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Logic and Theory of Inquiry

militant praxis as subject and as episteme

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[...] We can also deal with this issue from another perspective and resume the discussion of the old tradition of operaismo on "joint-research" as the exemplary form of such method. The practice of joint-research was nothing other than the possibility of knowing, through inquiry, the levels of awareness and consciousness of the process that implicated workers as productive subjects. If I go into a factory, get in touch with the workers and carry out with them an investigation into the conditions of their labour, the joint-research is obviously the description of the productive cycle and the identification of the functions of each person within that cycle. But at the same time, it is also a general evaluation of the levels of exploitation that each and every one of them suffers, of the workers' ability to react in relation to the consciousness of their exploitation in the system of machines and before the structure of command. This way, as the research advances, the joint-research creates outlooks of struggle in the factory and defines threads or devices of cooperation outside the factory. Evidently, here is where

the hegemony and centrality of praxis in research resides: this praxis helps our understanding of the cycle of production and exploitation and is enhanced when it determines resistance and agitation, which is to say, when it develops struggles. Thus, it is practically possible to constitute an antagonistic subject¸ because this is what all of the argument is about. We can start, then, from this old experience of operaismo and ask ourselves: what joint-research can be carried out today, in post-modernity and the total transformation of the scene of labour and social organization? This is clearly a difficult question, which I cannot claim to be able to answer here; if anything, it is a case of moving forward and working around it.

In fact, if we think about inquiry today in all its practical significance, the important thing is to enhance its biopolitical premises and settings. The central elements of inquiry ought to be the bodies. There is an array of issues that concern the body and corporeal life that need to be brought into play if we wish to constitute, represent and begin to define whatever constellation or composition. I believe this issue is of extraordinary importance and arises from the biopolitical method that we are beginning to practice. This method breaks away from the all too rigidly analytical methodologies experimented with by sociology. I call such methods theories of the salami, the analytical slicing up of the social body. Today, by contrast, we are probably beginning to confront first and foremost the issue of corporeality (and we do so with great confidence in the power of the body).

Another issue that needs to be dealt with is the attempt to constitute the object by assuming - negatively to start with, yet always and in each instance - its singularity and its thrust towards the 'common', rather than simply its identity or difference. This methodological cue is really new and original: in the past we used

to select, analytically isolate, and then point to the homo oeconomicus, the aesthetic one, the psychological one, and so on - now we can bring it all together. Whilst we used to move from the standpoint of the processes of determination and the specificity of phenomena, to always end up between identity and difference; it is now possible, in our effort of determination, to skip this dichotomous pair that often blocks us, and be able to conceive of the multitude as "common" and difference as singularity. I think that today we have the chance to overcome these old dichotomies not only in words but concretely: the contents of differences are enriched in singularities and in the "common" they play together, as in a new frame of activity. The key element of this perspective is the "common", that is: the bodies; the logical categories of singularity and how they refer to the common; and the "common" as ontological presupposition. I think that from this perspective, sociological research ought to keep making apparent the conditions of 'commonality' within which a singularity is established. This is crucial if we want to build something. These constellations somehow correspond to the old disposition of the elements of class "composition", albeit here newly composed within the wealth of a corporeal common.

(Please note: since the biopolitical was devised as our research outlook, we never progressed by way of a contact with bodies. Each singularity is defined as corporeality, but the biopolitical corporeality is not merely biological, but social. For instance, when we deal with an issue like the precarisation of labour, in reality, we certainly grasp the tiresome physicality of the condition of the precarious labourer - the mobility and flexibility of labour - but to this we must add our perception of the power of new labour-power. In other words, on one hand there are the terrible conditions that constrain precarious labour, and, on the other

hand, its new qualities: in this way we can grasp precariousness, by fluctuating between identity and difference, whilst seeing the common as the basis of exploitation and, at the same time, the activity of resistance.)

