

## BEYOND NIHILISM: NOTES TOWARDS A CRITIQUE OF LEFT-HEIDEGGERIANISM IN ITALIAN PHILOSOPHY OF THE 1970s

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**ABSTRACT:** This article provides a much-needed introduction to the philosophical debates around nihilism and negative thought which preoccupied many Italian left intellectuals in the seventies, and which still have important repercussions today. In order to present the principal stakes of the ‘Left Heideggerian’ current, the article undertakes a close reading of Massimo Cacciari’s 1976 book *Krisis*, and of Antonio Negri’s critical response to it—first in a review of the book, and then in a number of texts from the seventies and eighties, closely analysed by Mandarini, in which Negri develops a positive political metaphysics. This contrast between Cacciari and Negri allows Mandarini to investigate the significance of seemingly recondite philosophical issues to the development of Italian radical political thought, and to identify some of the key stakes of this debate: the status of politics and the political, the role of ontology, the place of dialectics and, crucially, the opposition between Cacciari’s formalistic understanding of negativity and Negri’s link between negativity and antagonism.

**KEYWORDS:** Cacciari; Descartes; Dialectics; Heidegger; Negri; Negative; Ontology; Spinoza; Wittgenstein

In the context of this seminar, the term ‘metaphysics’ indicates the tradition of thought that conceives of the self-founding of being as negative foundation. Whether or not an integrally and immediately positive metaphysics is possible (such as the one that ... A. Negri finds in Spinoza), remains an open question.  
(Agamben, *Language and Death*)

### I

For metaphysics, the foundation is that upon which being rests, it is the foundation (*Grund*) that allows being to take place. But, ‘as much as being takes place in the nonplace of the foundation (that is, in nothingness), being is the unfounded (*Das Grundlose*)’<sup>1</sup>

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1. Giorgio Agamben, *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*, trans. Karen E. Pinkus with Michael Hardt, [www.cosmosandhistory.org](http://www.cosmosandhistory.org)

Italian philosophy from the late 1960s to the 1980s—but this is by no means over—stitched a line leading from Schopenhauer and Nietzsche through to Wittgenstein and Heidegger that wove together *Das Grundlose* of being with the trajectory of nihilism. The very different theoretical and political backgrounds of the participants in these debates takes nothing away from the overall tendency to transfigure the foundation by stripping down being and, ultimately, authorising philosophical mysticism and political opportunism.<sup>2</sup> The very real differences of the resulting positions—hermeneutical free-play, decentred community, or formalist decisionism<sup>3</sup>—cannot override the ultimate end of these tendencies: to provide a political (and rational) foundation for mysticism in terms of the immanent production of a merely residual, liminal negativity. It is these tendencies that I group together under the label of ‘Left-Heideggerianism’—in recognition of their principal philosophical predecessor.<sup>4</sup>

What I propose to do here is to not detail the rich diversity of the theoretical trajectories of Left-Heideggerianism in Italian philosophy over the past thirty or so years—a daunting task and certainly not one to be attempted in a short article such as this. I intend, instead, to make some preliminary notes on something that has been largely overlooked in the discussion of recent Italian thought: i.e. the debate around the provocative assertions of Italian *Krisis*-thought. At the centre of this debate is Massimo Cacciari’s *Krisis. Saggio sulla crisi del pensiero negativo da Nietzsche a Wittgenstein* published in 1976. That Cacciari’s text was central to the development of a number of subsequent tendencies in Italian philosophy, political theory and political practice, is attested to by its influence on the development of ‘weak thought’ (*pensiero debole*) and, more importantly, on the notion of the ‘autonomy of the political’ as adopted by some of the leading intellectuals of the Italian Communist Party—amongst whom one must number Cacciari himself. Antonio Negri’s critical review of this work in the Italian journal *aut aut*, which sparked the debate, did not conclude in any resolution or compromise between the contrasting po-

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Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1991, pp. xiii—translation modified. Also see Giorgio Agamben, *Il linguaggio e la morte. Un seminario sul luogo della negatività*, Turin, Einaudi, 1982, p. 6.

