

Introduction to
Communists Like Us
New edition*

It is said that in the days of the first World War, Vladimir Illic Lenin and Tristan Tzara frequented the same bar in Zurich, without ever encountering one another.

The words of the former wanted to make the world with the strength of the will, the law and of power.

The later enunciated words with irony, as the creation of worlds in which the will, the law and power are suspended.

Had they understood one another, the 1900s would have been much lighter.

Had they been friends they would have constructed spaceships capable of navigating upon the ocean of chaos: rafts for all the refugees that depart [*si allontanano*] from the bellicose and arid lands of late-modern capitalism.

(Felix, F. Berardi, p. 174)

This vision of the poet and militant meeting in a small oasis of peace surrounded by war and defeat – the defeat of anti-chauvinist social-democracy – as a moment that could have turned creation into a political weapon and steely will into an open process of collective singularisation, is merely that: an hallucination of a different history.

The encounter of Félix Guattari and Toni Negri took place in ?. It was a meeting that occurred in the heat of a battle that no one knew had already been lost, and the result of their collaboration was published in a – comparative – oasis, at least for Negri who had fled Italy for Paris, once the defeat was clear for all to see.

Of course, Negri is not Lenin and Guattari is not Tzara – the *approchement* is no doubt unfair to both, for different reasons. In the one case, it is too much to live up to and, at the same time, reduces the life of a political theorist and philosopher to his militancy; in the other, creativity and poetry can in no way sum up a contribution that spanned the fields of psychiatry, philosophy, semiotics and militant organising. But perhaps this is as close as we have got to

such an encounter – for what Franco Berardi (Bifo) was certainly pointing to was precisely the hope in the chance encounter of revolutionary politics with desire and creation. In that sense, perhaps the names “Negri” and “Guattari” could be said to be bearers of the categories, on the one hand, of revolutionary will and, on the other, of creation and desire.

So this *approchement* serves merely to mark, with perhaps too far-fetched an image, the way that this book could be read today: as a call to respond to defeat by reaffirming faith in collective revolutionary action; with new forms of organising, new ways of association, and new singularisations of collective subjectivity combining militancy with creativity.

This response to a defeat of a collective movement asks us to recommence thinking a way out from the defeat; recognising the depth of the defeat while at the same time declaring faith in the ideas and practices that characterised the movement. This book can, in many ways, be said to sum up a whole period of theoretical reflection of both theorists – in Guattari's case, his *Molecular Revolution*, *L'Inconscient Machinique*, and *Il capitale mondiale integrato*,¹ and, in Negri's, *Marx Beyond Marx*, *Il comunismo e la guerra*, and *The Constitution of Time*.² To that extent, there are perhaps no theoretical advances in this book – although what an extraordinary confluence of ideas and common interests and desires are to be found here, in this book that emerges, as Negri tells us in his 1990 Postscript, from correspondence between the two authors while the one was in prison.

And yet, what perhaps does become explicit for the first time, is the question of defining and asserting fidelity to the communist project and, most crucially, the start of thinking anew the question of organisation, in a way that will refuse to see these aspects divided into a means/ends dyad. Indeed, it is perhaps this refusal that most clearly marks the text, signalling a course of study and practice that – though cut short in the case of Guattari – will result in *Chasmose*, *The Three Ecologies* and continues for Negri in his collaborations with Michael Hardt.³ Themes that were struggling for expression began to be first rehearsed here.

I shall focus this short introduction on the persistence of the question of organisation, but will begin with a few words on the definition of communism.

¹ *Molecular Revolution: Psychiatry and Politics*, translated by R. Sheed, Penguin, London 1984; *L'inconscient Machinique: Essais de Schizo-analyse*, Recherches, 1979; *Il capitale mondiale integrato*, Cappelli, 1982.

² Published as the first part in *Time for Revolution*, A. Negri, translated by M. Mandarini, Continuum, London 2003.

³ *Chasmose*, F. Guattari, Galilé, Paris 1982, translated in English as *Chasmosis*, translated by P. Bains and J. Pefanis, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1995; *Les Trois Écologie*, F. Guattari, Galilé, Paris 1989, translated in English as *The Three Ecologies*, translated by I. Pindar and P. Sutton, Athlone Press, London 2000. For Negri's co-authored projects, I have in mind particularly *Empire*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2000 and *Multitudes*, Penguin, New York 2004.

