

The Labour of the Multitude and the Fabric of Biopolitics

Globalization Working Papers 08/3

August 2008

WORKING PAPER SERIES

Antonio Negri



Institute on Globalization
and the Human Condition
<http://globalization.mcmaster.ca>

Introduction

Mark Coté

I had the pleasure of driving Toni Negri to the McMaster University campus for his brief stay as the Hooker Distinguished Visiting Professor. As contingency would have it, we approached the city from the east, since I had picked him up at Brock University. Anyone familiar with Hamilton knows that this necessitates driving past the heart of “Steeltown.” Negri, in a driving practice true to his theoretical orientation, excitedly requested that we follow the route most proximal to the mills and smokestacks of Stelco and Dofasco. He asked many questions about the history of steelworkers’ labour struggles, the composition of the labour force, its level and form of organization, and the role of heavy industry in the Canadian economy.

Negri’s keen interest in the conditions of a quintessentially material form of industrial production provides a necessary counterpoint to the strong poststructuralist inflection of his lecture. After all, his stated focus was on the subjective, the cultural, and the creative as key modalities of labour under globalization. These contrapuntal elements bring us to the heart of Negri’s project wherein the conceptual deployment of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze act as articulated elements of his longstanding and ongoing commitment to Marxist theory and praxis. It is, of course, an open Marxism, iterable as necessitated by our historical moment. But then innovation, as opposed to orthodoxy, has been a hallmark of Negri’s distinguished and sometimes incendiary career.

In the lecture which follows—“The Labour of the Multitude and the Fabric of Biopolitics”—Negri asks two basic questions. First, how can we understand the organization of labour under neoliberal globalization where it has been anchored in the *Bios*? Second, when and by which modalities does life itself enter into the field of power and become a central issue? In answering these questions, he offers an exciting reconceptualization of power (*pace* Foucault) that provides a unique and provocative lens through which to examine globalization in relation to the human condition. The purpose of this brief introduction will therefore be to both contextualize the work of Negri and introduce key concepts used in the lecture, namely biopower-biopolitics, and the crisis of measure.

Negri may be most familiar to some through his scholar-as-celebrity status achieved with the massive success of *Empire* (Hardt and Negri 2000). In Italy, however, he has been producing important work since the 1960s. The autonomist Marxist tradition from which Negri emerged—historically called *operaismo* (“workerism”) in Italian—was distinguished by turning orthodox Marxism “on its head,” as it were. Its fundamental conceptual innovation was to reverse the dynamic of labour-capital power relations. Rather than beginning with capital’s domination over labour, the autonomists—via Mario Tronti in the early 1960s—began with the struggles of labour. In short, this new model understood capitalist power as having a reactive dynamic; only ever responding to the potential, the practices, and the struggles of labour. Thus capitalist development proceeds through the rearticulation of existing social and productive forms of labour. Under such a model, questions about the composition of labour are of preeminent importance, particularly as they can reveal the weakest points of capitalist control.

Negri attained another kind of prominence in the 1970s. At that time, the Left in Italy was certainly the largest and most febrile in Europe.¹ It was also polyvalent, active both within representative democracy and on an extra-parliamentary level. Throughout the 1970s, the Eurocommunism of Enrico Berlinguer’s Italian Communist Party was tantalizingly close to gaining power, falling only four percent short of plurality behind the ruling Christian Democrats in 1976. The Party’s institutional successes created a wider swathe for more critical and open Left politics. Negri was a preeminent part of this tradition, long active in the more radical extra-parliamentary Left, both as a revolutionary militant and as Professor and Head of the Institute of Political Science department of the University of Padova. Clashes grew more constant, not only between the variegated radical Left

and the Italian state, but with the Italian Communist Party as well. Indeed, Negri's work from that time cannot be properly understood without recognizing that the antagonism it expresses is directed as much against the Italian Communist Party as the state and capital. After the murder of Italian Prime Minister Aldo Moro in 1978 by the Red Brigade, the state went on the offensive with its net indiscriminately cast wide. Despite the lack of evidence, and the fact that Negri had been a vocal opponent of the Leninist-vanguardist Red Brigades, he was accused of being their theoretical wellspring.

He quickly fled to Paris and while in exile there, was invited by Louis Althusser to deliver a series of lectures at the prestigious Ecole Normale Supérieure, eventually transcribed as *Marx Beyond Marx* (Negri 1989). Based on the *Grundrisse* (Marx 1993), the lectures evinced not the despair of post-insurrectionary failure, but a liberatory focus on making Marx more adequate to a historical moment in which Post-Fordism was beginning to take flight through neoliberal globalization. As such, it signalled an expanded theoretical perspective that would lead Negri increasingly to Foucault, Deleuze, and the conceptual cornerstones of his Hooker lecture which follows.

