AotP as a theoretical legitimization of entryism and

trasformismo, as well as a foretaste of the perceived weaknesses of so-called 'weak thought'. We conclude that Hardt and Negri's recent critical engagement with this concept, influenced by Machiavelli, advances their arguments in crucial new directions without entirely overcoming underlying limitations.

2. Multitude and immanence in operaismo and postoperaismo

Postoperaismo owes its origins to 1960s Italy and first-wave operaismo. It sought to build a politics autonomous from traditional forms of representative democracy epitomized in the party system, and emphasized direct action and subversive struggle at work, unmediated by trade unions. For operaismo, 'it was plainly not enough to seize the means of production – the conditions of production themselves had to change and were a better starting point for revolutionary transformations than the statist "neo-reformism"' of the *Partito Comunista Italiano* (PCI), who had shed Soviet links in favor of pluralism.[14] Confronting the conditions of production, operaismo focuses on the relationship between the technical and political composition of the working-class.[15] The technical composition organizes labor-power as an economic input, shaped by capital through processes of division, management, and mechanization. The political composition involves the struggle of labor-power to autonomously constitute itself through refusal of work, resistance, and re-appropriation of surplus-value. Capital's drive for decomposition leads to the conditions for new political recomposition, where advanced sections of the working-class develop autonomous needs and demands within the existing technical composition. Which of these processes have primacy, and the industrial settings demonstrating them, are central to operaist analyses.

In the late 1960s and 1970s there were varying attempts to identify and weaponize a new working-class. The first focused on the mass worker who gained power under Taylorism, disrupting the link between wages and productivity. When these struggles declined, new social movements were perceived as recomposing themselves as the social(ized) worker or the multitude. The mass worker concept captured labor's progressive abstraction and socialization, confined to the labor process. The social(ized) worker represented class recomposition beyond production, spanning the entire valorization process. The massification of intellectual and technical labor, particularly university students, symbolized the refusal of assembly line life. The law of value was seen as increasingly inadequate for mediating the reproduction of this class of workers. By the 1970s, a postoperaist politics sought to expand anticapitalist struggle beyond immediate workplace exploitation in response to automation. This shift included redefining the working-class as the 'social worker', engaged in society at large.

In the series of books inaugurated by *Empire*, Hardt and Negri advocate breaking from the category of the working-class amid a crisis of work in capitalist society. They express enthusiasm for the New Economy's 'multitude' of 'immaterial laborers'. The concept of 'multitude', borrowed from Spinoza, symbolizes a new social subject aligned with changes in production. Work increasingly revolves around creativity, communication, cognition, and affect, blurring the lines between life and work. The postmodern multitude's spontaneous productivity and unbridled 'creativity of desire' suggest that shifts in

work content mirror workers' intrinsic drive to self-actualize through more communicative, cognitive, and creative labor.[16] Negri categorizes the working-class ability to valorize in a 'self-defining, self-determining' manner, operating independently from capitalist valorization and beyond the grasp of capitalist measurement.[17] Capital evolves in tandem with the development of the multitude. The advance of Empire stems not from an external force but emerges intrinsically, synonymous with multitude—as Sherman notes, 'subjectivity is depicted in objectivized terms, and the qualities of subjectivity migrate into capital itself'.[18] In Negri's words, 'there is an unmediated relation between power and subjectivity'.[19]

Negri's Spinozist assessment of the ability of social actors to drive broader change portrays the multitude as 'entirely positive' in propelling capitalist progress. Thus, Negri presents a political vision that is paradoxically utopian yet complicit with the existing state of affairs, as the aim is to 'keep on rebelling, here and now, enmeshed in this reality'. In a reality infused with the positivity of a world molded by the multitude's self-valorizing power, there exists a paradoxical resignation. This entails a 'false hope and illusionary comfort' Negri complains of being accused of peddling by critics. This resignation precisely embodies the 'redemption' that Nairn accurately identifies within the 'spiritual or spiritualistic salvation movement' proposed by *Empire* and *Multitude*.[20] While there is merit in pragmatic resignation when conditions preclude redemption, Negri's approach blurs the line between them.

This has a tendency to overlook continuing capitalist processes of commodification, exchange, ownership, and property relations. Negri's immanent unity of all social phenomena thus differs significantly from the comprehensively mediated totality theorized elsewhere in the Marxist tradition, particularly that part indebted to Frankfurt School critical theory. Negri rejects any concept of mediation, presenting a world where power and resistance are immediate and internally related without transcendence. In contrast, critical theory views the world as one in which opposing principles and forces are mediated in social forms, constituting their mode of existence, temporarily sublating and fixing antagonisms without promising dialectical resolution. Forms of mediation like the state and the commodity do not exist on a plane of ontological immanence with the social relations and actors subject to them. Instead, they assume an alienated and alienating existence, standing apart from and dominating human action, whilst preserving its contradictions.[21]

This interpretation, equal parts Frankfurt School critical theory and Marx's critique of political economy, underscores the fateful nature of the forms human activity takes. It compels us to grapple with better and worse ways of being separated and alienated from ourselves, others, and the things we create collectively. Reinstating the abstract and alienated mediation of human life as an analytical principle suggests that transformative social change is less straightforward than postoperaismo proposes. Postoperaismo places all creative powers in the hands of a new revolutionary subject, overlooking how the results of human practice take forms turned against us. Viewing labor as existing solely for its own sake simplifies history as unfolding entirely according to our design. But,

> By talking about 'the multitude' (which obscured the differences among groups that do not have a stake in Empire's rule), 'immaterial labor' (which obscures the fact that Empire's rule has not only revitalized the ugliest forms of brute material labor domestically, but has also proliferated them abroad), and a 'value theory' beyond measure (which obscures the fact that it is unclear to what extent Marxian value theory is even relevant here), Hardt and Negri obscure the mediated nature of what they are investigating.[22]

By dismissing social mediation, Negri's immanentist view of historical development fosters an 'artificial positivity'. This essentially 'recapitulates the very worst aspects of Empire's logic of domination', but in a celebratory rather than critical manner.[23] An overly optimistic politics emerges where Hardt and Negri claim to have 'gotten beyond 'the perverse dialectic of enlightenment'' that, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, compels us to acknowledge that 'the fallen nature of modern man cannot be separated from social progress'.[24] From an immanentist perspective, the decline of Empire is considered inevitable due to the positive ontological priority bestowed upon the multitude.

As a concrete example of this affirmative quietism, for instance, the postoperaist account of the advent of immaterial labor suggests that the apparent rise of a postindustrial service or knowledge economy was not simply an outcome of the reshaping of global production in the wake of the collapse of the postwar order and the declining status of the mass worker that defined it, but rather the result of struggles waged by a multitude of social and intellectual laborers refusing the assembly line for forms of work based on communication, creativity, and the manipulation of symbols and affect. As such, new patterns of surplus-value extraction and exploitation appear as an achievement of a new class actor struggling on the side of the forces of production to expand the space required for the realization of the 'general intellect' foretold in Marx's Fragment on Machines, in the process exceeding the capacity of conventional modes of capitalist valorization to manage and measure economic activity. The liberation sought and secured by the multitude is thus seen as lying within labor itself rather than in resistance against it, the character of labor itself in nascent creative and digital industries presented as the product not of managerial imposition but the self-organization of immanently free and autonomous workers themselves. As many critics have pointed out, this quietistic affirmation of the contemporary employment relationship fails to face up to the false promise of this new economy for many workers.[25]

Negri's argument that capital fails to capture and measure the self-valorizing creativity of the multitude as a new class actor is rooted in a Spinozist ontology. The theoretical foundation is laid in *The Savage Anomaly*, where Negri draws from Spinoza's *Ethics*, emphasizing the crisis in capitalist development as a struggle between finitude and negation versus infinitude and affirmation. According to Spinoza, 'every substance must be infinite'.[26] What Noys calls 'affirmationism' will become a recurring theme of Negri's work thereafter, culminating in *Empire*.[27] Negri, following Spinoza, associates infinitude with the affirmation of an indivisible, singular substance that is self-productive without external cause. Negri extends this in his conceptualization of the multitude and Empire as two heads of a single entity, class desire and capitalist progress intertwined. In this

framework, existence equals omnipotent power, an infinite force that acts boundlessly, ceaselessly, and positively.[28]

Negri's conceptualization of the multitude thus emphasizes self-valorizing activity over a vast temporal and spatial terrain. This positive outlook aligns with the transformation in Negri's political thought, suspending the antagonism that characterized earlier operaismo at the theoretical level in favor of affirmation.Through this lens, resistance comes to look a lot different. The most effective means to achieve social change is to simply go with the flow. Rather than press the Benjaminian 'emergency brake' on the trainwreck of progress, in the Negrian account resistance hits the accelerator.[29] Viewing development as emanating from the multitude, characterized as an entirely positive force, results in affirming transformations irrespective of impact—a version of the revolution credo of 'the worse the better'. Like prior operaismo, this ontologically prioritizes human practice but substitutes affirmation of the world it generates rather than retaining a critical moment of antagonism between subject and object. As Cleaver observes, this shift away from work refusal and class struggle was already hinted at well before Negri's Spinozian turn, in the adoption of Marx's Fragment on Machines as a depiction of the multitude's 'self-valorizing' capacity.[30] It takes Negri's extensive textual interpretation of Spinoza's philosophy to fully realize the direction hinted at in this reading.

Indeed, the affirmation Negri derives from Spinoza actually aligns closely with precisely the orthodox and deterministic Marxism conspicuously opposed by post-operaismo. The resulting framework is both affirmationist and deterministic, positing that all acts in world identified with the divine are driven by necessity rather than freedom. This produces in Negri a comforting notion that everything unfolds for a reason. This extends even to crises, which, regardless of consequences, are 'subsumed within the route of the continuity of the revolutionary process'.[31] Central here, and to Negri's reading of Spinoza more generally, is the identification of the ontology of the *Ethics* as the source from which Spinoza's politics are derived—and, in turn, Negri's.[32] However, Sherman highlights a methodological problem with ontology, stating that it 'recapitulates the most objectivistic aspects of the sciences by positing sociohistorically generated needs and problems as invariant'.[33] The real problem is the politics invited by eternalizing claims such as that Negri draws from Spinoza insofar as 'from an ontological point of view, *the negative does not exist*'.[34] From this flows a political call, turning Gramsci on his head, for a Spinozian 'optimism of the intellect'.[35] The ontological basis for this politics circumvents the accusation of uprootedness from reality by assigning to reality itself an inherent positivity—rendering not the optimists but the pessimists the ones out of touch with things as they are.

At singularity with the multitude and its desires, society is affirmed as is. In this political perspective, 'The more capital dominates in real subsumption, right down to the roots of existence, the more potential there is for resistance; the worse, the better'. By placing all momentum in the hands of the multitude, the 'penetration of capitalist relations' is seen as a sign of the 'immeasurable power of naked life'. The only limits are those self-imposed by the multitude, as these social relations are considered to be its 'own powers'.[36] In this 'monism of positivity', everything is seen as one, and we propel it forward. Noys argues that despite evidence of domination and misery, this suggests that

'capital is a mere expression of the underlying power of the multitude'.[37] When all power is attributed immanently to the multitude, a lack of critical perspective prevails, with no external standpoint to assess reality. Hegel, in contrast, argues that contemplating substance requires an external perspective, contradicting Spinoza's appeal to a form of thought lodged within substance itself.[38] Negri attempts to overcome this with reference to what Sherman calls the 'pointless point of view' of the multitude, both vague and all-encompassing. Later, we explore some of the impasses of such a position for contemporary left politics.

3. The forces and relations of production beyond dialectic

Before his Spinozist shift, Negri adhered to a Marxian commitment to a dialectical analysis broadly derived from the German idealist tradition.[39] Later, Negri characterizes Spinoza's as 'precisely the opposite of a dialectical method'. Spinoza's 'constitutive process of ontology' excludes the 'negativity' or 'emptiness' necessary for a 'science of appearances' or 'oppositions' in the Kantian and Hegelian sense. A reality governed by the insurgent potential of the multitude is 'irreducible' to any 'dialectic process of mediation'. In Spinoza, Negri sees no 'sign of mediation' or abstraction, only a 'philosophy of pure affirmation' that centers on a concreteness reproduced in ever more substantial a form. For Negri, Spinoza's statement that '[b]y reality and perfection I understand the same thing' indicates that 'the existence of the world demands no mediation for its ontological validation'. This is because 'corporeal singularity' itself is perfect, containing an ontological necessity.[40] Things are therefore sufficient in themselves, neither requiring or implying any mediation, alienation, or abstraction.