2. By ‘mysticism’ I mean something very specific, as I hope will become apparent in the ensuing discussion.

3. I am tempted to include Agamben’s image of the camp as the *nómos* of the modern and his notion of ‘bare life’. The failure of Agamben’s later project stems, as Negri argues convincingly in two recent essays, from the ontological indetermination, passivity and unproductivity of ‘bare life’ and not from a nihilistic foundation that he did so much to uncover in his earlier work. On this see: Agamben, *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*, Giorgio Agamben, *Homo sacer. Il potere sovrano e la nuda vita*, Turin, Einaudi, 1995, Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1998, Antonio Negri, ‘The Political Subject and Absolute Immanence’, in Creston Davis, John Milbank and Slavoj Žižek (eds.), *Theology and the Political: The New Debate*, trans. Matteo Mandarini, Durham, Duke University Press, 2005, pp. xii, 476 p, Antonio Negri, ‘Giorgio Agamben: the Discreet Taste of the Dialectic’, in Matthew Calarco and Steven DeCaroli (eds.), *Sovereignty and Life: Essays on the Work of Giorgio Agamben*, trans. Matteo Mandarini, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2006. Whether or not that saves Agamben from mysticism, i.e. from the re-establishment of a formal transcendence within immanence (and not in terms of a negative foundation that is the focus of this paper), remains, I would contend, ‘an open question’.

4. I owe this label to Antonio Negri.

sitions. It did, however, serve to mark the point of irreducible conflict between two tendencies within Italian communist philosophy and politics. This debate cannot, then, be considered to be merely an incidental result of a review written for the Italian journal *aut aut* in 1976. Rather, it is fundamental to an understanding Italian philosophy and politics in a critical period of Italy's political and social history. It is also, something on which I shall focus in the second half of this paper, the point of convergence for a series of themes and problems that would be central to Negri's thought from that moment forth.

After discussing Cacciari's extraordinary book *Krisis*, I shall focus on a few selected texts of Negri's from the 1970s and early-to-mid 1980s. These challenge the specifically subtractive twist given to the *Krisis* of the foundation and they set the stage for Negri's continuing endeavour to develop a positive metaphysics which refuses *Das Grundlose* of Being (i.e. the determination of Being as negative foundation).

## II

Massimo Cacciari, with whom Negri collaborated closely in the 1960s, was—along with Mario Tronti—instrumental in theorising the shift towards the 'autonomy of the political' as the political consequence of *Das Grundlose* of Being.

Is it necessary, therefore, to make of Marxism the recovered philosophical foundation of science? But what does this foundation have to say to us today? Is it not, rather, a new dimension of *politics* that Marxism is able to open up for us—not in terms of a 'philosophy' of politics but as a 'will to power' exerted concretely over the multiplicity of languages of technology? Does one respond to Heidegger's and Nietzsche's thought through 'philosophy', appealing once again to Subjects, writing yet another meta-physical utopia for them? Or does one respond by starting to abandon the rafts and ladders and penetrating, without emergency exits, into the politics of Technology, scientific research and into the infinite aporias of the 'social brain'?<sup>5</sup>

Cacciari's penetrating critique of the dialectic in the late 1960s and his analysis of a 'negative thought' that precludes any possible synthesis turned, in the 1970s, into an analysis of the means for the technocratic construction of 'new orders', founded on nothingness and crisis—a 'revolution from above' for the management of development by the representatives of the working class (i.e. through Italian Communist Party's control of the levers of political power). It is to this shift that we shall turn first.

