

JUNE 28, 1997: Interview with Antonio Negri.

The following is a rough translation of an interview Toni Negri gave to the German daily newspaper "Die Tageszeitung." The conversation was held on June 28th, 1997 in Paris before Negri's return to Italy. The interview was conducted by Angela Melitopoulos and Nils Roller. The English translation reprinted here was originally posted to the deleuze-guattari list on July 27, 1997 by Jamie Owen Daniel with the following prefatory remarks: "It's far from perfect but I think reasonably accurate. Anything in brackets is something I have added for either continuity or explanation. Jamie."

Q: Are you returning to Italy as someone who has been defeated politically?

Negri:

"Autonomia operaia" focused on the continuing transition from the traditional labor movement to the new subjects that have formed because of the development of modern capitalism. A new class was facing the factory workers' unions, a new class that didn't yet possess a new identity through its intellectual and social labor and operated with autonomous organizational structures. It was our goal to shape this passage from classical factory labor to social labor. The identity of this new subject, to which we referred as the "social laborer," determines our society today. This does not mean the devaluing of labor as the central factor that creates wealth and value within society, but rather that this factor in the power structure is formed in a completely new way through today's conditions of production. Efforts to accelerate this process through political action have failed; in this we have been defeated, but not in our evaluation of this new concept of labor.

Q: In your statement to the press, you referred to the fact that you are going back to Italy in order to facilitate your [new?] citizenship. What is the relationship between your exile and European unification?

Negri:

In no European country was there a reaction to the social movements after 1968 that was as contemptuous of human beings [as that in Italy]. The political strategy in France and Germany consisted of the political absorption of the broad masses of the movement into, for example, the Green Party or into alternative projects. Because of this, the radical and terrorist groups were isolated. In Italy, things were handled, and continue to be handled, differently: the entire extra-parliamentary movement was characterized as terrorist and an entire generation was therefore criminalized and forced into internal and foreign exile. By returning, I would like to draw attention to the fact that the new government in Italy has the opportunity to "work through" [see note below], honorably and democratically, this legacy of the First Republic and bring to an end the dark past of state terrorism. The state policy of provocation was responsible for thousands of deaths in the 1970s; banks were blown up and bombs planted on trains. The outrage in Bologna, in which more than 100 people were killed, was carried out by the secret service and by paid right-wing radicals. Certainly we and our movement made mistakes. [But] none of us wanted this civil war.

Q: Are you demanding a new, fair trial?

Negri:

No, there can't be a new, fair trial, the cases are closed. In the case of Sofri, there was finally a decision yesterday against a re-opening of the case. I would like [instead] to advance the parliamentary discussion of amnesty. For the last four sessions of the legislature, a draft of a bill [on amnesty] has been awaiting a decision. In most of the judgments rendered at the time, defendants received the maximum sentences. We cannot forget that there was state abuse of power here, particularly in the use of State's witnesses and [this word is illegible--jd], whose testimony often fell apart. This was underscored by the French state, which has offered exile to those sentenced by these Italian courts since 1979.

Q: The seventeenth-century philosopher Spinoza has been important to your thought; he was exiled ["cast out"] from his own community. Is Italy still a land from which a Spinozist must flee?

Negri:

"Spinozism" for me means two things. First, the examination of causes rather than of effects. And, second, a call to an activism that constructs new communities on an ethical foundation. These communities are democratic because they emerge through the praxis of a majority of individuals. But even Spinoza himself didn't know how to unify his intellectual work and his activism.

Q: What would be ethical behavior in Italy today, whether as a politician or a private person?

Negri:

That can't be answered so quickly and in such general terms. One can, however, note that citizens today are in possession of greater power than ever before. In all areas, the productive force of immaterial labor is unfolding. The problem at hand is that of forming a new public space in which democratic and productive forces will be able to become effective together, so that individuals (Einzelnen) discover the power of the community and recognize the potential of common democratic production that is inherent to it. Thus, I don't differentiate between political and private behavior, but instead, [I] think individuality and community together on a democratic/productive foundation.

Q: How is it possible to behave politically in an electronic society in which individual workers don't know each other personally?

Negri:

Clearly it isn't easy, but I think that one must simply engage oneself and do it! I am taking up my political work again starting from the ground up, from prison. With my return, I would like to give a push to the generation that was marginalized by the anti-terrorist laws of the 1970s so that they will leave their internal or foreign exile and again take part in public and democratic life. This is our opportunity to re-identity ourselves [i.e., rejuvenate our identity].

But prison as a site of non-communication, of exclusion from political activism? That's not the case. One communicates not only with the help of electronic instruments, but above all through the position that one assumes in a political/social situation. The position one takes within the

event in which one is taking part communicates on the foundation of the body, even on the internet. It [the body] is a combination of rationality and feeling, of intelligence and emotionality, and if it doesn't exist, all communication is empty, non-existent. What we have in common precedes us in bodily form.

Note: Here I am assuming that Negri uses "aufarbeiten" in the way Adorno does in his essay on "working through the past" - jamie.