Spinoza's rejection of dialectical principles of mediation, alienation, and abstraction enables Negri's partial departure from orthodox Marxism. However, the incompleteness of this break becomes evident in Negri's struggle to free his analysis from teleology. Negri himself warns against Spinozian immanentism's potential recuperation for a historical necessity resembling orthodox Marxist teleological determinism.[41] And, despite its professed intent, the radical departure from Marx via Spinoza, like postoperaismo's apparent critique of traditional Marxist productivism, ends up echoing the most orthodox renditions of its object.

Negri criticizes Hegel for reducing Spinozism to 'a philosophy of the relationship between productive forces and relations of production'. However, it is notable that Negri, in his appeal to Spinoza, relies on such a conceptualization of this relationship, indebted to the 'fetters' view of history expounded in Marx's famous 1859 Preface as well as the Fragment on Machines.[42] In this view, the technological forces constantly reshape the social relations of production. Despite Negri's embrace of Spinoza, his commitment to this forces-relations view of history persists. Instead of characterizing it as a dialectic, however, which he dismisses as 'reformist teleology', Negri uses an immanentist framework to describe how the forces are 'transformed' into relations through a process of subsumption towards the singularity of social principles.[43]

Negri suggests that both Spinoza and Machiavelli recognized the multitude, representing the forces of production, as the creator of the relational forms of command

imposed on it. This is reflected back on Marx in the form of an interpretation that stresses how 'it is struggle that molds the visage of institutions'—in other words, that 'it is the forces of production that produce and eventually overturn the social relations within which they are paradoxically clamped and restrained'. This immanent relationship between productive forces—or multitude—and the relations that follow in their wake Negri classes as a 'rapport' between two poles. This is as opposed to any conceptualization that sets out to antagonistically 'subject the productive forces to the domination of the relations of production'. As such, just as Marxist historical materialism would hold, the productive forces dominate and drive the relations.[44]

From a Spinozian perspective, the forces produce the relations, endowed with the ontological necessity of 'multitudes open to the constitution of the political'. For Spinoza, writes Negri, the 'constitution of society' is nothing less than the 'mapping of the development of the productive forces'. Negri argues that in Spinoza, 'productive force is subjected to nothing but itself', constituting 'a movement of the infinite' devoid of 'domination' by the relations of production. The power attributed to the productive forces in Spinoza provides this philosophy with an 'inexhaustible richness' and a 'savage determination'.[45] The utopian implication is that the multitudinous forces of production can be liberated from the relations, no longer dialectically co-constituted but an absolute singularity, immanent in the truest sense.

Rather than delivering the promised break from traditional Marxism, Negri's late work retains key elements embraced by twentieth-century Marxists. The Spinozian rejection of limits paves the way for an intensified belief that incipient communism is already hidden within the present, reminiscent of the dynamic depicted in the Fragment on Machines. Immanence implies that communism is not imminent but inherent in present circumstances, waiting for the productive force of the multitude to actualize it. This is nothing less than a rehashed version of Marx's motif of communism as the 'real movement' of history, which Negri himself cites approvingly.[46] History is seldom so favorable, as Benjamin wrote of the left of his own time, convinced by 'the notion that it was moving with the current', regarding 'technological developments as the flow of the stream with which it thought it was moving'.[47]

The 'fetters' theory of history, as proposed by Negri, falls short in capturing the intricate dialectical relationship between the forces and relations of production, of which Benjamin would have been only too aware. This theory overlooks the complex interplay where antagonistic social relations in capitalist society both shape and limit the development of productive forces, leading to unpredictable outcomes. Negri's assertion of automatic social transformation neglects the influence of social forms like value, money, commodities, and the state in maintaining what Adorno terms the 'static side' of the dialectic, undermining the dynamic elements he emphasizes. Even in a 'static' state, the relations of production, despite being deemed 'objectively anachronistic' and weakened, continue to overdetermine the forces of production. This persistence is attributed to their inability to function autonomously, prompting state intervention to oversee the 'intrinsic dialectic' of society, preventing its potential collapse amid social conflicts, akin to Hegel's view in the *Philosophy of Right*.[48]

According to Adorno, traditional Marxism's assumption of an 'undisturbed, autonomous' form of economic progress reshaping society aligns with similar assumptions in liberal theory. Rejecting the primacy of the forces of production, Adorno argues that the state does not only supervise the positive unfolding of the dialectic but can also impede and confine it. He challenges the traditional Marxist thesis of 'the worse, the better', by highlighting that social and political power can control and limit economic tendencies. Pauperization 'must not become visible lest it blow the system apart'. Hence, schemes of 'extraeconomic' support paid by the state are concerned with 'the system's consciousness of the conditions that enable it to be perpetuated'.[49] As Adorno puts it, 'the ruling class is so well fed by alien labor that it resolutely adopts as its own cause the idea that its fate is to feed the workers and to "secure for the slaves their existence within slavery" in order to consolidate its own'. And, in so doing, it secures also the social reproduction of the worker—the human who subsists as labor-power—within the same system, suspending the dialectic of forces and relations of production.

Negri seeks to distance his historical theory from a 'molar' historiographical perspective that emphasizes 'large aggregates and statistical groupings', suggesting it portrays a world of continuity. Instead, he advocates for a molecular perspective, focusing on qualitative change at the level of 'micromultiplicities' and 'singularities' forming 'unbounded constellations or networks'.[50] However, this approach cannot adequately capture the continuities maintained by social relations mediated through the state. Hardt and Negri adopt a molecular perspective in *Empire*, emphasizing the emergent change arising from the constitutive movement of the multitude engaged in immaterial labor. The immanent relationship between the multitude and capital under specific historical conditions drives this change. According to this view, the movements of the multitude align with those of capital, propelling value beyond measure and fostering the potential for postcapitalism.

However, this molecular perspective focuses narrowly on microscopic compositional changes in labor content while overlooking the persistence of the macroscropic forms and relations through which it is mediated. Prioritizing the micro over the macro leads to premature conclusions about the demise of continuing antagonisms and modes of domination. Extrapolating from compositional changes in labor's content systemic observations about capitalism elides how the labor process is merely a carrier of the valorization process. Understanding this necessarily implies a 'molar' perspective that challenges ideas of an epochal crisis driven solely by the emergence of new work forms in individual labor processes creating paradigm shifts in capitalism as a whole.

Owing to their overemphasis on immediate changes in specific areas of production detached from broader political-economic frameworks of social reproduction and circulation, Hardt and Negri might well be criticized for adhering to an unacknowledged productivism. This tends to be based on the practices and experiences of certain workers, and in particular a fixation on the futures of the factory as a site of labor, from which the character of capitalism as an entirety is read off. Ascribing the multitude's 'creativity of desire' to its productive activity, this viewpoint sees novelty and change in an evolving labor process unencumbered by any sense of the persistence of the valorization process that it continues to serve.[51] The social mediation associated with the latter means that

rather than immanent harmony, working life is crisscrossed by 'ambivalence and tension' whereby human practice produces a reality that comes to stand apart and dominate its doers.[52]

Similarly, postoperaismo sees the forces of production as the propellant of history ultimately unburdened by the relations of production. This discounts the possibility, discussed at length in the critical theory tradition, that the relations fix in place without resolution the state of things as they are. Marcuse, for instance, cautions that fantasies of liberation via the unfolding forces of production not only remain contained within the contradictory social conditions of capitalist society, but risk the achievement of their liquidation in false forms of social unity in which relations are cleansed of all contradictory or antagonistic intent. Here he foresees the emergence of so-called 'immaterial labor' by means of 'a larger interdependence which integrates the worker with the plant', for instance, driven by the increased technical oversight and decision-making ability afforded by the superintendence of technologies.[53] From this perspective, these new mediations conceal underlying contradictions in a new form without satisfactory resolution. A dialectical standpoint is necessary to comprehend both the dynamic, positive side and the static, negative side of this situation.

4. Production beyond measure, politics beyond mediation

The theoretical rejection of mediation in Negri's Spinozist turn, evident in prioritizing forces of production over social forms and relations, has broader implications for praxis. Negri, in rejecting the dialectic and embracing Spinoza, not only adopts a methodological shift but responds to an 'ontological commitment' with political consequences. According to Sherman, Hardt and Negri advocate a 'postmodern materialist ontology' that moves beyond the 'cursed dialectic' of modernity. Unlike the conventional dialectical view emphasizing the 'domestication' of subjectivity in modernity, Negri envisions a version of capitalist development and workplace change that not only 'gives rise to...an oppositional working-class subjectivity' but is itself the active expression and result of that opposition.[54] This rejection of the dialectic rejects also the mediation of this subjectivity, insofar as the multitude is 'immediately "insurgent"' and not mediated in any way by the formal legal and political infrastructure through which class struggle proceeds in liberal society.

The rejection of mediation leads to a monist interpretation of social change whereby the unit of political action and analysis is not the individual but the monad of which they are part, wherein Negri contends, individuals are no more crucial than rocks, stones, or trees in the grand scheme of things.[55] Flattening the individual within the broader context of historical development removes the role of political deliberation. In this perspective, individuals and movements traverse time and technological advancements without any meaningful choice in whether or not these changes should occur. This position removes from the picture such mediations, seeing history as a positive force that compels compliance regardless of political actions. Inherent in these ideas is a liquidation of antagonism rather than its promotion. As Sherman suggests, the multitude, endowing the world with positivity, resembles Hegel's state, representing the resolution of contradictions and reconciliation of 'splits within civil society'. This occurs as an 'abstract

construction, posited from above', transcending negativity.[56] But such a construction claims to overcome negativity prematurely, and perhaps impossibly.

By eliminating mediation and liquidating splits in civil society under the sign of immanence, Spinoza, in Negri's interpretation, provides a philosophical basis for abolishing the separation between state and society. Negri sees in 'Spinozian immanentism' a call for a 'politics of the "multitude" organized in production', bypassing formal channels of liberal democracy. This unmediated constitution of the world 'eliminates even the abstract possibility of the rule of law', as a means of articulating and working through social antagonisms and contradictions elided in the identity between multitude and power, society and state.[57] Hardt and Negri's view of multitude and Empire as two aspects of the same entity, growing together, parallels nothing less than the liquidation of antagonism seen in contemporary projects of populist renewal on both the left and right.