Negri identified a "crisis of measure" in the Marxist labour theory of value as *both* an emergent characteristic of global capital, *and* as a new path for radical political, social, and economic change. A key factor in the breakdown of a simple temporal measure of the productivity of labour is the radical transformation of the production process through Information and Communication Technology. This facilitates the rise of "immaterial labour" and the "general intellect" as the dominant productive forces, as opposed to unmediated material labour.

What is innovative about the interpretation by Negri and other autonomists is that this is primarily a subjective process—hence the increasingly post-structuralist trajectory. Marx, in the *Grundrisse*, posited "general intellect" as accumulating in the fixed capital of machinery. However, the "subjective" reading of the autonomists situates this value in new labouring subjectivities, the technical, cultural, and linguistic knowledge that makes our high-tech economy possible. Such subjectivities become an immediate productive force. And, as autonomist Paolo Virno notes, "They are not units of measure, but rather are the measureless presupposition of heterogeneous operative possibilities" (1996, 269). The temporal disjunction provocatively situates immaterial labour beyond the commodity form, signalling a "scissor-like widening" of the gap between wage labour/exchange value and this new subjective productive force.

For Negri, such a force is diffused—albeit asymmetrically—in an individuated manner across society, and it expresses the "global potentiality which has within it that generalized social knowledge which is now an essential condition of production" (Negri 1988, 224). In short, this new "subjective" condition of labour is the liberatory potential of what Negri would later call the "multitude." Thus inscribed in this new power dynamic is the possibility of labour being not only antagonistic to capital, but autonomous from—as opposed to within—capital.

Foucault's biopower offers a new conceptual foundation. Here Negri helps to make visible the strong lines of affinity between Foucault (and Deleuze) and autonomist Marxism that have been largely overlooked. What is taken from Foucault is a thoroughly reconfigured understanding of power. What it enables us to see with greater precision is the intertwining of life and power, in myriad productive formations. Foucault identified biopower as a form emergent since the end of the eighteenth century in the wake of the inadequacies of sovereign and disciplinary power. This is a productive form of power relations which "manages" populations (not individual bodies) in a "preventative fashion" to maximize their productivity as opposed to being, say, punished after the fact as with sovereign power (Foucault offers sexual health and early epidemiology as initial examples). As Foucault notes, "biopower uses populations like a machine for production, for the production of wealth, goods, and other individuals" (1994, 1012).

So far, we have considered that biopower has been presented as a more sophisticated form of command, but such a unidimensional interpretation obscures the very aspects which make it so favoured by autonomists. Maurizio Lazzarato emphasizes this in his important essay “From biopower to biopolitics” (2002). Lazzarato reminds us that Foucault distinguished constituted biopower (a dispositif of command, management, and domination) from biopolitical becoming (creativity and resistance). It is the latter biopolitical form that holds the capacity for freedom and transformation identified by Negri in his lecture. Power, be it in the labour-capital dyad or in biopolitical-biopower form, is always in an indissoluble linkage between resistance and control. The pursuit of its productive, creative, and liberatory potential is the real heart of Negri’s lecture and it contributes to bringing about more desirable forms of globalization.

The Labour of the Multitude and the Fabric of Biopolitics²

Antonio Negri

(Translated by Peter Graefe, Sara Mayo, and Mark Coté)

I would like to discuss the problem of the anchoring of the organization of labour—and of the new post-modern political field which results—in the *Bios*. We will see in a moment when and according to which modalities life enters into the field of power and becomes an essential issue.

Let's take as a starting point the Foucauldian definition of biopolitics. The term "biopolitics" indicates the manner in which power transforms itself in a certain period so it can govern not only individuals through a certain number of disciplinary procedures, but also the set of living things constituted as "populations." Biopolitics (through local biopowers) takes control of the management of health, hygiene, diet, fertility, sexuality, etc., as each of these different fields of intervention have become political issues. Biopolitics thus comes to be involved, slowly but surely, in all aspects of life which later become the sites for deploying the policies of the Welfare State: its development is in effect entirely taken up with the aim of a better management of the labour force. As Foucault says: "the discovery of population is, at the same time as the discovery of the individual and the trainable [dressable] body, the other major technological nucleus around which the political procedures of the West were transformed" (1994, 1012). Biopolitics is thus based on principles which develop the technologies of capitalism and sovereignty: these are largely modified by evolving from a first form—disciplinary—to a second, which adds to disciplines the dispositifs³ of control. In effect, while discipline presented itself as an anatomo-policy of bodies and was applied essentially to individuals, biopolitics represents on the contrary a sort of grand "social medicine" that applies to the control of populations as a way to govern life. Life henceforth becomes part of the field of power.