The book begins with what Negri tells us in his Postscript was something many – including friends, we can only imagine the position of his enemies! – found incomprehensible: ‘The project: to rescue “communism” from its own disrepute’. Let me begin with a restatement of the several, cumulative definitions of communism that the authors provide us with in this book. Communism is:

- ‘the collective struggle for the liberation of work’
- ‘the assortment of social practices leading to the transformation of consciousness and reality on every level: political and social, historical and everyday, conscious and unconscious’
- ‘the establishment of a communal life style in which individuality is recognized and truly liberated, not merely opposed to the collective’
- ‘the singular expression for the combined productivity of individuals and groups (“collectivites”) emphatically not reducible to each other ... the process of singularization’

The gap between *telos* and movement is refused in their account of communism. Militant organisations refuse to see themselves as ones directed to realising an external ideal. They are instead forms that, in the process of their organisation-singularisation, realise communism as integral to that movement. But it is how organisation-communism can be interwoven that is the daunting task to which this small book provides a first response.

What then are these new ways of thinking the question of (communist-)organisation that are beginning to emerge? It is, I think, important to consider the statements made by the two authors on this question in the two newly translated essays, one signed “Guattari” the other “Negri” that were published at the end of the original French edition of the book in 1985.⁴ Guattari’s account is possibly the most fully developed of the two, although Negri provides an interesting difference of viewpoint whose importance is crucial in signalling the contrasting theoretical and practical traditions of thinking and struggle which none the less came together in this remarkable little book.

In the concluding pages of his intervention, Guattari sets out three ‘conditions’ to which the ‘militant assemblages to-come’. First, the

new social practices of liberation will not establish amongst themselves hierarchical relationships; their development will answer to a principle of *transversality* that will enable them to establish themselves by ‘bestriding’ [*à cheval*], as a ‘rhizome’, heterogeneous groups and interests.
(p. 105)

⁴ The essays, in fact presentations that were composed in view of a conference in Montreal shortly before the book was published, were published in neither the 1989 Italian edition nor the 1990 English edition. They were originally published as addenda to the actual text, entitled *Les Nouveaux Espaces de Liberté*. They are translated here for the first time in English so that we can finally present the complete first edition of the book.

That is, these militant assemblages will refuse 'authoritarian discipline, formal hierarchies, orders of priority decreed from above, obligatory ideological reference points....' And yet, a point to which we shall return, this must not be seen as in conflict with what Guattari tells us is the 'establishment of, obviously inevitable, necessary and also desirable, *centres of decision*' (p. 106). This is clearly a complex and – still unresolved demand – to work out 'analytical collective procedures that enable the separation of the *work of decision* from the *imaginary investments of power*'. Second, one of the principal tasks of these new social practices will be to develop 'collective and/or individual *processes of singularisation*'. Third, these 'mutating militant machines' (p. 107) must be thought not as assemblages built to last and concerned with their self-preservation but should be 'precarious', always in-becoming. And they should do so by 'promoting a logic of multivalent alliances'. They must leave aside the

...perverse myth of the *taking of state power [prise du pouvoir d'Etat]* by the party of the vanguard. People will no longer take power in the name of the oppressed! People will no longer confiscate liberty in the name of liberty. The only objective now acceptable is: the taking of society by society itself. (p. 108).

What then of the State? Here Guattari is somewhat ambiguous. The 'mutating militant machines' are not concerned with taking State power, for it is not an 'external monster one must escape or tame' (p. 108). The State 'is everywhere, beginning with ourselves, at the root of our unconscious' and to that extent any militant assemblage must contend with it rather than conquering it.

Negri's response is telling of some of the divergences or at least ambiguities that remained between their respective position on the question of organisation and practice which I think it is useful to highlight. On the one hand, Negri reaffirms one of the fundamental principles of *operaismo*: the 'modernisation' or neoliberal restructuring that was underway was merely the

...powerful mystification of what we are, of the knowledge [*savoir*] that we have ... In order to begin again to live and to organise knowledge [*savoir*], we must break with this totality. ('Lettre Archéologique' in *Les Nouveaux Espaces de Liberté*, pp. 114, 115).