As such, ontological claims translate into political ones, Negri asserting the pre-existence of democracy as the foundation of politics, whereby democracy is the automatic and effortless basis of what passes as the political, not its outcome. As Negri writes of Spinoza's thought: 'freedom, the true one, the whole one, which we love and which we live and die for, constitutes the world directly, immediately. Multiplicity is mediated not by law but by the constitutive process. And the constitution of freedom is always revolutionary', regardless of outcome. No matter the intention or result, 'the law is democratic because…men…have constructed it'.[58]

Rejecting the working through of societal antagonisms through deliberation and mediation implies a majoritarian political ethos. Identifying the multitude with historical development suggests that whatever the majority of humans do expresses an ontological need. This is made clear in Spinoza's statement—which, as Negri suggests, is an important one—that 'If two men make an agreement with one another and join forces, they can do more together, and hence, together have more right over nature, than either does alone. The more connections they've formed in this way, the more right they all have together'.[59] Negri deems this passage 'fundamental' as it signifies the way the multitude's collective dimension disrupts the antagonistic process of being, eliminating negativity. Without antagonism, civil society no longer needs to mediate differences between individuals and the state. The relationship becomes direct, abolishing the separation between state and society. For Spinoza, 'civil society and the political State are completely woven together, as inseparable moments of association and antagonism produced in constitution. The State is not conceivable without the simultaneity of the social, and neither, inversely, is civil society conceivable without the State'.[60]

In the more recent *Assembly*, Hardt and Negri develop this argument for the destruction of the gap between state and society with the introduction of new institutions that 'immanently organize the collective'.[61] This immanent and unmediated mode of organizing runs the risk of jeopardizing the autonomous space liberal democracy guarantees between impersonal power and the individual, where counterpowers operate. This underestimates the significance of the separation between state and society, the space for radical politics within formal, impersonal structures of representation and deliberation. Negri, influenced by Spinoza, collapses the two, attacking what he terms

'contractarianism' in the name of an 'immanentist refusal' of any 'contract' between state and society. Negri seeks to replace the dependence on contracts, which establish a formal legal equality even in cases of exploitation, with a system of 'consensus' and a shift from the individuality to the 'method of collectivity'.[62]

The potency of direct, personal action over the indirect, impersonal character of liberal society renders mediation and measurement impossible.[63] The concept of the multitude as a classless singularity without internal antagonism rejects the mediation of societal differences, aiming to restore society in the image of this unified multiplicity. This can resemble a postmodern version of the populist 'people'. Hardt and Negri even acknowledge 'the sincerity or intelligence of many right-wing activists' protests against the elites of finance, global institutions and national government', suggesting that there are elements of this populism that 'could be recuperated by intelligent left-wing movements' because they mark an attack on the forms of property apparently responsible for plundering the productiveness of the multitude. Nonetheless, they emphasize that the 'multitude' is not synonymous with the people but a radical completion of the impossible project of populism, which depends upon 'the fantasy of a unified people'. Their criticism of contemporary populism focuses on its tendency to consolidate social movements in state power, not on the propagation of a popular will itself.[64]

These more recent insights, shaped by the political climate, build on Negri's earlier writings on Spinoza, emphasizing the crucial distinction between the multitude and the people. The multitude, owing to 'the differences of the singularities', resists reduction to the concept of 'the people'. Moreover, Negri seems aware of the negative resonances of some aspects of the conceptualization of the multitude in a passage that communicates the political recklessness inherent in an affirmationist account of constituent power that views every turn, no matter how negative, as a step on the path to something better:

> If evil (or fascism) is lying in wait to seize its chance in the space that leads from *being-multitude* to *making-multitude* (whether it be the fascism of animality or humanity, or just the formal automatism of obedience); if our life is continually obliged to face up to certain regressions […]: well, all that is not enough to cast the movement of the multitude, or its striving toward liberty, into doubt. Unless we think that man desires not life but death—and consider that resistance is not an ethical act but an act of suicide.[65]

The imperative here is to remain positive and believe that everything will unfold for the best. This optimistic outlook, rooted in postoperaismo, departs from the critical-theoretical foundations of the Marxist tradition. There is no engagement with reification or the subject-object dialectic. With Spinoza's influence, Negri rejects these concepts, asserting that 'Man has no other boss than himself. All alienation is eliminated'.[66] Hence, Negri theorizes change through an already-free revolutionary subject, requiring no effort for its liberation. This perspective drags Marx from the realm of negativity to unbridled positivity.

Critical theory, particularly the Frankfurt School's fusion of Hegel and Marx, offers tools to scrutinize Negri's postoperaist interpretation of Marx and Spinoza, especially in its scepticism of a determinism based on the unfolding forces of production. However, it

falls short in guiding practical political implications and alternatives. Hans-Jürgen Krahl, an interlocutor of both autonomism and the Frankfurt School, blamed Adorno's 'isolation of emigration' for his failure to steer his critique of social domination towards a broader 'partisanship of theory' tied to collective emancipation. Adorno's justified alertness to the persistence of fascism hindered a more comprehensive engagement with wider political projects, whether stabilization or resistance.[67] Moreover, owing to a resigned assessment of the capacity of the working-class to fulfil the mission assigned to it by an overoptimistic left, the Frankfurt School 'became increasingly pessimistic with respect to [the] prognoses that capitalism would ultimately self-destruct and give way to a socialist society'.[68]

This interpretation of the historical context marks a departure from the foundational Frankfurt School opposition between traditional theory and critical theory, the latter having been viewed as inherently geared toward the 'practical transformation of social reality'.[69] As the Frankfurt School grappled with the failure of the actually existing proletariat to fulfil its burdensome role as the historical revolutionary subject, the relationship 'between theory and practice' that distinguished critical theory from traditional theory was further complicated. Without this, critical theory risked falling into either an 'idealism' based on 'unfounded value judgments and wishful thinking', or the 'critical pessimism' of Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which set out 'a Critical Theory without revolutionary subject, based on the critique of ideology alone'. This alighted upon a logic of instrumental rationality that, having comprehensively mediated every aspect of existence, left 'little scope for hope'.[70] Adorno later argued that any unity of theory and praxis, as advocated in early critical theory, tended to politically prioritize action and impose it on thought. Defending thought as the sole location of 'truly critical opposition', according to Hohendahl, appeared to replicate the traditional theory the Frankfurt School criticized in the thirties. The 'category of negation' became abstract, 'losing its critical edge' in the process.[71]

Without being clearly 'defined…in organizational categories', then, critical theory's purpose as a practical intervention 'loses its binding force', mired in an ontological and epistemological position where 'man can analyse the logic of history but not organize political opposition'.[72] However, useful for decoding the ideological contradictions of other visions of political action, we must look elsewhere for practical alternatives. As noted at the outset, there is undoubtedly something thrilling in the capacity of Italian thought—epitomized by Negri and Tronti—to get its hands dirty with politics in a way critical theory understandably could not.

5. Reading the *Political Treatise* in theory and practice

We have seen already that while the Fragment on Machines seemed to offer postoperaists an escape from orthodox Marxism, it ultimately led back to some of its foundational weaknesses. Another posthumously published unfinished text, Negri's engagement with Spinoza's *Political Treatise*, presents a potential route for postoperaismo to address some of these issues. Through this work, Negri demonstrates a more sophisticated engagement with politics in both theory and practice, showcasing a level of political realism sometimes lacking in other accounts of the multitude written simultaneously and

subsequently. Negri grants similar importance to Spinoza's *PT* as he did to Marx's *Grundrisse* at a different stage of his work. Like Marx's notebooks, this similarly unfinished, posthumously published work is rhetorically elevated to represent nothing less than 'a work of time-to-come' that 'elaborates not mere elements but rather democratic thought in its entirety'.[73] The openness to interpretation inherent to the unfinished and posthumous character of certain texts once again invites Negri in.

Similar to how postoperaists see the *Grundrisse* as revealing the hidden truth in Marx's work, the *PT*, for Negri, brings forward what was implicit in Spinoza's previous work—an emphasis on the world's 'surface' and the 'physics' governing the 'human production of the world'. The human freedom inherent in *potentia* underlies the *conatus* of the human drive to shape oneself and the world, expressed in the *cupiditates* of human passions and material desires. Just as with the apparent law of capitalist decline and postcapitalist emergence buried in Marx's work, the *PT* enables Negri to demonstrate that throughout Spinoza's work, this metaphysical dynamic always had both a progressive and positive direction.[74]

According to Negri, the *PT* 'founds, in theoretical terms, modern European democratic political thought' by viewing human universality embodied in the multitude as the foundation for democracy, unlike ancient thought that centered on the specific citizenry of the polis. However, it diverges from other modern democratic theories by conceiving democracy as centered on immediately expressed power rather than rather than transferred sovereignty and natural right 'alienated' through mediation. This perspective aims to elucidate the emergence of a society where subjects are equal in right but unequal in power.[75]

Negri identifies three core contributions of Spinoza's *PT*. First, any transcendence on the part of the state is denied in a 'demystification of politics' that resonates with 'anticapitalist and antibourgeois' critiques of state-society separation. Second, we see an account of Power (*potestas*) as subordinate to 'social power' (*potentia*)—in other words, that of the multitude, synonymous here also with 'social needs' and 'the hegemony of productive forces'.[76] The multitude's struggle for freedom is equated with the forces of production, similar to how—at least in Spinoza's period—the relations of production were synonymous with bourgeois forms of transfer, alienation, and mediation defining the connection between civil society and state.

Spinoza's conceptualization of this constitutive terrain rejects the 'alienation of natural right' implied in seventeenth-century 'relations of production', owing to its 'materialist', 'anti-dialectical' metaphysics. Negri proposes that Spinoza's theoretical effort in the *PT* should be understood within the context of 'the last humanist and democratic battle' to safeguard the 'freedom of the productive forces from a new hierarchy of exploitation in the relations of production'.[77] Contrary to the idea of legal and political relations having autonomy from social and material forces, the Power (*potestas*) in the former immediately participates in the power (*potentia*) of the latter. It is immanently part of 'the absolute', not through any dialectical process of contractual transfer.[78]

Third, we witness a notion of constitution which begins from the 'antagonism of subjects' and stresses the ongoing centrality of 'the right of resistance', 'opposition to Power', and 'affirmation of autonomous forces'.[79] This dynamic, whereby individual

cupiditates passes over into collective *potentia*, knows no pacification by mediation, only 'displacement'. Its inherent antagonism cannot be pacified 'abstractly' or 'dialectically'. Resolution occurs through the 'constitutive advance of power', central to the antagonism but suspended when, as in Spinoza's 'fundamental' dictum cited earlier, 'men come together and join forces', the greater the number the greater the power and right. This power and right is established in law and state not through 'transcendental' formal mediation but through 'traversing the social antagonism' itself via a series of 'collective displacements'.[80]

Negri sees in Spinoza's three core contributions in the *PT* the introduction of 'atheism into politics'. Spinoza rejects any transcendental utopian community or general will in which human subjectivity is alienated. This is materially constituted, as sovereign power at the state level must align with natural right. This implies that 'a free society can be constructed' despite, rather than because of, the processes of determination, legitimation and transcendence outlined in bourgeois political theory. Natural right, here, is connected to the 'specific antagonistic motive' propelling the 'constitutive development' of the multitude—an innate 'fear of isolation' originating from the 'state of nature'. This fear generates a 'desire for security' progressively fulfilled through various forms of society. Rather than signifying the gradual surrender of natural right to the state, this transition represents 'an integration of being'.[81]

The antagonistic dynamic establishing the multitude takes distinct forms in various political systems—monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. Initially satisfied in monarchical rule, where one figure wields Power, Spinoza unfolds the contradiction between this and the 'constitutive process' forming its 'ontological foundation'. Unlike the democracy, or 'absolute government', of the multitude, under monarchy 'all law is the expression of the will of the king' although 'not everything willed by the king is law'. This is due to the subordination of the 'monarchical form' to the 'confrontation-mediation-encounter between different powers'. Spinoza similarly dismisses aristocratic government, as it contradicts its aim of absoluteness. The only form of 'absolute' government is the democracy of the multitude, leading aristocrats to devolve power to councils and other agents in search of 'social consensus'.[82]

Spinoza's *PT* concludes without delivering its promised chapter on the third form succeeding monarchy and aristocracy—the absolute democratic state. Democracy is defined 'quantitatively' by exercising sovereign power through 'a council comprised of the multitude as a whole'. It is also defined qualitatively, aligning with certain ontological conditions related to the 'primordial radicality of democracy'.[83] In Negri's perspective, this missing chapter would have united the metaphysical narrative of the development of absolute government with a 'reading of political contingency'. However, Negri argues that the *PT* is not truly incomplete, being suggestive of an eventual conceptualization of 'being as a product of power' and 'absolute government of the multitude' as the 'expression of freedom organized into security'.[84] Whilst the 'contractarian horizon' Negri identifies in the *Theological-Political Treatise* has largely faded from view by the time of the *PT*, the conclusion of the former is cited by Negri as foreclosing what Spinoza would likely have included in the concluding chapter of the latter. Here, Spinoza writes of the state that

> its ultimate end is not to dominate, restraining men by fear, and making them subject to another's control, but on the contrary to free each person from fear, so that he can live securely, as far as possible, i.e., so that he retains to the utmost his natural right to exist and operate without harm to himself or anyone else…not to change men from rational beings into beasts or automata, but to enable their minds and bodies to perform their functions safely, to enable them to use their reason freely, and not to clash with one another in hatred, anger or deception, or deal inequitably with one another.[85]

In this perspective, the state's purpose is 'freedom'. However, two potential issues arise with the vision of political progress derived by Negri from Spinoza's unfinished Treatise. The first concerns the 'natural' or 'animal' power from which the multitude arises, creating collectivities from individualities stricken by the 'dominion of fear, violence, and war'. The meeting of passions and affects is 'ever open and never pacified'. These tendencies may lead to the emergence of a 'bad' or 'barbarous' multitude marked by hate and violence. The popularization of the concept of multitude with the release of *Empire* in the early noughties coincided with an upsurge in religious extremism and terrorism, raising questions about where the limits of this subjectivity are drawn. However, Negri argues that the 'suicide bomber' cannot represent multitude because his actions only 'feed on death', whereas the constitutive concept of multitude centers on 'a politics of life against death'. Negri constructs clear boundaries to conceptually seal off multitude, driven by 'joyous passions', from critiques based on the ugliest manifestations of radicalism, resistance, and majoritarianism.[86]

Anticipating some of the criticisms made in the first half of the article, a second issue revolves around the potential realization of the 'absolute' in 'absolutism' due to the inherent tendency toward limitlessness in the concept and subject of 'multitude'. When power as *potentia* eventually passes over, as it must in a political project directed at the state, into Power as *potestas*, how does it avoid the transcendence Negri critiques? Negri attempts to argue that even when 'the Power constructed by the formative process of the multitude is absolute', it is always limited by the 'vicissitudes' of the community's judgment based on 'law in the name of reason', according to which individuals are subjects only insofar as the state itself is 'reasonable'.[87] However, if reason is determined solely by a reality shaped by the multitude's movement, there is no external or transcendental perspective from which to assess and critique the 'reasonableness' of the state, and the potential for majoritarian absolutism in its name.