The notion of biopolitics raises two problems. The first is tied to the contradiction that we find in Foucault himself: in the first texts where the term is used, it seems connected to what the Germans called in the nineteenth century the *Polizeiwissenschaft*, that is to say, the maintenance of order and discipline through the growth of the State and its administrative organization. Later on, however, biopolitics seems on the contrary to signal the moment that the traditional nation/state dichotomy is overtaken by a political economy of life in general. And it is this second formulation that gives rise to the second problem: is it a question of thinking biopolitics as a set of biopowers? Or, to the extent that saying that power has invested life also signifies that life is a power, can we locate in life itself—that is to say, in labour and in language, but also in bodies, in desire and in sexuality—the site of emergence of a counterpower, the site of a production of subjectivity that would present itself as a moment of desubjection (*désassujettissement*)? It is evident that this concept of biopolitics cannot be understood solely on the basis of the conception that Foucault had about power itself. And power, for Foucault, is never a coherent, stable, unitary entity, but a set of "power relations" that imply complex historical conditions and multiple effects: power is a field of powers. Consequently, when Foucault writes of power, it is never about describing a first or fundamental principle, but rather about a set of correlations where practices, knowledge and institutions are interwoven. The concept of power becomes totally different—almost totally post-modern—in relation to this Platonic tradition which has been permanent and hegemonic in a good part of modern thought. The juridical models of sovereignty are thus subject to a political critique of the State which reveals the circulation of power in the social and consequently the variability of phenomena of subjection to which they give rise: paradoxically, it is precisely in the complexity of this circulation that the processes of subjectification, resistance and insubordination can be given.

If we take these different elements, the genesis of the concept of biopower should then be modified as a function of the conditions in which these elements have been given. We will now seek to privilege the transformation of work in the organization of labour: we have here the possibility of working on a periodization of the organization of labour in the industrial era that permits us to understand the particular importance of the passage from the disciplinary regime to the control regime. It is this passage that we can see, for instance, in the crisis of Fordism, at the moment where the Taylorist organization of labour no longer sufficed to discipline the social movements, as well as the Keynesian macroeconomic techniques which were no longer able to evaluate the measure of labour. Starting in the 1970s this transformation (which will provoke in turn a redefinition of biopowers) was most clearly seen in the “central” countries of capitalist development. It is thus in following the rhythm of this modification that we can understand the problematization of the theme of production of subjectivity in Foucault and Deleuze, by underlining that these two schools of thoughts have common ground. In Deleuze, for instance, the displacement of what he takes to be the genuine matrix of the production of subjects—no longer a network of power relations extending throughout society, but rather a dynamic centre and a predisposition to subjectification—seems completely essential. From this point of view, when we speak of the themes of discipline and control and of the definition of power which follows, Deleuze does not limit himself to an interpretation of Foucault, but integrates labour and develops his fundamental intuitions.

Once we have established that what we mean by biopolitics is a non-static, non-hypostatized process, a function of a moving history connected to a long process which brings the requirement of productivity to the centre of the dispositifs of power, it is precisely that history which must be understood.

The danger to avoid is to read at the heart of biopolitics a sort of positivist vitalism (and/or materialist: in effect we could very well find ourselves before what Marx called “a sad materialism”). This is what we find, for instance, in certain recent interpretations of the political centrality of life. These interpretations develop a reading of biopolitics that creates a sort of confused, dangerous, even destructive magma: a tendency which refers much more to a thanatopolitics, a politics of death, than to a genuine political affirmation of life. This slippage towards thanatopolitics is in reality permitted and fed by a great ambiguity that we lend to the word “life” itself: under the cover of a biopolitical reflection, we slide in reality to a biological and naturalistic understanding of life which takes away all its political power. We have thus reduced it to be, at best, a set of flesh and bones. We would have to ask at what point a Heideggerian ontology doesn’t find in this move from the *Zoē* to *Bios* an essential and tragic resource.⁴

Furthermore, the fundamental specificity of biopolitics in Foucault—the very form of the relationship between power and life—which immediately becomes, in Deleuze as in Foucault, the space for producing a free subjectivity, was given an indiscriminately vitalistic interpretation. But as we well know, vitalism is a dirty beast! When it begins to emerge in the seventeenth century, after the crisis of Renaissance thought, and from the interior of modern thought itself, it paralyzes the contradictions of the world and of society to the extent that it considers them as impossible to resolve. Or more exactly: it brings them to define the very essence of the world starting from the postulate of their invariability. In the confusion of vitalism, there is no capacity for discernment. Life and death are locked in a relation of great ambiguity: the war between individuals becomes essential, the co-presence of an aggressive animal and a society exasperated by the market—what we call the dynamic of possessive individualism—is presented as a natural norm, that is to say, precisely as *life*.