That is, Negri links the process of liberation explicitly with the necessity of destruction: 'It is on this act of destructive liberty that, today, a positive social practice can be built' (p. 115). Negri recognises that the historically and *ontologically* stratified nature of the State makes any notion of its pure and simple destruction, a nonsense; and yet – flirting with Guattari's terminology – he states that its strata can be opened up and be given a different composition which break with the 'capitalist politics of reterritorialisation' (p. 119). But all this takes place

within the context of Negri's discussion of the dialectic of liberation and destruction. Is this not Negri's way of saying that the path of liberation must pass through the destruction of the State – however this destruction might be conceived? How else to understand Negri's claim that the 'concept of the left is a concept of war' (p. 116) and any attempt to evade this is to render the left 'insignificant'.

We now come to a central aspect of the question of the organisation for liberation, of the form of militant social practice of liberation. This entire discussion revolves around the name, Lenin.

It is clear – more or less explicitly – that when Guattari warns against 'authoritarian discipline, formal hierarchies, orders of priority decreed from above, obligatory ideological reference points...' (p. 106) he is warning against what we might call the Leninist temptation. At the same time, Guattari recognises, as we have seen, the need for '*centres of decision*' within any militant strategy. Largely, this is the question that can be said to define Lenin's thought. It is, arguably, the central contribution made by Lenin to the thought of how militant practice should be organised. The question is clearly, how to think centres of decision outside the form given it in *What is to be Done?* Guattari states merely that such centres of decision will require the utilisation of 'the most sophisticated technologies of communication' for 'maximal effectiveness'. It is not at all clear how this helps us. Guattari and Negri are clear about one thing: they are against 'spontaneist myths', as they write together in *Communists Like Us*; and even in his contribution to *Pratique de L'Institutionnel et Politique*, he defends *Anti-Oedipus* against attempts to read it as an 'ode to spontaneity or an eulogy to some unruly liberation'.⁵ Thus, the debate is put very much in the same terms as the conflict between Lenin's and Luxemburg's problematics of organisation. While all this is true, the means of resolving this question by Guattari and Negri cannot be simply reduced to one side or the other of the debates within the Second International. For Guattari, the refusal of spontaneism was made 'in order to underline the artificial, "constructivist" nature of desire that we [Guattari and Deleuze] defined as "machinic" ... To say of desire that it makes up part of the infrastructure amounts to saying that subjectivity produces reality' (p. 128, 129). But while for Guattari this amounts – implicitly – to a dismissal of Lenin, Negri is much more unwilling to allow such a rapid move beyond Lenin.

In Negri's response to Guattari, he writes:

...the history of the party, that is to say, the history of the continuing dialectic of class consciousness between 'equipment' and revolutionary 'assemblage' – the history of the party, from anarchism to social-democracy, from socialism to Leninism, can be explained through the linear evolution of class composition. What is clear is that through this evolution, one truly [*bel et bien*] discovers an accumulation, a subjective

⁵ *Pratique de L'Institutionnel et Politique*, F. Guattari, J. Oury, F. Tosquelles, Editions Matrices, 1985, p 62, translated in *The Guattari Reader*, ed. G. Genosko, Blackwell, 1996, p. 128.

dynamic of classification, of selection and constitution. All that becomes fixed in past experiences of organisation becomes the critical material of an always renewed project of liberation. (p. 120)

And if his position on Leninism still remains somewhat ambiguous, he states that:

Within the new perspective of struggle and organisation, [Leninism] is certainly an element that has been surpassed, but equally it will live always in the assemblage that we use [*predispons*]. (p. 121)

And what is this always living moment of Leninism, this 'powerful reminder of an indelible function' within the new organisations of liberation? It is precisely the call for the dialectic of liberation and destruction of the totality (p. 121-2). Desire as construction, as machinic, is understood by Negri as the passage from 'movement to party' (p. 124); it depends upon the material force of the masses establishing a relationship between knowledge and the 'capacity for destruction'. The problem, as Negri states it in the final words of his response, is that of 'constructing the catastrophe' (p. 125) with Spinoza's affirmation of a love that lies between 'power and knowledge [*savoir*]' and 'above all', with the eternal and Goethean Lenin: "in the beginning is action". Let us hurry' (p. 126).