Negri acknowledges the problematic potential implicit in Spinoza's political philosophy. On the 'compatibility between absoluteness and freedom', Negri raises the possibility of 'totalitarian utopia' and questions whether the 'refusal of the contract' leads to an 'absolutist projection of freedom' where all distinctions and determinations vanish. However, Negri contends that such objections are untenable. The multitude, in Negri's view, is the concept that allows Spinoza to 'reconsider' the 'relationship between freedom and absoluteness', circumventing this problem. Its antagonistic character keeps it forever 'open' and 'non-conclusive'. Spinoza deploys a paradox to diffuse this problem, suggesting that there is true unlimitedness of Power and thus truly absolute democracy only

where 'the State is sharply limited and conditioned by the power of consensus' established through the 'active presence of subjects' and their 'collective needs'.[88]

The 'absolute' character of this democracy, according to Negri, does not imply deterministic closure or finality. The multitude's 'originary dimension' involves a 'paradox at the intersection of causality and chance, tendency and possibility'. Due to this paradox, the 'demand of reason'—absolute democracy—'does not succeed in becoming real'. Contrary to populist dimensions in some of Negri's later work, the multitude is 'neither *vulgus* nor *plebs*'. Negri, following Spinoza, suggests that 'the absoluteness of the democratic claim' may not encapsulate the 'entire development of freedom'. However, there is a positive aspect to this lack of resolution in the openness and inconclusiveness that allows the 'coexistence of singularities, reciprocal tolerance, [and] the power of solidarity'. This state of affairs 'poses the effectiveness of the non-solution of the relationship between absoluteness and freedom' and the 'problem of the political subject' as 'the foundation of one of the highest values of the republican tradition: tolerance...of respect for consciences, of freedom to philosophize'.[89]

The fragility of democracy's fleeting achievement is the foundation of freedom's pursuit rather than a limit, Negri implies. In the *PT*, 'the difficulty of maintaining democracy over time is considered...a life-giving element' that rather than 'opening a state of internal war and destruction of institutions' actually 'leads to a deepening of democratic possibilities' and the 'continuous reinvigoration of the republic'. In this way, 'the outcome of the various alternatives that open when contradictory options undermine sovereign unity is a confirmation of the democratic initiative'. The tension between the 'unity of the political' implied in the concept of the absolute and the 'multiplicity of subjects' implied in that of the multitude is the starting point of practical politics in its Machiavellian sense, rather than a barrier preventing it.[90]

In line with its overall political realism, the politics of the *PT* represent, for Negri, 'a true dystopia—a Machiavellian conjecture of freedom'. The 'unconcluded relationship between the absoluteness of Power and the multiplicity of propositions, needs, and experiences' forms the precise starting point and basic foundation over which 'every value, choice, every political act must extend'. The 'rational tendency' Spinoza identifies in the multitude 'exists within the folds and...complexity' of this relationship, which cannot be closed or concluded due to the 'always different and variable effects of the will' and the realism and pessimism derived from experience and matched to the actual content of politics.[91] It is to practical politics, and the implications Spinoza's *Treatise* hold for it, that we now turn.

5.1. From theory to politics

Spinoza's *PT* presents an alternative to the majoritarian impulse found in Negri's conceptualization of the multitude. The question is whether Negri's theoretical framework stays true to the democratic pluralism proposed in the unfinished *PT*. As we have seen, for Negri, Spinoza's 'absolute' is not absolutist due to its 'metaphysical condition' in the 'non-conclusiveness of the relationship between social praxis and the juridical subject of Power'. This non-conclusiveness means that the absolute does not pose a resolution to the

complexity of the 'political process', but retains and contains this complexity within it. This lack of closure, the 'imbalance between absoluteness and freedom', allows democracy to thrive and provides politics its context. The unresolved character of this tension and the 'non-conclusiveness of the universe' provide space for subjective action. Negri addresses the question of political praxis through the movement of the multitude, as described by Spinoza. The ambiguity of the multitude, arising from the unresolved contradiction between 'absoluteness and freedom, between civil right and natural right, between reason and…the physicality of the constitutive movement of being', makes it a concept that 'cannot be closed off'. As the 'motive element' of Spinoza's thought, 'this situation of theoretical contradictoriness…this disproportion and this extreme tension of concepts are torn from the heavens and forced to live in the world'.[92] This 'secularization of the idea of Power' stands against the political theology of the likes of Hobbes, which calls upon divinity as an answer to the lack of 'physical and metaphysical reasons' in politics. Rather, this brings politics back down to earth, where Machiavellian virtue and fortune determine the possibilities of political subjectivity and describe how absolute democracy translates 'seeking one's own advantage' (*cupiditates*) into a collective process.[93]

According to Negri, the first chapter of the *PT* serves as a key to understanding this progression of the practical politics it implies. In this chapter, Spinoza criticizes philosophers for overlooking the centrality of 'human passions' to the 'effective reality' political analysis addresses. In terms resembling the 'critique of utopia' associated with the likes of Machiavelli and Hobbes, Spinoza argues that philosophy fails to capture how politics is driven not by the question of 'what "ought" to be done', but rather by the 'passions' and by the 'effectual capacity' of human nature, driven by material 'desire for appropriation', unconstrained by morality or reason. Politicians, meanwhile, capture this not due to virtue or wisdom but through experiential knowledge of engagement in practical politics. This aligns their thought with practice, enabling navigation of the non-linear terrain of 'opportunity and chance' that politics represents. In contrast, philosophy lacks the requisite cunning and craftiness, imposing mediation and limits on the 'living reality' of the multitude's pursuit of human freedom in the 'collective and progressive rhythm of constitution'. Spinoza then criticizes the politicians, or 'statesmen', who understand the passions as the starting point of politics based on experience but fail to recognize their 'determinate causes' and the method required to uncover them in the forces of production. The prudence of politicians and the security sought by the modern state cannot negate the freedom that flows as a necessity from human nature. This necessity of freedom thus presents a potential solution to the 'contradictory couples' of political realism, most notably that between liberty and security.[94]

Up to the second point of Spinoza's procedure in the *PT*—the critique of the statesmen, which follows the critique of the philosophers—there is still some sense that politics has an autonomy from material or social imperatives. In the third step of Spinoza's procedure in the *PT*, Negri follows the search for a determining driver of politics, finding it in the constitution of the multitude that draws from the development of the passions (*cupiditates*). This implies that the human condition and political constitution become one and the same, and because of the necessity this grants freedom, the state can reconcile the

contradictory couples of liberty and security, multitude and prudence. For Spinoza, Negri writes, the state exists because 'the freedom of singular individuals must construct collective security', there being no 'autonomy' of the political without such a 'collective subject'. As such, 'only the power of the many, by making itself collective constitution, can found a Power', and multitude always has the power to 'reopen' the process of which Power is the product.Negri proposes that Spinoza and Machiavelli share a political realism that is not a 'relativism of values' but a commitment to the 'truth of the concrete' and of 'action', the adherence to the 'absoluteness' of which distinguishes it from the 'statesman' Spinoza distances himself from in the *PT*'s opening part.[95]

Machiavellian 'political realism' is thus reframed around the dynamic struggle for human freedom rather than its domestication. This relation of 'power against Power' is epitomized in the struggle of the multitude, its power equivalent to natural right and thus freedom—an order 'as strict and determined as can be'. Law manifests the justice of the multitude which 'collectively organize[s] the necessity of freedom' against antagonism. This mimics legal positivism, linking what is just and unjust with what is legal and illegal, as the constitutional state expresses the justice of the multitude, deriving legitimacy from collective *potentia*.[96]

The intrinsic link between existence and justice presented in the *PT* and Negri's reading eliminates any sense of discontinuity or contradiction. For instance, freedom is such a virtue that Spinoza suggests imperfections in someone's character or behavior cannot be attributed to their freedom but to something else. However, the zero-sum antinomy of 'power against Power' means that at this stage in the analysis antagonism persists, the 'natural state' of 'opposing *cupiditates*' knowing no 'pacifying solution'. As Negri notes, this leaves us with a problem that resists 'impossible processes of pacification', opening up 'a dangerous process of the construction of being'—in other words, politics.[97] However, in contrast to the unity-in-difference advocated by others in the operaist tradition, Negri ends up paradoxically suggesting precisely such a conceptual pacification.

Negri's interpretation of the *PT* points to the multitude as a majoritarian subject that conceptually pacifies antagonism in exactly the way he sets out to avoid. The notion that such a subject has more power, and thus right, the greater its number, 'dislocates the antagonistic process of being' by glossing over the 'natural enmity' of competitive struggles. This collective process Negri sees as constituting a kind of 'physics' that defies any 'voluntaristic' idea of the AotP. This 'physical order' is consolidated in the state. However, there is little said of what happens to 'power to' when the right it implies is regulated in the form of 'power over'. It is difficult to introduce contradiction to Spinoza's association of 'what is right' with 'what is', with what is just always expressing 'the material and collective progression of humanity'.[98]

In Negri's framework, the structural determination resulting from struggle does not account for the unintended consequences even emancipatory struggles might have. This theoretical worldview lacks capacity to comprehend how the right fight may produce the wrong results. What is has always already been fought for and is always already what ought to be. Moreover, the form of these struggles is rigidly confined, and Negri extends the concept of the multitude developing through a 'social physics' to include a 'horizon of bare physicality and savage multiplicity'. This physicality, described as 'perfectly

horizontal', rejects the 'artificiality' of contractarian mediations for the 'material inexhaustibility of the social flux'.[99]

This rhetorical valorization of the concrete, the violent, the affective, and the natural against any form of mediation, abstraction, or compromise shows the inherent danger of collapsing the political into the social without any dialectical distance. This 'social physics' that Spinoza outlines in his *PT* defies attempts to impose upon it the bourgeois architecture of the social contract and the 'regulation' and 'transfiguration' of civil society under the 'guarantee of the state', which Spinoza had previously relied on in earlier works to establish the 'construction of collectivity based on the *cupiditates*'.[100] In the *PT*, consensus supplants contract as a result of the displacement of individuality in collectivity in the search for security and freedom. The transition from 'power to' to 'power over' and the consolidation of the collective right of the multitude in the state involve no 'transfer' or 'mediation'. Concepts like 'sovereignty', 'power', and the 'right of the commonwealth' lack specificity of their own and are 'reduced' and 'flattened', finding realization only in the organized power of the multitude. This precludes any 'Spinozan recuperation' of 'raison d'Etat' and rejects the notion, contrary to 'bourgeois ideology' and the 'sublime line of thought Hobbes-Rousseau-Hegel', that state and society, the political and the social, can be distinctly conceived.[101]