Vitalism is thus always a reactionary philosophy, while the notion of *Bios*, as it is presented in the biopolitical analysis of Foucault and of Deleuze, is something entirely different: it was chosen in order to rupture this frame of mind. For us who follow their lead, biopolitics is not a return to origins, a manner of re-embedding thought in nature: it is on the contrary the attempt to construct thought

starting from ways of life (whether these be individual or collective), to remove thought (and reflection on the world) from artificiality—understood as the refusal of any natural foundation—and from the power of subjectification. Biopolitics is not an enigma, nor a set of such inextricable fuzzy relations that the only way out seems to be the immunization of life: it is, on the contrary, the recovered terrain of all political thought, to the extent that it is crossed by the power of processes of subjectification.

From this point of view, the idea of a biopolitics accompanies in an essential manner the passage to the post-modern—if we understand by this a historical moment where power relations are permanently interrupted by the resistance of the subjects to which they apply. If life has no “outside,” if it must by consequence be lived completely “inside,” its dynamic can only be one of power. Thanatopolitics is neither an internal alternative, nor an ambiguity of biopolitics, but its exact opposite: an authoritarianism transcendent, a dispositif of corruption.

To finish on this point, let me rapidly mention two last things regarding thanatopolitics. It is no accident that it was particularly affirmed in the experiences that are sometimes called “revolutionary conservatism” (let us think, for example, of a figure such as Ernest Jünger), that is to say a type of thought where individualist and vitalistic anarchism functioned as a genuine foreshadowing of Nazi thought. We can think today of what is meant by the act of a kamikaze: if we make an abstraction of the suffering and desperation that leads to such choices—suffering and desperation that are absolutely political—we are then again face-to-face with the suicidal reduction of the *Bios* to the *Zoē* and which suffices to remove all biopolitical power from the act that one commits (notwithstanding the judgment that we may have on this act).

It is important to note the type of methodological approach that biopolitics necessitates. It is only by confronting the problem from a constitutive (genealogical) point of view that we can construct an effective biopolitical discourse. This discourse must be founded on a series of dispositifs which have a subjective origin. We are perfectly aware that the concept of “dispositif,” as it appears in Foucault and in Deleuze, is used by the two philosophers as a group of homogeneous practices and strategies which characterize a state of power in a given era. We thus speak of dispositifs of control or of normative dispositifs. But to the extent to which the biopolitical problematization is ambiguous, because it is at the same time the exertion of power over life and the powerful and excessive reaction of life to power, it has seemed to us that the notion of dispositif should assume the same ambiguity: the dispositif could equally well be the name of a strategy of resistance.

When we speak of “dispositif,” we want to therefore speak here of a type of genealogical thought whose development includes the movement of desires and reasonings: we thus subjectify the power relations that cross the world, society, institutional determinations and individual practices.

However, this line of argument, which was that of Foucault and Deleuze, finds a profound anchoring in the non-teleological philosophies that have preceded the *Historismus*,⁵ or that have developed in parallel to this. These schools of thought, from Georg Simmel to Walter Benjamin, have brought with them theoretic formulations which permitted through the analysis of forms of life the reconstruction of the ontological weave of culture and society. From this point of view, and beyond our legitimate insistence on the origins of the concept of biopolitics in French post-structuralist thought, it would be equally interesting to find in German thought at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries an epistemological development of the same type. The fundamental figure would clearly be Nietzsche: we would have, in effect, to analyze all the Nietzschean efforts to destroy postivist and vitalist teleology and the manner in which we find in this same effort the project of a genealogy of morals. The genealogy of morals is at once a set of subjectification processes and the space of a materialist teleology which both accepts the other risk of projectuality and which recognizes the finiteness of their own subjective source. This is what we have chosen to call, many years later, and following a post-modern reinvestment of Spinozist thought, a

“dystopia.”

It is therefore possible to push the analysis of biopolitics as it was in the liberal and mercantile era—and the resistance to it—towards the location of the functions it takes, once removed from modernity, in the context of the “real subsumption of society under capital” (Marx). When we speak of real subsumption of society under capital (that is to say, the actuality of capitalist development), we mean the mercantilization of life, the disappearance of use value and the colonization of forms of life by capital, but we also mean the construction of resistance inside this new horizon. Once again, one of the specificities of post-modernity is this character of reversibility which profoundly marks the phenomena which are present: all domination is also always resistance. On this point, one must underline the surprising convergence of certain theoretical experiences within Western or post-colonial Marxism (we can think here obviously of Italian *operaismo*, or to certain Indian culturalist schools) and the philosophical positions formulated by French post-structuralism. We will come back to this.