We should, of course, mention Negri's brief comments on this debate in his 1990 Postscript to the English edition of the book reprinted here.⁶ Here, the terms of the debate – spontaneity and direction – are linked to the names Luxemburg and Lenin but while restating the central importance of this debate, this time, instead of, as in François Dosse's words, expressing 'his ineradicable attachment to Leninism' (*Gilles Deleuze et Félix Guattari. Biographie Croisée*, F. Dosse, Éditions La Découverte, p. 357), which Dosse sees as characterising Negri's concluding statements in the '*Lettre Archéologique*', Negri states somewhat more ambiguously, that the future movements 'will have to reconsider these issues'.

But we cannot conclude here. More needs to be said about Negri's Lenin. If we are to grasp Negri's continuing reliance upon Lenin for the 'always renewed project of liberation' (p. 120), and if we are to situate his Lenin within today's Lenin revival associated with the names of Slavoj Žižek, Alain Badiou (via the figure of Saint Paul), Sylvain Lazarus, and others, a brief comparison with some of these new approaches will be instructive.⁷ What would have and will seem to many to be, at best, a misplaced nostalgia, at worst, a confirmation of the

⁶ It should be recalled that both the English and the Italian edition of the text, both published at around the same time, both of these concluding essays were excluded from publication.

⁷ For an outstanding collection of the variety of new approaches to Lenin, see *Lenin Reloaded: Toward a Politics of Truth*, S. Budgen, S. Kouvelakis, S. Žižek editors, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2007.

totalitarian lurking within every communist that reference to the name Lenin evokes, can best be answered through a consideration of his thought that refuses the simple reduction of the meaning of Lenin to State Socialism.

For this purpose it is instructive to very briefly indicate where Negri's Lenin distinguishes himself from that of two of the most exciting thinkers of the moment – namely Žižek and Badiou's – appropriation of Lenin. Let us begin with Badiou. What distinguishes his from Negri's Lenin is not that he accepts what Negri calls the position of 'western political science' on Lenin: i.e. "To speak of Lenin is to speak of the conquest of power".⁸ It is true that Badiou is quite clear that the question of politics is always a question of power for Lenin, and to think of it in any other terms is utterly naïve.⁹ However, as Negri points, it is not the question of the seizure of power itself that is 'repellent',¹⁰ it is the divorcing of the question of seizing power from the 'abolition of the state'. It is clear, however, that for all the shifts in his thinking on the relation the subject should take to the state, from – as Alberto Toscano puts it – from the 'dialectics of destruction' of his Maoist phase, to the notions of 'distance' and 'subtraction' of his later thought,¹¹ it has never, for Badiou, been a case of the simple capture of state power that characterises the 'repellent' Lenin of western (bourgeois) political science.

In fact, it is Žižek who perhaps best indicates where Badiou's later thinking on politics and the state falls down, and that incidentally takes the same name as one of Negri's great bugbears – as assiduous Negri readers will recognise – namely, in the 'autonomy of the Political' that it reveals. Žižek writes in 'Repeating Lenin: Lenin's Choice':

No wonder that the Lenin Badiou and Lazarus prefer is the Lenin of *What Is to Be Done?*, the Lenin who (in his thesis that the socialist-revolutionary consciousness has to be brought from without to the working class) breaks with Marx's alleged 'economism' and asserts the autonomy of the Political, NOT the Lenin of *The State and Revolution*, fascinated by the modern centralized industry, imagining the (depoliticized) ways to reorganize economy and the state apparatus.

This quote is interesting because it manages to sum up not only the differences between Badiou (and Lazarus) and Žižek and Negri, but also between the first two (or three) and Negri. As for Žižek, so for Negri *The State and Revolution* is a more contemporary and relevant text than *What is to be Done?* And this is, at

⁸ 'What to do Today with *What is to be Done?*, or Rather: The Body of the General Intellect', A. Negri, translated by G. Thomson, in *Lenin Reloaded*, p. 297. The same piece has been published in a different translation in *reflections on Empire*, A. Negri, translated by E. Emery, Polity, Cambridge 2008. Although Emery's translation of this expression as 'bourgeois political science' (*Reflections*, p. 148) is incorrect, it could be argued that this is effectively Negri's accusation.

⁹ 'One Divides Itself into Two', A. Badiou, in *Lenin Reloaded*, p. 12.

¹⁰ *Reflections*, p. 148.