## III

The form of the dialectic is the form of the negative that is affirmed positively—the recoverable contradiction. The *whole system* posits itself and maintains itself in

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5. Cacciari's article in *Rinascita* quoted in Amedeo Vigorelli, 'Noi, i soggetti e il "politico". A proposito di Bisogni e teoria', *aut aut*, no. 155-156, 1976, pp. 196-203, pp. 196-7. *Rinascita* was the cultural and theoretical journal of the Italian Communist Party (PCI). See Massimo Cacciari, 'Noi, i soggetti', *Rinascita*, no. 27, 2 July 1976.

terms [*nel segno*] of negativity: a movement of *universal* alienation is the true-real [*vera-reale*] totality.<sup>6</sup>

For Cacciari (and Negri) the Hegelian dialectic represents the highpoint in the victorious and expansive cycle of capitalist development, in which all contradictions, all conflicts are turned directly into productive moments of capital's advance as the self-realisation of Spirit. Everything becomes a moment of the production-consumption circuit of *Kapital-Geist*; the negative—in the form of 'determinate negation'—is the engine but it is an always already disciplined moment. That is, it is systemic and, hence, an integral moment—always presaging its disappearance—in the circuit of *Geist*.

In contrast to this 'virtuous' dialectic is the 'negative thought' developed in the nineteenth century by bourgeois theorists such as Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Mach, and in the twentieth century by Wittgenstein and Heidegger amongst others. Cacciari coins the term 'negative thought' in the late 1960s so as to precisely differentiate it from the positivisation of the negative that characterizes the dialectic. Negative thought begins by resisting all attempts by bourgeois ideology to pre-determine and synthesize. However, the role that the negative plays here is by no means straightforward. The negative is no longer immanent in the same way. It is no longer a moment of advance, no longer a dynamic moment produced and consumed at once. Cacciari claims that the process of alienation and recovery of *Kapital-Geist*, which makes itself at home in a world it produces, a world that it expels from itself only to re-appropriate more fully, is over. The negative now surrounds; it delimits and constrains but in so doing, it renders reality all the more 'ready-to-hand'. The Absolute Master, death now marks the outer perimeter of one's being and throws one back onto one's own-most possibilities, opening up an (instrumental) world for us and determining new orders to re-found the unfounded. The negative persists only in this paradoxical, marginal position that is the very condition of immanence but which, as we shall see, renders the mystical worldly—and the worldly mystical.<sup>7</sup>

Cacciari refuses to identify the mystical experience in the early Wittgenstein, for instance, with that of transcendence, on the ground that mysticism is—rather—the experience of (this side of) the limit (...of language, of my world...). It is the experience that the world is *de-limited*, hence, that it is 'radically worldly'.<sup>8</sup> He argues that the mystical should be opposed to the 'profound', on the basis that the profound is the un-sayable that one attempts to say—such as the attempt to provide a presentation (*Darstellung*) of

6. Massimo Cacciari, 'Sulla genesi del pensiero negativo', *Contropiano*, vol. 1, 1969, p. 131.

7. Mysticism is most obvious in the work of Schopenhauer and his denial of the Will, in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* it appears explicitly, as itself, and it is there in Heidegger's 'guilt' and 'call of conscience'. Cacciari shows precisely how these examples are more than merely suggestive of the mystical and to what extent they actually develop a thinking of the limit as the definition of the mystical. The link I allude to between Hegel and Heidegger's conception of death is drawn from what is perhaps Agamben's most brilliant book, *Il linguaggio e la morte*.

8. Massimo Cacciari, *Krisis. Saggio sulla crisi del pensiero negativo da Nietzsche a Wittgenstein*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 1976, p. 95, Massimo Cacciari, *Dallo Steinhof. Prospettive viennesi del primo Novecento*, Milan, Adelphi, 1980, pp. 135-40, Massimo Cacciari, *Posthumous People: Vienna at the Turning Point*, trans. R. Friedman, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1996, pp. 97-101.