In addition, we have already insisted on the importance of “real subsumption,” to the extent that one must consider it as the essential phenomena around which the passage from the modern to the post-modern has occurred. But this transition’s fundamental element seems also to be the generalization of resistance on each of the nodes which make up the great weave of real subsumption of society under capital. This discovery of resistance as a general phenomenon, as a paradoxical opening inside each of the links of power, as a multiform dispositif of subjective production, is precisely that of which the post-modern affirmation is made up.

Biopolitics is therefore a contradictory context of/within life. By its very definition, it represents the extension of the economic and political contradiction on all the social fabric, but it also represents the emergence of the singularization of resistances which permanently cut across it.

What do we mean exactly by “production of subjectivity”? Here, we’d like our analysis to go beyond the anthropological definition assumed in Foucault as in Deleuze. What seems important in this perspective is in effect the historical (also productive) concreteness of the constitution of the subject. The subject is productive: the production of subjectivity is thus a subjectivity which produces. Let us insist at present on the fact that the cause, the motor of this production of subjectivity, is found inside power relations, which is to say in the complex set of relationships which are nonetheless always traversed by a desire for life. However, to the extent that this desire for life signifies the emergence of a resistance to power, it is this resistance which becomes the genuine motor of production of subjectivity.

Some have judged this definition of the production of subjectivity to be unsatisfactory because it makes the mistake of re-introducing a sort of new dialectic: power includes resistance, resistance could even feed power. And on another level: subjectivity would be productive; the productivity of resistances could even construct subjectivity. It is not difficult to stymie this argument: it only suffices to return to the concept of resistance that we spoke of earlier, that is to say, the productive link which links the concept of resistance to subjectivity, and which immediately determines the singularities in their antagonism to biopower. We do not understand very well why all allusion to antagonism must be necessarily reduced to a return to the dialectic. If this is truly a singularity which acts, the relationship which develops with power can in no case give rise to a moment of synthesis, of excess, of *Aufhebung*—in sum, the negation of negation in the Hegelian manner. On the contrary, what we’re dealing with is absolutely a-teleological: singularity and resistance become exposed to risk, to the possibility of failure, but the production of subjectivity nonetheless always has the possibility—better still, the power—to give itself as an expression of surplus. The production of subjectivity can therefore not be reabsorbed into the heart of dialectical processes that seek to reconstitute the totality of the productive movement under transcendental forms. Certain effects of “reabsorption” are of course inevitable (as underlined by the particularly subtle schools of modern sociological thought such

as Luc Boltanski and Richard Sennett), but it has to do in all cases with unpredictable phenomena, ones that go in all directions and never give rise to consequences that can be determined in advance. As we will insist again shortly, when it is obliged to pass from the exercise of government to the practice of governance, the machine of power reveals itself incapable of running its own mechanical dimension in a unilateral and necessary manner. Any attempt to reabsorb subjective productions can try to block new ways of life, but it will only immediately solicit other resistances, other surpluses. This becomes the only machine that we recognize in the function of post-modern societies and politics: a machine which is paradoxically not reducible to the mechanics of power.

We could object that politics and statism have always proceeded on a logic which, in the heart of capitalism, would give to power relations the Leviathan figure of a unilateral negotiator and resolver of problems: that is precisely what power consists of. In the eighteenth century, theories of the “Raison d’État” included not only the arts of violence, but also the arts of mediation. When we move the theme of power into the context of biopolitical relations, what appears—and what is new—is exactly opposed to this capacity of neutralization or immunization. It is in effect the emergence of rupture that forms alongside the production of subjectivity—the intensity of this surplus is its defining characteristic.

Two words on this concept of surplus, or as we have sometimes called it, the notion of excessiveness. This idea was born inside a new analysis of the organization of labour, a moment at which value comes from the cognitive and immaterial product of a creative action, and when it escapes at the same time from the law of labour-value (if we understand this in a strictly objective and economic manner). The same idea is found at a different level in an ontological dissymmetry which exists between the functioning of biopower and the power of biopolitical resistance: where power is always measurable (and where the idea of the measure and the gap are in fact precise instruments of discipline and control), power is on the contrary the non-measurable, the pure expression of non-reducible differences.