¹¹ 'From the State to the World?: Badiou and Anti-capitalism', A. Toscano, *Communication and Cognition*, 37, 3-4, 2004, p. 199.

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least in part, because the hypostatisation of the political that many have drawn from it results in understanding (misunderstanding I would argue) the critique of economism as a dismissal of political economy. It would, however, be a mistake to accuse Badiou of such a misunderstanding. His own reasons for inserting a radical hiatus between the state and the economic is due to a series of extremely complex ontological set-theoretical reasons.¹² Caricaturising this complex discussion to limits set by this short introduction, whereas the state, society, economics, etc. are the work – ordering – of being, politics is the realm of the event that is irreducible to being. In this way, Lenin is championed by Badiou as the subject of the event of October 1917, an event without socio-economic conditions, or at least, where those conditions are not the conditions of the event named Bolshevik Revolution.¹³

On this score, both Žižek and Negri are in agreement: one cannot divorce economic from political – indeed, Marx's critique of political economy operates a precise insertion of the political into the economic. However, Žižek's conclusion that from *The State and Revolution* one should draw together the strands of the Lenin-political-strategist and Lenin-technocrat of the new society and new state, is equally repellent to Negri. Žižek frequently states that he stands in contrast to Badiou's championing of the moment, the event of 1917 and war communism, affirming instead the project of the patient, laborious construction of socialism (in one country, one might add). But this stress on the technocratic element of Žižek's Lenin, should not be (con-)fused with the Tronti-Cacciari reading of Lenin that so often is the object of Negri's ire.¹⁴ For despite Žižek's rhetorical strategy of provocation – such as his apparent championing of the Lenin of '*Communism is Soviet power plus electrification of the whole country*',¹⁵ of the constructivist image of the cold, disciplined, mechanised new man, etc. – it is the utopian moment that is opened and the battles for socio-cultural-organizational change that excites him about Lenin, and his demand to repeat, not return to Lenin. To that extent at least, Žižek and Negri are not so far from one another.

And yet, a distance remains, and what links Žižek's Lenin to Badiou's is what most opposes him to Negri. Despite Žižek's recognition of the necessary intersection of the political and the socio-economic – that contra Badiou the two cannot be divorced from one another by the anti-ontology of the (revolutionary) event, that 'true heroism resides not in blindly clinging to the early revolutionary enthusiasm [as Badiou does], but in recognizing "the rose in the cross of the

¹² For anyone who wants to acquaint themselves with Badiou's argument, they should turn to *Being and Event*, A. Badiou, translated by O. Feltham, Continuum, London 2005, in particular to Meditation 8 and 9. See also *Metapolitics*, A. Badiou, translated by J. Barker, Verso, London 2005, chapter 5 'Politics Unbound' in particular.

¹³ Or more precisely still, the event cannot be extracted from those conditions.

¹⁴ For some discussion of the debate between Negri and Cacciari and Tronti, see my 'Beyond Nihilism: Notes Towards a Critique of Left-Heideggerianism in Italian Communist Thought,' in *Cosmos & History*, 4:2, 2008.

¹⁵ *Collected Works volume 31*, V. I. Lenin, Lawrence & Wishart, London 1966, p. 516.

present” of the material conditions one is caught within¹⁶ – nevertheless, Žižek reveals his very own autonomization of the Political:

With Lenin, as with Lacan, the revolution *ne s'autorise que d'elle meme*: one should assume responsibility for the revolutionary *act* not covered by the big Other – the fear of taking power 'prematurely', the search for the guarantee, is the fear of the abyss of the act.¹⁷

So, while Žižek is arguing – quite correctly – that Lenin refuses the revisionist tendency to await for the 'objective conditions' to develop to a sufficient degree, that the 'stages' of social development unfold, that it is only with the say-so of these conditions, stages, laws that the process of revolution is justified; nevertheless, his challenge to opportunism (to use of good Leninist epithet) that revolution cannot rest upon the big Other, does not amount – as Žižek suggests – to the statement that the revolution must rest on nothing other than itself, the 'abyss of the act', to legitimate itself. Is this not effectively to substitute an ethics of the revolutionary event for a politics? By this move Žižek takes one step forward and two steps back.