The collapse of the social and political into a single immanent mish-mash raises questions about the clarity and utility of such a theory. Viewing subjectivity as synonymous with capitalist development, and vice versa, neglects the compelling concept of the human condition that grounds Spinoza's theories. While Negri finds in Spinoza's *PT* a clearsighted and realistic model for action that partially overcomes the debilitating, disempowering contradictions identified by critical theory, he withdraws from giving specifics about the practical form of such action in the context of the various aporias across which the analysis ranges. Negri is left with little more to say about the practical implications for praxis than an unanswered question: 'But how? According to what lines of orientation, what perspectives and what projects?'.[102]

Later, Negri acknowledges these theoretical limits. Practical politics reduces to the concept of the multitude, initially centering on 'new forms of political and social struggle' against a backdrop of war, globalization, and crisis, defined by 'an agitational method that operated at the base, through social media and with the absolute primacy of horizontal and radically democratic organizational forms'. But, asks Negri, 'Does all this have any relation to the Spinozist definition of multitude?' He answers: 'Not much'. This is arguably because in the course of its popularization the concept evolved from a Spinozian account of collective development to a Marxian account of a class actor expressing social and material tendencies. Negri notes that the deployment of the term 'multitude' began as a critique of identitarian notions of the political subject, whether 'people', 'nation', or the traditional working-class. But where Negri's reading of multitude gradually goes astray is through reverting to Marx(ism) in search of precisely such a parallel mass class actor, principally by understanding multitude not as concept but as a contemporary fact realized 'as a subject in the postindustrial stage':

> In other words the multitude appeared as a class concept in situations where the class of workers, rather than being a mass, was reconfigured in the development of production and presented itself as a set of singularities, tendentially brought together by a socialised productive activity characterised by immaterial (intellectual, cognitive, affective, linguistic etc) and nomadic elements.[103]

This is not the multitude of Spinoza, but rather just another spin on the productive proletariat of traditional Marxism. Setting this aside, the principal residue that remains of the *PT* in Negri's work, up to and including *Assembly*, is the denial of any autonomy of the political from the social, and the affirmation instead of 'the autonomy of the collective needs of the masses'.[104] Having liquidated politics in the social, Negri is left little to say about the practice of politics as a separate and relatively autonomous sphere of activity, because the underlying assumption is that such a sphere does not exist and any worthwhile 'action' must cover the whole social field—a hard bar to reach. Ultimately, this constrains the capacity of Negri's postoperaismo to successfully navigate politics as it actually is rather than as one might desire it to be. As we shall see in the next section, there is another direction taken in the development of operaist thought that retains the specificity and separation of spheres that Negri's Spinozan turn seeks to abolish—with lessons for praxis that critical theory alone is incapable of generating.

6. The autonomy of the social and the autonomy of the political

Operaismo's 'Copernican revolution' overturned traditional Marxist determinism by stressing how political struggle shapes economic organization at the workplace level. Postoperaismo gave voice to the circularity implied in this conception, whereby the technical composition in turn determines the political, and political subjectivity is sorted at the point of production. The conceptualization of composition in this sense leaves little room for politics as a sphere of activity relatively independent of productive dynamics. In its attempts to cover for this fundamental weakness, operaismo introduced new stages in between the two compositional phases, displaced the power of determination onto new economic actors, or even negated any distinction between the technical and political altogether. However, just as operaismo leads us into postoperaismo as the fullest realization of some of its underpinning weaknesses, another subterranean tendency within operaismo and its development also shows us the way out. In this section, we consider how the grandfather of operaismo, Tronti, and the increasingly 'politicist' direction taken in his later work, provides a way out of this impasse, via 'a critique of all progressive versions of history…resolutely anti-economistic and anti-sociological'.[105]

Initially inspiring operaismo, Tronti increasingly distanced himself from the Marxist tradition up to and including his own Copernican revolution, citing its incomplete analysis of politics. Before and after his death, this pessimistic political turn has received much less commentary than his optimistic operaist phase. Tronti's 'politicism' was discernible in his initial Copernican reversal, emphasizing the role of subjective struggles in capitalist development, but required rearticulation as operaismo subsequently began to shift towards material and economic determinism. As Carrera writes, where operaismo

> had initiated a Copernican revolution in Marxism, Tronti's autonomy of politics was now the beginning of a Machiavellian revolution. As Machiavelli separated politics from morals, Tronti put Marxist politics at a safe distance from the ups and downs of the working-class struggle. He argued that political representations of the working class had to be relatively free from their constituency in order to pursue purely political gains within Parliament and the state's institutions.[106]

Instead of the struggle over surplus-value, then, Tronti stressed the role of values in political struggle. Introduced in the postscript to his *Workers & Capital*, the 'political' encompassed 'the institutions of power and the practice of taking and keeping power'.[107] Tronti sought to reclaim the domain of 'the political' from conservative and counter-revolutionary thought to complete Marx's unfinished critique of political economy.[108] Glimpsed in the lineage 'Machiavelli, Hobbes, Hegel and Schmitt; Weber, Lenin and Keynes; the Great War, 1917, and the Great Depression' shared in common with other quarters of the (post)operaist milieu, this concept reflected his growing pessimism about the effectiveness of an extraparliamentary politics separated from labor movement institutions and organizations.[109] Tronti rejected the reduction of the political to a superstructural expression of material dynamics, rebuking the idea of a seamless continuity between the economic and the political as proposed by 'vulgar Marxism'.[110] This was proven not least in the failure of practical attempts inspired by the eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, highlighting the danger of prioritizing revolution over reform as the process through which power is managed.[111] Tronti's perception of the defeats in operaismo and Marxism in the sixties led him to rescue from historical materialism's suppression a lineage of pessimistic anti-rationalist thought including Nietzsche and Weber, as well as the 'subversive strategy' of Lenin.[112] He embraced a lineage of 'uncomfortable' or 'forceful' political thought marked by 'realist' confrontation with the 'tragic side of history'.[113]

Tronti saw the end of the Cold War and the collapse of Soviet Communism as not just a lost battle but a lost war for the workers' movement and the left. This defeat led his conceptualization of the AotP to draw closer to the 'political theology' associated with Weber via the likes of Benjamin and Schmitt, which might best be understood as fixating on 'how politics represents values'.[114] Tronti considered political theology a possible avenue for theorizing the power the working-class could wield in a world where capitalist political and economic dominion was complete. Benjamin's notion of the messianic, for example, connected class struggle in a present context of defeat with the redemption of lost paths in the future—a flight out of the present in past futures and futures past.[115]

Against a backdrop of defeat, Tronti critiqued Marxism's 'cultural tradition' as an obstacle to the contemporary left. Its understanding of the determination of the political by the economic was preserved in operaismo, which reduced society to a factory with transformations in wage-labor its 'single engine'. This failed to capture the multiplicity of engines simultaneously driving capitalist society, around which the working-class must struggle using diverse methods. Tronti emphasized the need to comprehend the complex 'chain of mediations' connecting the (social) factory and the political sphere, the economic and the political.[116]

Tronti rejected the operaist tradition's focus on finding universal points of determination between economics and politics. Instead, he saw the economic and political shaping each other in various directions depending on circumstances. This contingent directionality can exhibit 'a lag, a being out of sync', Tronti thought, giving the state space to 'absorb and temper socio-economic conflicts'. Hence, rather than one principle always and inevitably compelling the other, Tronti emphasized the existence of distinct political and economic cycles with their own modes of struggle, with permanent discontinuity in each direction. This discontinuity, non-coincidence, and contradictoriness were understood in the context of the separation between state and civil society, rather than as an 'ideological trick' or 'function of class domination'.[117] Such a separation is the starting point of any democratic politics, and not, as generations of revolutionary leftists have tended to suggest, an inconvenience to be eliminated.

Tronti asserted that politics, as a 'subjective activity' and set of institutions and actors at the level of the state, possesses its own history and temporality irreducible to capitalist economic development alone. Politics loses its meaning if confined by economic necessity. If 'political organization' were to 'slavishly follow struggles within the immediate process of production', it would lag behind capitalist restructuring, rendering it ineffective. The temporal lag between different cycles allows the political realm autonomy to mediate between struggles over capitalism's various discontinuous scales of activity, including but not reducing to workers' struggle at the point of production. Contra operaismo's original mission, it was insufficient to struggle over the relations of production in the (social) factory without contesting capital elsewhere, at the level of the state.[118]

Tronti, recognizing the insufficiency of working-class struggle alone to induce a broader crisis in capitalist development, shifted focus to the political as the terrain on which working-class advances were halted and on which it would thereafter be necessary to operate. He argued that the left must understand the practices and processes of politics as a distinct sphere of activity. Drawing on Lenin and Weber, Tronti urged the left to prioritize the struggle for power over the 'ethical view of politics as the realization of the good', with theory itself a weapon.[119] This meant that it was crucial to engage in struggle within formal political institutions. The state, as the central mediator of the class antagonism, represents a site where struggles can play out without a predetermined result. However, for labor to assert control, it must demonstrate its 'ability to govern' by actively participating in the 'practice of negotiation, manipulation, and intervention' associated with politics proper.[120]

For Tronti, 'political initiative' can inspire policy interventions that dictate the trajectory of economic development. In 'moments of crisis and transition', the influence of the political becomes crucial. 'Political mastery of economic laws' can shape material dynamics, aiming for either stabilization or 'social mutations' that offer 'partial solutions' to social and economic contradictions.[121] Recurring touchpoints in operaist and post-operaist thought, such as the New Deal and neoliberalism, but also Bolshevism and fascism, illustrate the importance of political responses to crises or threats in capitalist reproduction.

The AotP suggests the potential for working-class participation in processes of 'modernization' that manage contradiction for 'efficiency, productivity and

entrepreneurship', alongside democracy. Tronti notes a historical trend of capital encouraging working-class involvement in the 'modernization of capital' as a necessary step for capital's own 'political development' through the state. This incorporation, responding to crises, opens up the 'political terrain in relation to society', providing workers 'room for movement that is real, and not utopian' within which they can struggle and, where circumstances allow, capital-labor compromises can be struck.[122] The interplay of conflict and compromise mediated at the state level represents 'normal political struggle' within a capitalist society, providing the proper context for class politics. Tronti emphasizes the importance of political realism, asserting that movements fail the further they travel from this basic principle. Navigating this situation successfully requires ensuring the 'autonomy of the political struggle from that of the class' and its organizational expressions.[123] This is because 'only *the force that directs politically the processes of social transformation* can be the victor'.[124]

Tronti recommends a shift in focus for the working-class from attempting to dominate the relations of production in the workplace to pursuing state politics, through which the political institutions of the working-class would enjoy the autonomy necessary to win power. He argues that achieving working-class goals involves diverse strategies beyond a narrowly economistic interpretation of class interest, with trade unions operating autonomously along antagonistic lines separate from the formal political sphere, and vice versa. He saw such a separation as essential for the renewal of workerist politics, noting how reformist social democracy's 'quotidian Menshevik tactics' combined acceptance of existing conditions with an ideological 'pure principle' of improving 'those conditions themselves'. This reformist shift should be understood in the context of this changing political landscape. His theorization of the AotP was targeted at 'a reality in which the driving-force of the economic […] had ceased to offer an adequate conceptualization of social change'. The decline of the Fordist-Keynesian compromise and weakening of workers' movements were products of state interventions crucial for socioeconomic change. Tronti saw in this 'decreasing autonomy of the social' the possibilities for transformation afforded workers by the 'autonomy of the political'.[125]

6.1. Beyond Marxism, with Hegel

Unlike the 'militarized' view of the Marxist tradition that sees the state as an instrument of class rule and violent force to be either destroyed or wielded, Tronti emphasizes the importance of understanding the state's increasing capacity to respond adaptively to social transformations with pragmatic mediations rather than brute force.[126] For Tronti, this was epitomized in the Italian Christian Democrats, and the reformist 'Historic Compromise' convened with the PCI. Inspired by popular-frontism and Eurocommunism, in striking such a compromise the PCI aimed to bolster democracy as a bulwark against 'the radicalization of social struggles and movements'. In 'mourning for the labour movement', Tronti came to 'identify politics' with the 'state form' and the 'terrain of state-mediation as the only possible level of political confrontation'. Tronti took leading roles in the PCI and electoral office via its increasingly centrist successors. 'Engaging in opposition from the heights of government, driven by a politics of responsibility and

conviction', Tronti saw this as the 'loci' where the 'future of the Left' would be rescued.[127]

To inform this practical politics, Tronti recommended critical use of 'bourgeois science', which analysed struggles with a sophistication 'often ahead of thinking on the Left'.[128] Tronti considered 'enemy-thought', despite its tensions with 'petrified forest of vulgar Marxism', as essential for addressing the significant gaps in leftist perspectives.[129] This anti-materialist 'politicism' might be viewed as equally deterministic as Marxian 'economism', prioritizing the 'primacy of the political forces' instead.[130] But Tronti maintains contingency by emphasizing the primacy of different elements at different times. His conceptualization of the AotP relativizes the merits of materialist analyses based on the changing context.