On this basis we come to the shift to practice and the practical option: the rediscovery of antagonism. But where exactly is this transition, where does the option of antagonism lie? The theoretical proposal, from what has been said so far, would identify exploitation in command as the expropriation of cooperation; that is, as the possibility of blocking the activity of the multitude. Exploitation is established precisely on the wealth of the common and the productivity of the multitude, and attempts to impede its expression, to silence it, to disembody it, to eliminate it and take away its properties. Here we should grant alienation a strong materiality that concerns every aspect of the body. It is an expropriation and a disembodiment that clashes against singularities and the "common" and clearly collides with a practice that springs from the expression of the "common" and the processes of its construction. I think that the only way to begin to place a stronger emphasis on our research is by insisting on the singular and common configuration of new subjects of production, and on the exploitation that deepens on them, advancing from the things that dance and move before our eyes in post-modernity.

Let us posit one last question, very openly: what is it that we want? We obviously want democracy, a democracy at a global scale, that is, for all. The term "democracy" is not a happy one for sure, but we have no others. Every time we say that we want democracy we seem to fall into a trap because we are immediately asked: but what exactly do you want? Give us a list of all the democratic demands you claim to bring to this platform! I do not think that it is a case of making a list. If anything, on the basis of what has been said we

need to start drawing a scheme of what the desire for democracy, or better, for the "common" is, as a methodological criterion for evaluating the alternative proposals that continue to arise. At times I am under the impression that a whole series of proposals that until recently had seemed completely utopian, today appear to be increasingly real, as if our awareness of having entered a new epoch had matured. Somehow, we too should draw up something analogous to the cahiers de doleances, published before the explosion of the French Revolution. These documents presented the complaints of the Third Estate, but were more than simple protestations: they were denunciations of injustices as well as proposals for their solution. The method that acts from below moves through critique in order to provide a practical response. The issue today is how a democracy at the global level is conceivable. A first critical focus (as expounded in Empire) evidences the development of imperial mechanisms of control, division and hierarchy. We have also seen how these mechanisms are deployed in the exercise of permanent war. The real problem will be that of augmenting the subversive desire of the "common" that invests the multitude, by opposing it to the war, institutionalising it and transforming it into constituent power. In the course of the previous lectures we have noted that there are at least three elements capable of configuring the definition of the multitude in terms of the "common". The first element relates to social ontology: the affirmation that immaterial and intellectual labour does not call for command and that it is in its power to create in excess. This excess is developed in a "network". From the point of view of the ontology of labour, this means raising the problem of how to guarantee forms of "networks" for the future democracy. The "network" is a system of communication in which values of cooperation in the full sense, both productive and political, are formed.

The second element is that of the "common", that is, the material premise of production that no longer requires either capital or exploitation in order to exist. From this perspective, capitalism becomes increasingly parasitic with respect to the accumulation of the "common". The common permits the constitution of being and cannot be re-appropriated or privatised by anyone. So whilst on the one hand labour theories show us the inefficiency of command, on the other hand - and paradoxically – social theories show us the inalienable nature of the "common". The "common" is the inalienable matter on which we can build democracy.

The third main element that configures the process of the multitude is freedom. Without freedom there is no creative labour, without freedom there is neither cooperation nor common.

Once these elements are investigated, critique can move onto juridical and bourgeois conceptions of rights and democracy. On this issue, I think that the Marx's writings on right are still valid, especially his critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. His critique needs to be extended on current democratic rights, to show how formal equality and substantial inequality still constitute their foundation.

This becomes more relevant when we consider the new grounds for a global constitution and a global system of right. It is crucial to emphasise how the development of capitalism tends to eliminate the efficacy of any regulatory action of Nation-States. In modernity the development of capitalism occurred via the State; but today, in post-modernity, capitalism has re-appropriated the whole of the social fabric at the multinational level, and only resorts to nation-state interventions when necessary. When we speak of common property, of "networked" labour and of the guarantees of freedom on this issue, we have to deal with the process of globalisation. This is extremely important because it helps us to firmly reassert that we have moved beyond any guarantees from the nation state

and any illusion of a return to a nation states balance of powers. Today democracy must be extended onto the relations between multitudes, and construct, in this way, new social relations and a new right. We are not referring here to the abolition of right, but rather to new juridical forms capable of establishing norms that are guided by the three principles described above. At the same time, there must be sanctions against those who wish to re-establish command and introduce criteria of property over or against the "network", blocking its access or controlling its nodes; as there must also be sanctions against those who create technological and/or juridical tools to obstacle the circulation of knowledge and the great "commonality" that can feed production and life.