At a third level, one must be attentive to what is happening in State theories: the surplus is always described as a production of power—it takes, for example, the face of the “state of exception.”⁶ Yet this idea is inconsistent—even grotesque: the state of exception can only be defined on the inside of the relationship which links power and resistance in an indissoluble manner. State power is never absolute; it only represents itself as absolute, it offers a panorama of absoluteness. But it will always be made up of a complex set of relations which include resistance to what it is. It is not by chance if, in the theories of dictatorships which exist in Roman law—that is to say in those of the state of exception—the dictatorship can only exist during brief periods. As Machiavelli noted, this temporal limitation cannot be referred to as a constitutional guarantee, but to a reasoning in terms of efficiency. Consequently, the state of exception, even if it is in force for short periods, is unacceptable for free spirits and can thus only be valued as a desperate recourse in an equally desperate situation.

Finally, we find it grotesque that theories of totalitarianism (be they thought up by dictators themselves, or later on, by certain figures of contemporary political science, in particular during the Cold War) make of it a version of power where all resistance is excluded. If totalitarisms have existed—and if their sinister political practices continue to haunt our memories—the so-called absolute “totality” of their power is a mystifying idea that it is long past time to examine critically.

We must finally insist on one fundamental element: there is a sort of Marxist watermark that is found in all critiques of univocal conceptions of power—even if these, paradoxically, were produced in Marx’s name. Capitalist power, according to what was put in evidence by the current critiques we have just mentioned, is always a relationship. Constant capital is confronted with variable capital; capitalist power is confronted with the resistance of labour power. It is this tension that produces the development of the economy and history. It is true that “official” Marxism locked labour power and variable capital inside relations that were objectively prefigured by the laws of the economy. But it is

precisely this prefiguration having the value of necessity—more closely resembling the Heideggerian conception of technique than the liberation desire of proletarians—which certain Marxists, starting in 1968, began to break into pieces. This is the point of theoretical convergence between the *operaismo* of Laboratory Italy in the 1970s, schools of Indian post-colonial thought and the analysis of power formulated by Foucault and Deleuze.

Let us return to the link between subjectivity and social labour. Labour possesses genuinely new dimensions, we used to say. The first remarkable thing is without a doubt the transformation undergone by the temporal dimension in the post-modern modification of productive structures. In the Fordist era, temporality was measured according to the law of labour value: consequently it concerned an abstract, quantitative, analytic temporality, which, because it was opposed to living labour time, arrived at the composition of the productive value of capital. As it is described by Marx, capitalist production represents the synthesis of the living creativity of labour and of the exploitative structures organized by fixed capital and its temporal laws of productivity. In the era of post-Fordism, on the contrary, temporality is no longer—nor totally—enclosed within the structures of constant capital: as we have seen, intellectual, immaterial and affective production (which characterizes post-Fordist labour) reveals a surplus. An abstract temporality—that is to say, the temporal *measure* of labour—is incapable of understanding the creative energy of labour itself.

On the inside of the new figure of the capitalist relation, the surplus permits the creation of spaces of self-valorization that cannot be entirely reabsorbed by capital: in the best case, it is only recuperated by a sort of permanent “pursuit-race” of this mass of autonomous labour—or more exactly of this multitude of productive singularities. The constitution of capitalist temporality (that is to say capitalist power) can therefore no longer be acquired in a dialectical manner: the production of goods is always followed by the subjectivities that oppose it, under the form of a virtually antagonistic *dispositif* that comes to frustrate any capitalist synthesis of the process. The Foucauldian distinctions between regimes of power and regimes of subjectivity are therefore totally reinvested inside this new reality of capitalist organization; they are represented by the scission between capitalist time/value and the singular valorization of labour power.

We must thus return to an essential problem that we have already quickly mentioned: the problem of the simultaneous measure of capital’s labour and time. If we start from the idea that the living labour is the constituent cause and motor—material or immaterial—of all forms of development, if we think that the production of subjectivity is the fundamental element that permits us to escape the dialectic of biopower and to construct, on the contrary, a fabric of biopolitics to complete the passage from a simple disciplinary regime to a regime which equally integrates the control dimension and permits at the same time the emergence of powerful and common insurgencies, then the theme of measure (that is to say, of the quantified rationality of valorization) becomes central once again. Yet it only becomes central in a paradoxical manner, because all the measures that capital wanted to discipline and control henceforth become evasive.

Without a doubt, it will be necessary to one day open a new field of research so we can understand if the thematic of measure can be proposed once again today on a terrain of social production, according to new forms and modalities which will have to be defined. In that case, the ontological rupture between living labour and constant capital that we have located, will have to be considered as the presupposition of any analysis. The fact is that the surplus of living labour in relation to constant capital presents itself as production “beyond measure”—that is to say as “outside” quantitative measurement—and it is in this that the difficulty forever reappears. Rather it is a production that goes *beyond* the idea of measure itself, that is to say, it ceases in reality to be defined as a negative passing of the limits of measurement to become simply—in an absolutely affirmative and positive manner—the power of living labour. This is how it becomes possible to foresee at least tendentially the end of exploitation. And it is without a doubt what Foucault and Deleuze allude to

when they speak of the process of subjectification.