Let us return in conclusion to Negri then, and his very own assertion that one should not return to but one should repeat Lenin. To repeat Lenin, then, is yes to affirm what might be termed the subjective moment of political struggle and analysis. But such a 'moment' cannot be condensed in the notion of the act, the moment of decision. As always, for Negri it is a question of class composition.¹⁸ Negri writes:

...it is only within this subject that the real relations of forces can be assessed. The entire history of capital is, from this standpoint, the history of class struggles and struggles of the different political class compositions, and it is possible to read in the fabric of struggle the history of capital as its effect.¹⁹

No materialist conception of the subject can be given other than through the filter of class composition: it is

¹⁶ 'Trotsky's *Terrorism and Communism*, or, Despair and Utopia in the Turbulent Year of 1920', S. Žižek, forward to *terrorism and Communism*, by I. Trotsky, Verso, London 2007, p. xxi.

¹⁷ 'Trotsky's *Terrorism and Communism*, or, Despair and Utopia in the Turbulent Year of 1920', p. xviii.

¹⁸ For a detailed discussion of the notion of 'class composition', see *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism*, S. Wright, Pluto Press, London 2002, and my 'Antagonism vs. Contradiction: Conflict and the Dynamics of Organisation in the Thought of Antonio Negri' in *Contemporary Organization Theory*, ed. C. Jones and R. Munro, Blackwell, Oxford 2005, and in *The Sociological Review*, Oct. 2005, vol. 53, s.1.

¹⁹ *Trentate Lezioni su Lenin* [1977], A. Negri, Manifestolibri, Roma 2004, p. 23 – my translation.

only class composition that gives us the material and political complexity of the figure of the subject.²⁰

The notion of class composition draws together two aspects: a technical aspect, which involves an analysis of the world of production, its transformation, and the effects upon the labouring subject including the development of a certain level of needs and desires. The second aspect, the political composition, concerns the ways that this first – at least partly technologically driven – aspect can be appropriated politically. We can – simplifying again – speak of the way the specifics of the objective dynamics of exploitation are appropriated subjectively, i.e. from the standpoint of the working class. Lenin's great contribution was, for Negri, to 'translate the real class composition, as determined specifically, in organizational terms'.²¹ But such a contribution rests on more than a political sensibility or 'art of intervening', as Žižek would have it.²² It means truly following through on, and precisely articulating what it means to recognise that 'the economy is in itself political'.²³ Thus, whereas for Negri as well as for Žižek, *The State and Revolution* is a core text, equally Negri places much greater emphasis on Lenin's analysis of capitalist development and of imperialism in its relation to the composition of the class.²⁴ For it is precisely in the notion of class composition that economic and political questions can be seen to be most clearly intertwined.

So Negri affirms the following theses that he draws from Marx and Lenin:

- a) the history of capitalism is the history of class struggle and of the figures of class composition;
- b) economics and politics cannot be divorced and class composition is the plane on which they come together most directly;
- c) the subject can only be understood, in properly materialist fashion, via the notion of class composition;
- d) Lenin (building on Marx – 'in a lively, original and yet absolutely faithful way'²⁵) 'effected a recognition of the real and [...] proposed a full circulation between (subversive) political strategy and [...] organization of the masses'.²⁶

A little more should be said about this last, crucial moment d). It affirms that the party is the tool for the production of the antagonistic class subject, necessary for

²⁰ *Dall'Operaio Massa all'Operaio Sociale*, A. Negri, edited by P. Pozzi and R. Tommasini, Multhipla Edizioni, Milan 1979, p. 60 – my translation.

²¹ *33 Lezioni*, p. 23.

²² 'A Leninist Gesture Today', S. Žižek, in *Lenin Reloaded*, p. 83.

²³ 'A Leninist Gesture Today', S. Žižek, in *Lenin Reloaded*, p. 91.

²⁴ These aspects are central to Negri's analysis in his book length study of Lenin, *33 Lezioni su Lenin*, initially presented first as lectures over 35 years ago, and return in Negri's discussion of Lenin more recently, such as in his 2001 piece, 'What to do Today with *What is to be Done?*' in *Lenin Reloaded*.

²⁵ *33 Lezioni*, A. Negri, p. 164 – my translation.