Up to this point, you must think that we have not spoken of logic. Or perhaps you will concede that I have treated it by way of allusions when referring to inquiry, the theory of joint-research and my emphasis on the pragmatic behaviours that can and should be developed in the field of social knowledge. But this is not so. So far, we have really spoken of logic. It might have seemed to you that we avoided the issue of logic only because we did not treat it in academic terms – but we did not. So, in order to explain ourselves also in academic terms, to show that even militants can cross our rhetorical fields without difficulty, here comes a scheme, or a 'high' filter of what we have been logically unravelling. In fact, it is a schematic summary of the lecture, complemented by some bibliographic references.

1. The preamble to the discussion of logic as theory of inquiry is found in Marx's Einleitung (as we have often seen so far). We also refer here to John Dewey's *Logic: the Theory of Inquiry* [1938]. In his John Dewey (Harvard University Press, Harvard: 2001) Alan Ryan demonstrates how the lines of American empirical logic can cross with the lines of Marxian logic. The works of Rodolfo

Mondolfo and Sydney Hook recover their relevance today. Briefly, the centrality of praxis is here treated as an epistemological and a political issue. Moreover, in this introduction we have emphasised the relation between language, rhetoric, dialogue and invention, as they are intertwined in the two dimensions that we like: the Spinozian logic of the common name and the rediscovery of the common name in post-modern logic (on this question, see *Kairos, Alma Venus, Multitudo*, manifestolibri, Roma: 2002).

2. Inquiry as a logical dispositif. What does this mean? It means that, in our attempt to construct a logic of research, we have always developed a theoretical process that goes from the constitution of the object (inquiry), to the dialogical explanation of the constitution of the object (joint-research), to end with the definition of the constitutive subject. We thus see a sort of return of the object to the subject: this has always been the progression of revolutionary logic, as Ryan explains very well (in his John Dewey) where he outlines the transition from revolutionary liberalism to the New Deal of the US in the 1920's and 1930's. Mutatis mutandis, we could refer this "return of the object to the subject" to every revolutionary experience. In the previous lectures we demonstrated how the logic of the subject lies between causality and the discontinuity of development. The identification of the logic of the event is the main point in our discussion. We can say that the "common name" (the concept) always oscillates between identity and difference, but is also determined in the interstice between singularity and the common. It that is the case, that the subject is situated inside a process of production of subjectivity as production of a given temporality and spatiality. But in seeing the formation of the subject in the production of the common (through cooperation), we have also underlined the inadequacy of the field of logic by itself for the accomplishment of inquiry.

Cooperation in itself does not explain antagonism; so we must start again from the standpoint of antagonism.

3. Inquiry as ethico-political dispositif. In the Fordist society of the mass worker inquiry as an ethico-political dispositif was interpreted by joint-research: in joint-research the epistemological and militant/agitating devices were joined together. In this respect, see G. Borio, F. Pozzi, and G. Roggero, Futuro Anteriore. *Dai "Quaderni Rossi" ai movimenti globali*. Deriveapprodi, Roma: 2002. When we refer to inquiry as an ethico-political dispositif, we do not avoid the more distinctly cognitive and general epistemological questions; on the contrary, we include and situate them inside a process of collective learning. Somehow, inquiry as an ethico-political dispositif is always a *Bildungsroman*. The issue of the formation of the elite is tied with the question of the centrality of praxis, and the process of their formation with that of the organization of antagonism. A new series of problems arise here, in particular due to historical changes in class composition. What does inquiry as an ethico-political dispositif mean in post-modern society: not the Fordist society of the mass worker but that of the precariat, mobile, and flexible labour, the society of immateriality services and of the hegemony of cooperation? I do not think that the answer would be too different from that given on the issue of joint-research, from the perspective of method and the constitutive progression of the subject. Throughout the 1990s these issues were dealt with in the journal Futur Anterior, published in Paris by L'Harmattan; those who are interested can consult it. As to the process of joint-research in the post-modern scene and on the cooperation of immaterial labourers, see A. Negri et al., *Des entreprises pa comme les autres*, Publisud, Paris: 1993, and A. Negri et al.*, Le basin du travail immaterial*, L'Harmattan, Paris: 1996.