We have thus arrived at the edge of a new definition of capital as crisis—a capitalist relation, which, from the point of view of constant capital, seems from now on totally parasitic; we have also arrived at the centre of what is perhaps the possibility of a re-composition of antagonisms that engage with both the production of subjectivity and the expression of living labour.

We started by attempting to close in on the terms of biopower, biopolitics, discipline and control. It seems now essential to address the question of multitude.

In effect, all our analyses constitute in reality this presupposition of the multitude. Let us therefore propose, as a point of provisional support that we will have to reformulate and modify, the following definition. The concept of multitude is derived from the relationship between a constitutive form (the one of singularity, of invention, of risk, to which all the transformation of labour and the new measure of time has brought us) and a practice of power (the destructive tendency of value/labour that capital is today obligated to put in effect). But while capital was in the past capable of reducing the multiplicity of singularities to something close to the organic and unitary—a class, a people, a mass, a set—this process has today failed intimately: it no longer works. The multitude should thus be necessarily thought of as a disorganized, differential and powerful multiplicity. But this could be the subject of another lecture.

I thank you.

Notes

1. There are three excellent sources for an overview of the Italian autonomist Marxist movement. *Italy: Autonomia—Post-Political Politics* (Lotringer and Marazzi 1980) has contributions from core members of the movement and was written in the wake of the state crackdown. *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism* (Wright 2002) offers a comprehensive historical overview. Finally, *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics* (Hardt and Virno 1996) is a collection of essays which both assess the tradition of autonomist thought and propose future directions.
2. [Trans. Note: Dr. Antonio Negri visited McMaster University as the Hooker Distinguished Visiting Professor in 2006. This public lecture was delivered on 18 April 2006.]
3. [Coté: The *dispositif* is an important concept developed by Foucault that has been literally “lost in translation” and thus largely overlooked by English-language interlocutors. Most prominently, it was used by Foucault in *Histoire de la sexualité, tome 1 : La Volonté de savoir* (1976) as the « *dispositif de sexualité*. » Inconsistently translated as “apparatus” or “arrangement” or “deployment,” the *dispositif* is a methodological frame for understanding power. A *dispositif* is both discursive and non-discursive. Foucault describes it thusly: “[It is] firstly, a resolutely heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid” (1976, 299). Thus, *dispositifs* are always in the middle of things, comprising a complex “system of relations” of discursive and non-discursive elements. We can see that the *dispositif* brings together heterogeneous elements that have distinct registers: from the *materiality* of institutions, to the *regulation* of juridical processes, to the *expression* of what elsewhere might be called ideology, and, finally to the *techniques* and *practices* of particular subjectivities. There is a complex composition to these distinct elements; yet this heterogeneity, in part, is designed to go beyond the reductive schema of an all-determining mode of production. This shift to more complex causal relations reflects Foucault’s inexorable turn to seeing power as diffused, decentralized, and arranged in microphysical

relations. Methodologically, this means not just examining each element of this heterogeneous composition, but focusing on the effects of a given dispositif—in terms of what we can say, see, or be.]

4. [Coté: Giorgio Agamben (1998) revived the terms *zoe* and *bios* from Greek antiquity where they were key conceptual markers distinguishing “natural life” (*zoe*) and “political life” (*bios*)—the former refers to the home as the sphere of influence and the later the polis.

For Negri, *bios* expresses a dynamic of power—particularly in biopolitical form—which cannot be contained by older forms of sovereign power. In turn, this revealed the limits of such constituted power and necessitates the permanent turn to the “state of exception.” Here Negri is expanding upon key insights made by Maurizio Lazzarato, a contemporary autonomist theorist who made important contributions to a more critical and political deployment of Foucauldian biopower. He notes:

The introduction of the *zoe* into the sphere of the polis is, for both Agamben and Foucault, the decisive event of modernity; it marks a radical transformation of the political and philosophical categories of classical thought. But is this impossibility of distinguishing between *zoe* and *bios*, between man as a living being and man as a political subject, the product of the action of sovereign power or the result of the action of new forces over which power has ‘no control?’ Agamben’s response is very ambiguous and it oscillates continuously between these two alternatives. Foucault’s response is entirely different: biopolitics is the form of government taken by a new dynamic of forces that, in conjunction, express power relations that the classical world could not have known (Lazzarato 2002).]