²⁶ 'What to do Today with *What is to be Done?*', A. Negri, p. 301.

this movement because of the non-reducibility of political to technical class composition. It is precisely the non-linear line of determination from technical to political class composition that Negri draws from Lenin²⁷ and which allows for a properly revolutionary politics: class composition is freed through the destruction of the class antagonist, and thereby becomes a moment of creation. So not simply the dialectical passage from class composition via its determinate negation vertically raised to the form of revolutionary organisation – but onwards further, the form of revolutionary organisation, through the insurrectionary moment establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat that sets in train a continuous revolutionary movement towards communism. As Negri wrote over 35 years ago, that which:

...the organization *mediates* can be made *immediate* in the behaviour of the working class from the moment that overturning of the class adversary's power, from the moment that the working class and the proletariat as such fully assume the task and weight of the construction of a new revolutionary society.²⁸

If this is a correct summary of Negri's Lenin, then it can be argued that Negri remains true to the "Lenin moment" throughout his career. For Negri's texts rest upon a particular analysis of class composition, of the antagonistic subject from which he then operates a translation, or more properly a *creation* of a political form adequate to the demands of the class subject through which the communist impulse is given concrete form. This is most evident in his writings from the 1960s and '70s. But it is equally true of his more recent forays into political economy – into what he calls immaterial labour, cognitive capitalism and biopolitical production, which that mark a particular level of development of the subject that forms an already articulated biopolitical reality, the 'subversive body of this "general intellect"'.²⁹

It is not possible to properly evaluate this work in the space remaining but, to conclude, I want to highlight one of the risks of the new analysis – a risk that contains, I believe many of the ambiguities of Negri's later relations to Lenin today. It is the risk of a refounded spontaneism. The question Negri poses is whether, today, socially cooperative immaterial labour can, thanks to its composite nature as communism prefigured, if it can be the 'demiurge of its own body', or whether it requires an external vanguard to 'transform this flesh into a

²⁷ To await the economic conditions, to assume that specific economic conditions will immediately determine a political form, this is what Lenin condemned as 'economism', 'spontaneism' and opportunism – submission to the big Other, in Žižek's (via Lacan) take on this eminently political problem.

²⁸ 33 *Lezioni*, A. Negri, p. 165.

²⁹ 'What to do Today with *What is to be Done?*', A. Negri, in *Lenin Reloaded*, p. 301. Negri has explored the new composition of labour in seminars in Paris with Carlo Vercellone, as well as in *Reflections on Empire*, his work with Michael Hardt, and elsewhere. This work is also being pursued by Christian Marazzi, Andrea Fumagalli, Paolo Virno, Maurizio Lazzarato, and many others. The journal *Historical Materialism* has a very useful stream of articles on these themes.

body, the body of the general intellect'.³⁰ Negri's sympathy for the former option is not in doubt, although he admits that it is a question that can only be decided through a 'genuine movement of struggle'³¹ through which it must confirm its superior strength. It is this sympathy that made writing with Guattari all those years ago a possibility. But, if this miraculating of an organisational form is allowed, we may ask once again whether organisation would be anything other than what Negri had condemned as the strategy of revisionist 'process-organisation' in his 1970s book on Lenin? Of course, Negri would point to the transformations in the class composition – the emergence of immaterial labour, of the multitude – to signal the radical difference between conditions today and then (whether referring to early 1900s or to the 1970s); but doubts surely remain that changes in class composition have overcome the need for the instance of emersion from the ocean of productive multiplicities; that the exigency for a vertical – but not transcendent – political moment that slices through the cooperative productivity of the multitude, reconfiguring it in a form able to strike at capital and the practices of governance has been laid to rest. Negri's *33 Lezioni* includes a beautiful little cautionary passage on this problem, that it is necessary to restate: either 'organization is spontaneity that reflects upon itself. Otherwise it is impotence and defeat that try to justify themselves'.³²

Communists Like Us is a formidable little précis of the political – and theoretical – contradictions and tensions that traverse communist politics. It is these tensions and the relentless struggle for their resolution that continue to make of communist thought the untranscendable horizon for any revolutionary politics of our times.

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³⁰ 'What to do Today with *What is to be Done?*', A. Negri, in *Lenin Reloaded*, p. 302.

³¹ 'What to do Today with *What is to be Done?*', A. Negri, in *Lenin Reloaded*, p. 302.

³² *33 Lezioni*, A. Negri, p. 42.