In this last regard, Tronti sought alternative analytical tools due to changing conditions. Historical materialism, a 'product of early capitalism', was deemed obsolete as politics became more specialized, complex, and independent of pure economic drivers. Tronti argued that to succeed politically, the left needed to comprehend this radically different setting for class struggle. Early capitalism provided Marx with a clear case of the coincidence of politics with economics, but the emergence of a 'professional political elite' responsible for the 'management of power' through mediating between capital and labor led to a distinctive art and science of politics that Tronti believed the left should embrace.[131] For Tronti, this involved engaging with and, to some extent, acquiescing to bourgeois and conservative traditions of thought. These traditions, having been consistently vindicated by victory, possessed 'practical and theoretical experience' that the defeated, powerless left lacked. Tronti argued that the lesson of this experience was the need to slow down on the 'bending road of practice', accepting short-term compromise and piecemeal progress. However, 'on the straight line of theory, accelerate'—revising and renewing conceptual tools to better understand long-term challenges and navigate them effectively.[132]

This ultimately concerns the relationship between the intellectual and politics. Tronti suggests that, contrary to the traditional view of the intellectual 'envelop[ing] the men of action in a web of mediations and compromises', the roles are reversed and the web is spun instead by the politician. The intellectual possesses 'unconditional freedom' to pursue an extreme 'straight line' of thought. The politician, burdened by the weight of decision-making responsibility, follows the 'curved line' of action. Tronti emphasizes that the 'forceful political thought' driving these realizations can be both revolutionary and conservative in its political partisanship. But, at a time of declining political 'intensity, energy and power', erosion of 'modern political institutions' and directionlessness and disorientation at the top and bottom of politics, Tronti saw the ultimately conservative 'criterion of the political' espoused by the likes of Weber and Schmitt as one response. As a product of the worker's movement, Tronti suggested that 'like a vulture, I would seize the prey of thought wherever I may find it and for whatever ends it may serve', especially when left 'orphaned' by the defeat of 'Marxism as a unified system of thought'. This is not a substitution of one theory for another but constructing a 'constellation' that corrects the flaw of one with another. This method aligns with the 'Machiavellian counsel' to 'know your enemy better than your enemy knows himself'.[133]

Tronti's engagement with the 'forceful thought' of enemy traditions saw him advocate obstructing the course of history implied in the Marxist *eschaton* inherent in the likes of Negri, including the assumption of communism as an inevitable end of history. Instead, he advocates for a politics of *katechon*, of 'slowing down…the historical tendencies of capitalism in order to 'defer their disastrous consequences'. Here leaps in theory produce steps in practice, Tronti perceiving 'more *katechon* than *eschaton* in the *"what is to be done?"* which follows the end of modern politics'.[134] Slowing things down need not imply an absence of action. In certain conditions, including war and revolution, such actions may be necessary, Tronti following Weber's reading of the *Bhagavadgita* in seeing conflict as a solution to the 'polytheism of values', with peace secured only after waging war.[135]

Such states of exception offer rare moments of 'perfect coherence between theory and practice'. However, most of the time, political thought remains detached from the demands of practice, such that intellectuals and politicians alike 'must manoeuvre with demonic dexterity across the two terrains of thinking and of action'. As Weber argues, the diabolic power and force of politics sees boundaries and relationships between good and evil become blurred, and it is a prerequisite of praxis to stomach this ambiguity and contingency.[136] Tronti's connection to Weber highlights similarities between his pessimistic perspective on traditional Marxism's vision of progress and the strands of critical theory considered previously. Unlike critical theory, Tronti offers a practical politics that combines critique with potential political efficacy.

Additionally, Tronti also draws on Hegel to articulate the concrete implications of the abstract philosophy informing Frankfurt School critical theory. In a crucial text developing his conceptualization of the AotP, Tronti reveals in Hegel 'a subjectivity full of political realism'.This reading of Hegel stresses not political theory but 'political actions', deriving an 'objective political' synonymous with the 'state machinery' of institutions and a 'subjective political' synonymous with decision-making by politicians. The defeat of the Marxist tradition and workers movement owed to a failure to learn from the likes of Lenin and European social democracy that it was necessary to grasp the primacy and seriousness of this dual sense of the political. Tronti suggests that aligning short-term tactics with long-term strategy necessitates reengaging with precisely the 'high-level' bourgeois theory, represented in Hegel, with which Marx apparently 'settled accounts'. He regards Hegel's thought as representing the highest theoretical level of politics before the 'revenge of the social, a period in which the terrain of the political...buckles to other needs' with the rise of capitalism. In this respect he sees Hegel as anticipating and surpassing Marx. However, the sublation of Hegelianism within Marxism forced upon the workers movement an ideology that failed to produce a 'new way of doing politics' and so ceded the ground to a class adept at 'the practical management of power'.[137]

Marx's reluctance to be associated with bourgeois critique, including Hegel, deprived his followers of an awareness of the state's capacity to stabilize social relations through managing the interplay of the political and economic. This absence of state theory missed that the state is not 'the new suit or hat that capital puts on when it has already smartened up and is ready to present itself to the workers', but rather constitutive of capitalism itself. As Tronti writes,

> This is not so much about the autonomy of the political as about a lack of autonomy on the economic terrain; there is no autonomy of the social relation, no autonomy of production from the political when the decisive moment arrives for a transition to a different economic and social formation. In such moments we see the political objectively bends the economic terrain to its own demands; thus the political is an element that lives its own political life, that sets in motion its own laws that must come to be known and to be seen concretely.

Contrary to a Marxist perspective that saw the political terrain as a 'consequence of social relations of production', Tronti argues that the crucial decades of crisis in the early twentieth century resulted more from a 'crisis of political instrumentation [and] intervention in the economy' rather than the cascade of economics through politics. This misreading of the concrete historical context had tremendous import for the abstractions that issued from Marxism and echo in postoperaismo. Tronti's 'political Hegel' still stands a potential alternative. Tronti contends that the 'political Hegel' demands recognizing the necessity of not 'breaking' power, but of taking and managing it. Rather than seeking to abolish or 'blow up' contradictions, the left must instead seek to confront and 'govern' them.[138]

7. The critique of the autonomy of the political

There have been several well-founded criticisms of Tronti's theoretical development made in the decades since, relating to both its political and philosophical contradictions. As many pointed out at the time, the conceptualization of the AotP seemed to trail in the wake of the trajectory of the decisions made by Tronti and acolytes like Massimo Cacciari about their own futures as practical politicians.[139] As Negri led an extraparliamentary resistance against the PCI's 'intensifying collaboration with capital', it was precisely the capacity to effect change through this very complicity that attracted Tronti and the likes of Cacciari towards the PCI and away from operaismo, eventually joining the party's inner ranks. This was initially couched in terms of a strategic 'entryism', of which the full theorization of the AotP was ultimately downstream as a kind of philosophical legitimization of a direction already set, towards precisely the kind of traditional party and union politics that workerism had originally eschewed.[140] As well as Tronti's own course through party life, Cacciari's shows just how far this could be taken, his dictum that '[to have] power is to be integrated into the system' providing a preemptive justification of a political career the trajectory of which took him from what Negri called 'Nietzsche in parliament' to Mayor of Venice.[141]

It is widely noted that in spite of these apparent successes the 'internal logic' of the AotP, which in a break with conventional class politics permitted these 'political representatives to act without coordinating their activities with the needs of their constituents' produced only failure.[142] This historic failure began with the historic compromise, the Christian Democrats subordinating and excluding from the 'levers of power' the PCI whilst using the latter as cover for a 'fierce repression and criminalization of a large number of the extra-parliamentary left' of which Negri's imprisonment was in large part a result.[143] In this way, 'the Christian Democrats had made the history, and the Communists

had made the compromise', failing to wield any moderating or modernizing influence over policy and politics whatever from within government or without'.[144] Enforcing a position of fruitless responsibility on the part of the working class where previously *operaismo* had imposed a position of joyous irresponsibility, what initially appeared as *entrismo* quickly transpired to be *trasformismo*, an Italian concept describing 'the system of mutual favors and 'gentlemen's agreements' that kept the same business and land-owning elites in power over decades, but also served to co-opt newly powerful social groups and sideline ideologically committed politics'.[145]

A second important strand of critique is more theoretical and philosophical in orientation. It regards the claim of Tronti to avoid a material or technological determinism in positing the possibility that multiple different 'engines' can drive development at different points in time. More broadly, it concerns the tendency within wider Italian thought of the same period to herald a break with strong metaphysical or ontological referents for politics altogether. Arguably, Tronti might have taken the logical conclusions of the AotP further in the direction implied in the account of different engines or drivers, but we can perceive some of the opportunities and limitations inherent in such a development lurking in the 'weak' or 'negative' thought pursued by Cacciari and other associates who traveled a similar theoretical and political path over a similar time frame. At stake is whether in seeking to abandon an ontological focus on underpinning determinations and subjects driving politics, this approach simply substituted in another set of reference points, unable to escape the requirement of a ground or foundation.

Italian philosophy over the period following Tronti's AotP reacted to the failure of both operaismo and Eurocommunism by using philosophical foundation in Nietzsche and Heidegger, as well as a consolation in Christianity, to 'question strong metaphysical and ontological foundations' for politics.[146] This anti-metaphysical rejection of the *Grund*—foundation—led to an embrace of Heidegger's *Das Grundlose*—the unfounded.[147] The implication was that a politics based on any objective foundation would have an authoritarian, rather than democratic, tendency. Hence, advocates of weak thought emphasized *conversazione* over *contestazione*, 'downplaying political-philosophical conflicts about 'truth'—while holding practical political aspirations of a broadly social-democratic kind constant'.[148] In this respect, the philosophical critique of this body of thought and practice cannot be cleanly separated from the political, insofar as the 'hermeneutical free-play, decentered community, and formalist decisionism' that 'left-Heideggerianism' enabled set adherents on the path of 'political opportunism'. As Mandarini argues, this 'process of de-ontologisation' produces a 'free-floating *technics* of manipulation and efficacy' that 'reduces thought to what works and, hence, to the apologetic subordination to existing states of affairs…Once one excises all ontological foundation, power is necessarily defined by the level of integration into the system'.[149]

Cacciari, in particular, took the post-foundational implications of the 'political' theorized in the concept of the AotP to their apogee, rejecting, like Negri, transcendental dialectics albeit doing so not via an immanent ontology of subjective activity but rather a denial of any 'ontological referent' on which dialectical transcendence could be based. Cacciari increasingly saw politics in Wittgensteinian terms, centering on 'the irreducible autonomy of free-floating language games' the rules of which reward 'political

opportunism'.[150] For the likes of Cacciari, the language games and the conflicts on which they center cannot be resolved in the form of power as a 'synthesis'—power is only possible precisely for the lack of synthesis, in the negotiation of persistent conflict through playing language games. The Political, in this way, is that which 'keep[s] the confrontation between the various language games continuously open', striking compromises between 'different autonomies'. Stripped of a foundational political subject, politics is the preserve of a 'professional political class' skilled in 'decisionistic management of the multiplicity of fragmentary rationalities' into which the working-class dissolves.[151]

The challenge of this 'weak' or 'living' thought, however, is to hold the line on this lack of metaphysical or ontological foundation to the political. For Cacciari, 'substance is illusory, Being is equally so—both represent merely utopian moments of synthesis. In their place there is nothing'. But it is questionable whether the negative condition of nothingness used to steal away any firm ontological foundation achieves the break with metaphysics it sets out to, or whether it merely puts in its place an even more metaphysical and positive alternative foundation of its own. For critics like Mandarini, this 'nothing' cannot avoid positing a new metaphysical foundation in the forms of the negative itself.[152]

Bridging the theoretical and the practical political, Murphy points out the tendency within this line of thought to reimpose a referent within the 'language games' themselves, which however 'open' their confrontation is kept, nonetheless posit their resolution practically in the familiar transcendent 'dialectical synthesis' of 'party- and state-centred socialist reformism'. As Murphy observes of Cacciari, an underpinning revolutionary subject is indeed reintroduced—'the abstract universal subject of Heidegger's critique of humanist essentialism'—albeit one that acts not for itself but by 'delegat[ing] its agency to the masters of the specialised language game of politics'. This is 'workerism turn[ed] inside out, reserving to the party's technocrats the militant agency that Tronti's original hypothesis had attributed directly to the workers themselves'.[153] As such this apparent break with the determinism of the Italian radical tradition posits little more than the latest in the continuing succession of new revolutionary actors that generation after generation of disappointed Italian radicals have pinned their hopes on having been disappointed by the concrete reality of a working-class that refuses the role allocated it by abstract theory.