4. Inquiry and the logic of language. Having established the relationship between inquiry as logical device and the new situation of post-modern production, where language emerges as the fundamental means of production and productive cooperation, it is necessary to redefine inquiry in the realm of the logic of language. Paolo Virno, in *The Grammar of the Multitude and Il ricordo del presente. Saggio sul tempo storico* (Bollati Boringhieri, Turin: 1999) provides numerous openings on these issues. For my part, in addition to the arguments proposed by Virno, for a close examination of the problem of productive language (and cooperation and singularity) I refer to the works of Bakhtin, where the linguistic constitution of the real is defined in strong materialist terms.

Having developed our method in this way, we are again faced with some of the great themes of communism. This means that our method is adequate to the epochal alternative where we place ourselves, when the crisis of neo-liberalism manifests as its alternative the aims of communism: the re-appropriation of enterprises, the egalitarian distribution of wealth, the collective management of knowledge, etc. For years and years, since the great post-68 crisis, nobody dared to speak about these things. Today we begin to speak about them again and to adopt the method that leads to this possibility of expression, because we know that we live at the threshold of an extreme crisis: faced with either the restoration of a harsh past or the hope for a new world. It is a matter of decision, and it is precisely around the issue of the decision that the political is born. Before writing some notes on the issue of decision, we should stretch the imagination on this point and think that in the terrible and bloody period of transition we find ourselves in, everything is possible after all. Imagination and decision must intertwine in the movement of the multitude

and the desire of expression that the multitude produces. Inside this imagination, democratic representation – which has always been presented to us as the foundation of the guarantee of liberties – is a monstrous mystification to say the least. The imagination of the multitude currently raises the question of combining sovereign power (potenza) with the productive capacity of subjects. As we outlined it, our discussion on biopolitics leads to this conclusion. But how can the desire of the multitude be organised? How can another democracy be invented? At the national level democracy no longer exists, and at it is unthinkable at the global stage. Nonetheless, these un-thoughts are today the actuality of desire ... We ought to use the terms of the Enlightenment and conceive of new electoral constituencies at the global level that would no longer correspond to nations, but cross the face of the earth rebalancing the wealthy and poor areas, blacks and whites, yellow and green, etc., hybridising and subverting political borders and limits, using force at the service of the construction of the common. Constitutional imagination is what we want. Enlightenment is necessary. But let us return to decision. What does the problem of the relationship between the common experience of the multitude and the ethico-political and juridical concept of decision entail? I think that this can and should be talked about here as elsewhere, but the answer can only be given at the level of the language of the movement, inside the movement. After all, only in the movement are these questions matured; parties are dead and buried. The movements raise these problems and suggest solutions. Now, on the issue of the decision of the multitude: what is striking in the movements from Seattle to today is that they no longer speak of taking power, but rather of making power, of creating another power, and whilst everyone knows that this is utopian, they also know that it has become necessary and realistic due to the vertigo of the current epochal transition. We

cannot wait two or three hundred years for the decision of the multitude to become reality!
But this could be so and defeat inevitable ... In that case, let's leave! To the radical nature of constituent power corresponds exodus as an alternative, a constructive exodus that expresses positive forms of relations between decision and the multitude and thus between freedom and the production of the common. If we can not construct another power, the multitude can say: strike, desertion, subtraction from power ... And the processes between constituent power and exodus interweave and alternate. They are like waves that follow one another. The decisions of the multitude are damned tough terms, hard terms, produced by a tempestuous sea: there is no dulling of the masses for power. There is an ontological insurrection of the multitude. We live the biopolitical.

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