5. [Coté: *Historismus* is a German variant of Historicism initiated by Leopold von Ranke in the nineteenth century. It is of relevance to Negri as it was an early methodological break with “universal history” and instead emphasized the particularities of different historical periods and their unique conditions of possibility. This “relativism” was also a central characteristic of the Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce.]

6. [Coté: Carl Schmitt was a German political theorist who was active in the Nazi party, attractive therein no doubt because he postulated that the actions of sovereign power are never limited by the laws of the state. In other words, sovereign power has the permanent option of transgressing its own internal regulations, and, at any time it can negate the rights of citizens through the “state of exception.”

What was a virtuous and functional insight for fascists takes on unintended consequences when critically deployed, most notably by Agamben. The “state of exception” is turned on its head, as it were, and presented as the manifest limit to safeguarding of political rights and life under sovereign power. Agamben, who has long focused on the relationship between sovereign power and marginalized political subjectivities, uses the “state of exception” as the permanent model for our historical moment, as seen in everything from Guantanamo Bay to the refugee camp.

Negri has a longstanding interest in Agamben’s work and wrote an important review of *State of Exception* for the Italian paper *Il Manifesto* which has been translated as “The Ripe Fruit of Redemption” (Negri 2003).]

Works Cited

- Agamben, G. 1998. *Homo sacer: Sovereign power and bare life*. Paolo Alto: Stanford University Press.
- Foucault, M. 1976 in *Histoire de la sexualité, tome 1: La volonté de savoir*. Paris: Gallimard
- . 1994. Les mailles du pouvoir. In *Dits et écrits, t. 2*, 1001-1020 Paris: Gallimard.
- Hardt, M., and Antonio Negri. 2000. *Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hardt, M., and Paolo Virno. 1996. *Radical thought in Italy: A potential politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Lazzarato, M. 2002. From biopower to biopolitics. *Pli: The Warwick Journal of Philosophy* 13: 112-125
- Lotringer, S. and Christian Marazzi, eds. 1980. *Italy: Autonomia—post-political politics* New York: Semiotext(e).
- Marx, K. 1993. *Grundrisse*. New York: Penguin
- Negri, A. 1988. Archaeology and project: The mass worker and the social worker. In *Revolution* retrieved. 199-228 London: Red Notes.
- . 1989. *Marx beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse*. New York: Autonomedia.
- . 2003. The Ripe Fruit of Redemption. tr. Arianna Bové, *Generation Online*. <http://www.generation-online.org/t/negriagamben.htm>.
- Virno, P. 1996, Notes on the general intellect. In *Marxism beyond Marxism*, ed. S. Makdisi, C. Casarino, and R. E. Karl, 265-272. New York: Routledge.
- Wright, S. 2002. *Storming heaven: Class composition and struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism*. London: Pluto Press.

Institute on Globalization and the Human Condition

The Institute on Globalization and the Human Condition was created in January 1998 following the designation of globalization and the human condition as a strategic area of research by the Senate of McMaster University. Subsequently, it was approved as an official research center by the University Planning Committee. The Institute brings together a group of approximately 30 scholars from both the social sciences and humanities. Its mandate includes the following responsibilities:

- a facilitator of research and interdisciplinary discussion with the view to building an intellectual community focused on globalization issues.
- a centre for dialogue between the university and the community on globalization issues
- a promoter and administrator of new graduate programming

In January 2002, the Institute also became the host for a Major Collaborative Research Initiatives Project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada where a group of over 40 researchers from across Canada and abroad are examining the relationships between globalization and autonomy.

The WORKING PAPER SERIES...

circulates papers by members of the Institute as well as other faculty members and invited graduate students at McMaster University working on the theme of globalization. Scholars invited by the Institute to present lectures at McMaster will also be invited to contribute to the series.

Objectives:

- To foster dialogue and awareness of research among scholars at McMaster and elsewhere whose work focuses upon globalization, its impact on economic, social, political and cultural relations, and the response of individuals, groups and societies to these impacts. Given the complexity of the globalization phenomenon and the diverse reactions to it, it is helpful to focus upon these issues from a variety of disciplinary perspectives.
- To assist scholars at McMaster and elsewhere to clarify and refine their research on globalization in preparation for eventual publication.

To reach the IGHC:
1280 Main Street West
Hamilton, ON L8S 4M4, Canada
Phone: 905-525-9140 ext. 27556
Email: globalhc@mcmaster.ca
Web: globalization.mcmaster.ca



The Labour of the Multitude and the Fabric of Biopolitics

Antonio Negri
11 rue Linné
75005 Paris
France

leomantova@hotmail.com