These criticisms aside, the AotP underpins a productive and possibly transformative encounter in the most recent work of Hardt and Negri. In *Assembly*, they return constantly to a critique of the concept of the AotP, forming one of the central argumentative threads of this latest and likely final iteration of their postoperaist theoretical edifice. While maintaining skepticism, their interaction with this concept leads to significant reshaping of their approach, representing a moderation of certain excesses and a compromise with the practical realities of politics of the kind glimpsed but unfulfilled in Negri's earlier reading of Spinoza's *PT*. Their focus on the sources of Tronti's conceptualization of the AotP, including Weber and Machiavelli, shows responsiveness to the demands placed on theory by the necessities of practical politics. At the same time, this engagement marks a continuation of how, posing himself against the deontological 'left-Heideggerianism' that emerged from the upheavals and disappointments of the Italian seventies, Negri very early on resolutely refused '*Das Grundlose* of being'. Holding fast to ontology, he rejected how, transposed to practical

politics, this groundlessness implies an AotP contested through sheer 'will to power'.[154]

Updating this insight for the present day, Hardt and Negri characterize the AotP as the idea that 'political decision-making' should be shielded from economic and social pressures, a perspective they associate with left reaction against how neoliberalism has reduced what Wendy Brown terms 'the modest ethical gap' liberal democracy guaranteed between 'economy and polity'. This politically liberal critique in the name of 'rights, freedom and equality' they associate with 'pallid appeals to values and ethics'.Hardt and Negri also associate the AotP with the belief that a return to the state can offer an alternative to neoliberal economics, reviving mid-twentieth-century Keynesianism. However, they argue that the social and political conditions supporting such projects 'no longer exist', with institutions 'eviscerated' leaving only 'nostalgia'. Such prognoses, they suggest, do not move from the 'capacities for organization and cooperation' immanent to the 'lives of the multitude as they are today', cautioning against the appeal of electoral leadership as a response to the failures of post-2008 horizontalist movements.[155]

In this context, Hardt and Negri criticize left political realism that views reformism as the only 'reasonable and effective path' to power. They dismiss this form of reformism as 'accommodating to capitalist rule...participating in government [and] creating structures for labor and business to collaborate so that wages, work conditions, and social well-being can be slowly, but surely, improved'. Hardt and Negri find this form of realism 'entirely unrealistic' as it seeks an impossible and undesirable sovereignty closer to Hobbes than Spinoza. They take issue with political theology—the idea in Schmitt, Weber, as well as Tronti, that a secularized religious logic powers politics—namely, the idea of the sovereign as katechon, the godly force 'that holds evil at bay' deprioritising any politics based on 'a constructive project'. Critiquing the 'supposed common sense of political reason' and political science for upholding the AotP, they argue that these perspectives justify state action as the sole locus of 'political life', and the vital center the site of 'equilibrium and stability, justice and moderation' against 'radical and irrational challenges'. They associate this stance with a katechistic 'politics of fear' reminiscent of Hobbes and Schmitt. Hardt and Negri reject the notion of administrative or bureaucratic 'state reason' implied by this theology, viewing the state in instrumental terms as a tool of class power that artificially 'maintains separation between the rulers and the ruled'.[156]

Instead, Hardt and Negri advocate for 'non-sovereign' institutions and forms of power at the level of the social represented by the multitude. They propose a 'play of plural counterpowers' that prevents any transcendent sovereign overcoming and seizure of power capable of 'acting "in the final instance" over society and the state'. Only via this play of counterpowers can any vertical 'process of counterpower' be constituted by means of a Machiavellian 'new Prince'. This is a much more sophisticated picture of constitution than found previously in Negri, less prone to the populist resonances of recent years, and better for its interaction with ideas around the AotP. As if to highlight the increasing practicality of the politics this implies, the play of counterpowers will resemble nothing more or less than the 'free worker institutions' of Fordism. These institutions are seen as mechanisms for guaranteeing the active presence of 'non-state public power' distinct

from government and market, in civil society situated between individuals and the state.[157]

As the language reverts from the operaist influence of 'counterpower' to the post-operaist terminology of the 'multitude', however, old problems reemerge. A politics lodged at the level of the state must seek not only 'non-sovereign' organizations for the playing out of 'counterpowers', they argue, but a destruction of the state altogether and the gap it protects between representation and represented, between decision-making institutions and collective power. The multitude reenters the frame as the relationship between power over and power to, power from above and power from below, is flipped in familiar ways. For Hardt and Negri, conventional 'political realism' fixated on pursuing power from above neglects the potential and agency of the multitude as it already exists. They advocate for a true political realism grounded in 'a materialist analysis of the passions of the multitude' in its cooperative social production and reproduction. The recent version of their ideas places a greater emphasis on Machiavelli, rather than Spinoza, as an outcome of an encounter with the AotP.[158]

Machiavelli, one of the past masters of the AotP to which Tronti is indebted, has his own spin on the concept which Hardt and Negri see centering on a 'definition of power—as decision and virtue, as cunning and fortune, in the construction and the legitimation of the relationship of government, which requires consent and demands obedience'. However, they extract from this a distinctive political realism that challenges the tradition of the AotP. Against a Machiavellian AotP, they present Machiavelli's own words: 'to know well the nature of peoples one must be prince, and to know well the nature of princes one must be of the people'. From this perspective, power emerges from below to 'break open' the AotP—in this case, through the overflowing social production of the multitude.[159]

The engagement with Machiavelli and the AotP becomes particularly productive in forcing Hardt and Negri to address the practical political issue of leadership. Machiavelli and the AotP act as conceptual coordinates for a critical survey of the way that post-2008 left movements failed to establish the 'roots and branches' necessary to 'be able to survive adverse weather'. These movements, refusing organization in favor of structurelessness and leaderlessness, resemble the 'unarmed prophets' Machiavelli ridicules, being 'not only useless but dangerous to themselves and others'. Hardt and Negri concede that movements they promoted or inspired fell into this pattern. They are for balance between 'people's consent and popular action' and, if necessary, the 'force of authority'—whether through coercion or conspiracy.[160] Machiavelli captures the specific temporality that governs what Tronti calls the 'curved line' of political action, on which one must move slowly and carefully:

> to tame fortune and to weather the unfortunate storms of political events, we must construct institutionalised virtue as a line of defence. When the weather is calm, he counsels, we should build dykes and dams so that when the raging waters of the river rise up, the damage can be mitigated. We subscribe wholeheartedly to Machiavelli's prudence…movements need organization and institutions in order to last and to withstand all manner of adversity. No one

> should take the justified and necessary contemporary critiques of centralized leadership and authority to mean that political organization and institutions are no longer necessary.[161]

Following Machiavelli, Hardt and Negri see a balance of organization and openness, secrecy and transparency, as key to lasting success. They nonetheless argue that movements must withstand the autonomy asserted by their leaderships. This involves inverting the relationship between strategy and tactics, such that the multitude sets the former, and leaders work with it to enact tactics. This suspends the Schmittian logic of sovereignty resting with the one who decides (echoed in Tronti) and any sense the political has autonomy from the social—in other words, the immanence espoused in Negri's Spinozan turn. As practical illustration, they cite Latin American movements that subordinate the political to economic and social needs.[162]

From the engagement with Machiavelli and the AotP emerges a vision of long-term 'slow transformation of institutions' focused on seizing power in service of the capacities and struggles of the multitude. This strategic gambit Hardt and Negri recuperate as 'political realism', marking an advance on previous work by balancing spontaneity and institutional organization. However, their 'realism' holds that politics cannot but be 'animated by the movements of contemporary society' and the 'desires embedded in them', such that there is no autonomy for politics at all. Moreover, their assault on sovereignty and the AotP extends to 'a reassessment of the relationship between representation and democracy', there no longer being any 'separation between rulers and ruled'.[163]

Whilst Hardt and Negri's recent work undoubtedly brings organization and institutions back in, then, there is still an overall lapse into the immanentist and deterministic view that, collapsing the social and the political, sees the multitude as simply a representative of the unfolding material forces. The conceptualization of the AotP tends to differentiate between wealth and power on account of an aversion to economic determinism and a desire to keep the political separate from 'economic pressures and social needs'. But Hardt and Negri emphasize the interconnectedness of wealth and power, both in the concentration of wealth in the hands of the powerful and power in the hands of the wealthy, but also to the power that accrues to the multitude through the commonwealth of social production.[164]

Despite their claim to move beyond 'economistic versions of Marxism', Hardt and Negri simply displace materialist determinism from the economic to a category of the social in which the economic is immanently contained. By collapsing politics into this social terrain too, they lose the specificity and relative autonomy of different spheres of action and the capacity of politics to overcome sheer material necessity. This imposes a logic of determination rather than the 'lags' and discontinuities found in the operaist path untaken represented in the late work of Tronti.And, despite claims to have transcended transcendent aims or goals and shaken off Hegelian teleology, Hardt and Negri still espouse an 'immanent teleology' formed of 'the desires of the multitude'.[165] It is predictably undisprovable, insofar as everything that happens is ontologically assumed to be the result of the unfolding desires of the multitude as the carrier of the unfolding forces of production. Any claim that is uncontestable on the basis of the logic of the argument

provides little room for critical thought. All phenomena can be seen as an outcome and advance of the cause of the collective subject.

Moreover, Hardt and Negri's assertion that 'we have not yet seen what is possible when the multitude assembles' shields the multitude from criticism by suggesting that its true potential remains unrealized.[166] Following many previous works bearing witness to the multitude in motion, the results seem to have been so unsatisfactory that we find ourselves hearing the same argument that successive generations of radicals right and left alike have told since the dawn of time: we cannot judge utopia because it has not yet been properly tried. This stance, while claiming political realism, overlooks empirical evidence and experiences, raising questions about the viability of their political project in unfavorable circumstances.

8. Conclusion: On wishful thinking

Within a tradition of Italian thought that theorizes as part and parcel of political action, (post)operaismo has consistently been compelled by the pursuit of rediscovered or obscure texts enabling a march to be stolen on lesser opposition. In Negri's case, the personal and political intersected as his own struggles shaped this search from a position of exile, following his arrest and imprisonment. In this context, Spinoza played a crucial role in helping Negri 'get back on [his] feet', reconstructing a 'terrain of political realism' that resisted succumbing to the 'harsh reality of defeat'.[167] It may well be claimed that in making the criticisms voiced here, this article numbers among what Negri calls 'the defeated', a subsection of his critics who share 'a dismal outlook on life', opting to 'lick[] their wounds' rather than engaging in the 'overflowing joy of *multitude-making*'.[168] There is something in this; Christopher Hill described the generation who lived through and lost the political promise of the English Revolution as gripped by a profound 'experience of defeat'.[169] Negri, meanwhile, remained to the end 'immune to the reality or language of defeat'.[170] In light of the left's recent deficiencies, a critical reckoning with Negri's 'wishful thinking' is more pressing a task than ever. But, as noted earlier, critical theory and its particular 'negative' spin on Hegelian dialectics is in and of itself an insufficient guide to politics and the construction of practical alternatives.

We returned to Negri's treatment of Spinoza's *PT* as a potentially more sophisticated and clearsighted rendition of some of his core arguments that, being a trickier beast to apprehend, features somewhat less in existing critiques of his postoperaist thought. Whilst moving us neatly onto the terrain of practical politics itself, however, it still sustains the same shortcomings as found elsewhere—although arguably this has much to do with it being bolted onto a set of deterministic Marxian insights as it does with anything foundational to Spinoza. The *PT* and Negri's use of it remains much more alive to the paradoxes and contradictions that activate politics than do other uses and abuses of Spinoza in the postoperaist tradition. But the issue remains of why, given the specificity of politics, Negri follows Spinoza in condensing everything together, stealing away the particularity of politics as a sphere of activity separate, or at least relatively autonomous, from sheer social or material necessity. There is no detailed sense given here of how this contradiction is, or is to be, navigated in a concrete, practical sense. For Negri, Spinoza's

PT displaces the moment of autonomy from the political to the 'collective needs of the masses' and 'constitutive human praxis' within which the political is an immanent part.[171] The political is analytically folded into the social, determination by which deprives politics of the autonomy required to make it practical. It thus fails to escape the criticism Hegel raised of Spinoza: 'The cause of his death was consumption, from which he had long been a sufferer; this was in harmony with his system of philosophy, according to which all particularity and individuality pass away into one substance'.[172]

The article has sought a potential solution to the impasse this produces by returning from postoperaismo to the untaken path trodden by its operaist predecessor, in particular the late work of Tronit, its recently passed progenitor. Tronti articulates a conceptualization of the political that captures the role of human agency and struggle—such as that reached for by Negri via Spinoza and Marx. However, he also captures a pessimistic, realistic standpoint akin to that which underpins critical theory and its inheritance from the likes of Hegel and Weber—an inheritance that Tronti shares but to somewhat different effect. The qualitative difference in the work of Tronti is that it offers a more thoroughgoing guide to practical politics, making politically effective the vexed relationship of thought and praxis which in the increasingly theological direction of Tronti's writing might just as well be conceived of as that between 'God' and 'warrior' as between intellectual and politician.

Negri takes from Spinoza an immanentist view where the separateness and relative autonomy of different spheres of praxis are abolished in the name of an attack on transcendence of any kind, and from Marx a reading of history through the lens of a determining or necessary force. Even if, as in Spinoza, this determining force is a collective subject in process—the multitude—this orientation still has a theoretically stifling effect on precisely the concept of autonomy supposedly central to the autonomist tradition, and thus places Negri in a position of advancing an effectively post-autonomist perspective. Tronti, by maintaining the moment of autonomy on the part of the political and, via an innovative reading of Hegel that differs in intent and outcome from the Frankfurt School, the transcendent role of the state towards which class struggles are addressed, provides materials for an alternative. This becomes particularly pertinent in the present conjuncture as the conditions are reestablished for the kind of 'state of exception' that Tronti sees as underpinning the play of the political in the twentieth century.

Accounting for some of the many criticisms of the concept, in the final section, we saw that Hardt and Negri's own engagement with the concept of the AotP, in their most recent and likely work *Assembly*, does not leave their own theoretical framework untouched. The sophistication of the questioning of democracy and politics found earlier in Negri's work on the *PT* is combined with a critical rediscovery of political theology and political realism by way of an encounter with the tradition of the AotP that Tronti represents, as well as a Machiavellian treatment of leadership as the necessary outcome rather than initial driver of processes of organization. Against a backdrop which offers little grounds for the kind of optimism that underpinned postoperaismo at an earlier stage, this shows the increasing capacity on the part of Negri late in his life to think flexibly across the reality and specificity of politics in its practical form. Even if longerstanding flaws and weaknesses remain intact, Negri, like Tronti, showed the productive and contentious

power of the 'living thought' that emerged from the 'Italian difference'. The worlds of both theory and praxis are poorer for their loss.

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Notes

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1. Esposito (2012); Chiesa & Toscano (2009); Mandarini (2009).
2. Esposito (2012, 225, 232–33).
3. Negri (1992); Marx (1993); Hardt and Negri (2001, 2004, 2009).
4. Hardt and Negri (2017).
5. Tronti (2020); see Caygill (2021); Pitts (2022a).
6. Machiavelli (2011).
7. Marx (1993); Pitts (2016).
8. Hardt and Negri (2001).
9. Hardt and Negri (2017, xv, 37, 81, 125–27, 189).
10. Negri (1991, 2004, 2013, 2020).
11. Ryan (1992, xxviii–xxx, 191–221, 216).
12. Hardt and Negri (2001, 51–52).
13. See Pitts (2020).
14. Muller (2013, 92).
15. Thompson et al (2022).
16. Hardt and Negri (2001, 51–52).
17. Cleaver (1992); Pitts (2022b).
18. Sherman (2004, 167).
19. Hardt and Negri (2001, 169).
20. Negri (2013, 2, 49, 81–82 99n2); Nairn (2005).
21. Gunn (1992); Bonefeld (1994).
22. Sherman (2004, 146–7).
23. Sherman (2004, 168).
24. Hardt and Negri (2001, 25); Adorno and Horkheimer (1997, xiv).
25. Thompson and Pitts (2024).
26. Negri (1991, 49).
27. Noys (2012).
28. Negri (1991, 49–52).
29. Benjamin (2004, 402).
30. Cleaver (1992).

31. Negri (1991, 20).
32. Negri (2013, 52).
33. Sherman (2004, 148).
34. Negri (2013, 53).
35. Negri (2004, 99).
36. Bonefeld (1994).
37. Noys (2012, 114).
38. Hegel (1989, 536); Sherman (2004, 165).
39. Cleaver (1992, xxi).
40. Negri (1991, 47–52, 60, 72, 149, 213).
41. Negri (2013, 20, 41).
42. See Cruddas and Pitts (2020).
43. Negri (1991, 69; 2004, 84).
44. Negri (2013, 12, 39–40; 2004, 88–9).
45. Negri (1991, 220–223; see also 2013, 51).
46. Negri (2004, 97, 112n2).
47. Benjamin, quoted in Noys (2012, 115).
48. Adorno (2003a, 2003b, 122); Hegel (1967, 122–9).
49. Adorno (2003a: 104–105).
50. Negri (2008, 50–2).
51. Hardt and Negri (2001, 51–52).
52. McRobbie (2018, 93); Bonefeld (1994).
53. Marcuse (1972, 33, 37).
54. Sherman (2004, 145–6, 166).
55. Negri (2004, 14).
56. Sherman (2004, 166).
57. Negri (1991, xviii-xxii).
58. Negri (1991, xxi; 2004, 14; 2013, 74–5).
59. Spinoza (2016a, 513); Negri, 2004, 16).
60. Negri (1991, 194, 200).
61. Hardt and Negri (2017, 134).
62. Negri (1991, 195; 2013, 7).
63. Negri (2013, 52).
64. Hardt and Negri (2017, 23, 35, 52).
65. Negri (2013, 77–81).
66. Negri (2004, 24).
67. Krahl (1984, 307–8).
68. Hohendahl (1984, 209).
69. Krahl (1984, 307–8).
70. Kreckel (1984, 256–257); Adorno and Horkheimer (1997).
71. Hohendahl (1984, 210).
72. Krahl (1984, 308); Hohendahl (1984, 210).
73. Negri (2004, 10).
74. Negri (2004, 12).

75. Negri (2004, 9).
76. Negri (1991, 202).
77. Negri (2004, 13–14, 24).
78. Negri (2020, 48).
79. Negri (1991, 202).
80. Negri (2004, 16).
81. Negri (2004, 20–24).
82. Negri (2004, 20–21; Spinoza, 2016a, 544–545).
83. Negri (2004, 102–103); Spinoza, 2016a, 514).
84. Negri (2004, 21).
85. Spinoza, 2016b, 346); see Negri (2004, 22–23).
86. Negri (2020, 55).
87. Negri (2004, 17).
88. Negri (2004, 18–19, 37–39).
89. Negri (2004, 42–44).
90. Negri (2020, 50–53).
91. Negri (2004, 41).
92. Negri (2004, 44–45, 50).
93. Negri (2004, 58n37, 103).
94. Negri (1991, 186–189); Negri (2004, 12).
95. Negri (2004, 15, 24).
96. Negri (1991, 190–2; 2004, 16–17).
97. Negri (1991, 193–4).
98. Negri (1991, 194–196).
99. Negri (2004, 41).
100. Negri (2004, 16).
101. Negri (1991, 198–200).
102. Negri (2004, 45).
103. Negri (2020, 56–58).
104. Negri (1991, 202).
105. Lassere (2020, 275); Tronti (2020).
106. Carrera (2009, 6).
107. Tronti (2019).
108. Caygill (2021, 7).
109. Lassere (2020, 273).
110. Farris (2011, 31–43).
111. Lassere (2020, 274).
112. Caygill (2021, 4–5).
113. Tronti (2021/2019c, 21).
114. Carrera (2009, 21).
115. Caygill (2021).
116. Tronti (2020).
117. Farris (2013: 190–198); Mandarini (2010, 181–182).
118. Tronti (2020); Lassere (2020, 273).

119. Caygill (2021, 6).
120. Farris (2013, 191–192); Mandarini (2010, 181–184).
121. Tronti (2020); Lassere (2020, 272–273).
122. Tronti (2020); Tronti (2021/1980b, 59).
123. Farris (2011, 47–48); Mandarini (2010, 183).
124. Lassere (2020, 273).
125. Mandarini (2010, 180); Farris (2011, 42–45; see also Tronti (2020); Anastasi and Mandarini (2020).
126. Tronti (2021/1980b, 52–53, 56).
127. Farris (2011, 31–2, 49, 58); Mezzadra (2011, 993).
128. Mandarini (2010, 184).
129. Tronti, quoted in Farris (2011, 32–35).
130. Farris (2013, 199).
131. Farris (2011, 43–44; 2013, 188–189).
132. Tronti (2020); Lassere (2020, 273–274).
133. Tronti (2021/2019c, 22–23, 35).
134. Lassere (2020, 274–5).
135. Caygill (2021, 9–10); see Weber (2020).
136. Tronti (2021/2019c, 25); Weber (2020, 107).
137. Tronti (2021/1976a, 40–44, 50).
138. Tronti (2021/1976a, 46–49).
139. See Cacciari (2009).
140. Murphy (2010, 328, 332); Carrera (2009,7).
141. Mandarini in Cacciari (2010, 353–354); see Murphy (2005).
142. Murphy (2010, 332).
143. Mandarini (2009, 76).
144. Muller (2013, 94).
145. Muller (2013, 82); Mandarini (2009, 76); Toscano in Chiesa and Toscano (2009).
146. Muller (2013, 94–96).
147. Mandarini (2009, 55–56).
148. Muller (2013, 94–96).
149. Mandarini (2009, 55–56, 69).
150. Murphy (2010, 333); Mandarini (2009).
151. Mandarini (2009, 61, 66–67).
152. Mandarini (2009, 69); Murphy (2010).
153. Murphy (2010, 333–334).
154. Mandarini (2009, 57).
155. Hardt and Negri (2017, 42–44, 90).
156. Hardt and Negri (2017, 134, 246–51, 288).
157. Hardt and Negri (2017, 45, 257, 278, 287–289).
158. Hardt and Negri (2017, 76).
159. Hardt and Negri (2017, 70–81).
160. Hardt and Negri (2017, 3–7).
161. Hardt and Negri (2017, 63).

162. Hardt and Negri (2017, 16, 23–25, 34–35).
163. Hardt and Negri (2017, 231, 278, 284–89).
164. Hardt and Negri (2017, 288).
165. Hardt and Negri (2017, 233, 278).
166. Hardt and Negri (2017, 295).
167. Negri (2020, 47).
168. Negri (2013, 81–2).
169. Hill (2016).
170. Thompson (2005, 89).
171. Negri (2004, 18–19).
172. Hegel, quoted in Negri (1991, 203).

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