the *noumenon*. Instead, the mystical stems from negative thought's excision of all reference to a 'real world' transcending the limits of language and that, thereby, enables a multiplicity of *technics* to internalize those very limits, autonomising themselves in a variety of specific 'language games'.<sup>9</sup> They do so does so to make the world sayable, formulable and, so, to make it ready-to-hand as a function of a Will to Power. Negative thought is not, then, the attempt to express the inexpressible, to reach the unconditioned or absolute—an aim so prevalent in the history of metaphysics. Negative thought attacks all synthesis, all equilibrium and all reference: the real world becomes a fable, becomes ideological. The world's limits coincide with the limits of language, of what can be formulated. 'Our language games cannot be "situated" [*appaesabili*] ontologically'.<sup>10</sup> Negri summarizes this as follows:

Nietzsche's and Wittgenstein's work ... is reconceived in terms of a formal and negative thought but that is, thanks to the combination of the two elements, also constructive. It is constructive of logical and systemic horizons within which the efficacy of signification [*significativa*] is reduced entirely to the validity of the project, to the coherent rule of linguistic development [*alla regola coerente dello sviluppo linguistico*] and of the formal intention that constitutes it.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, for Cacciari, the rational lacks all exogenous foundation. There is no *Ratio* to be sought in the world—all we have is a proliferation of rationalities, of 'language games', of ideological structures irreducible one to another, that are circumscribed by a nothingness. This is succinctly summarized by Giuseppe Cantarano's phrase, 'reason is nihilism inasmuch as it is the *historical project of the annihilation* [*annientamento*] *of being*'.<sup>12</sup> Hence the indissoluble link between the 'mystical'—as described by Cacciari—and the mathematization, formalization of reality.

This is how the essence of the 'mystical' appears [*suona*]. It is the simple description, which has been able to fully internalize its limits and that contains and shows [*mostra*] the nothing that embraces it, without saying any of it [*senza dirne un solo accento*].<sup>13</sup>

9. For Cacciari's discussion of the opposition between the mystical and the profound, see *Krisis. Saggio sulla crisi del pensiero negativo da Nietzsche a Wittgenstein*, p. 112.

10. Massimo Cacciari, "'Razionalità" e "Irrazionalità" nella critica del Politico in Deleuze e Foucault', *aut aut*, no. 161, 1977, pp. 119-33, p. 132.

11. Antonio Negri, *La macchina tempo. Rompicapi Liberazione Costituzione*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 1982, p. 41. This review essay was first published in the journal *aut aut*, nos. 155-156, 1976, with the title 'Simplex sigillum veri. Per la discussione di *Krisis* e *Bisogni e teoria marxista*'. It was then reprinted in 1982, with the title 'Sul metodo della crisi filosofica', as chapter 2 of *La macchina tempo*.

12. Giuseppe Cantarano, *Immagini del nulla. La filosofia italiana contemporanea*, Milan, Bruno Mondadori, 1998, p. 319.

13. Cacciari, *Krisis. Saggio sulla crisi del pensiero negativo da Nietzsche a Wittgenstein*, p. 112. Cacciari argues that, for all the differences that exist between the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* and that of the *Investigations*, it is precisely the notion of the mystical which opens the way for the development of the concept of language games, by effectively isolating the process of formalisation—reducing logical propositions to tautologies—and, thus, preventing the referent from acting as a unitary point of synthesis for the multiplicity of language games.

We can formulate and manipulate this ‘conventional’ world, precisely because the world is nothing but what can be formulated, beyond that is Nothing, which circumscribes and conditions without itself being said: “‘behind’ the different games *there is nothing*’.<sup>14</sup> Here Nietzsche, Wittgenstein and Heidegger are indissolubly linked: will to power, formalization of language and metaphysics as the reduction of Being to (formulated) beings—technology and power. This is summed up in one of Cacciari’s most memorable and unsettling phrases: ‘[To have] power is to be integrated into the system.’<sup>15</sup>

Cacciari’s political programme rests precisely on such a de-ontologized, even skeletal, grasp of actuality (*Wirklichkeit*). How else is the autonomy of the political to be understood if not as the decisionistic management of the multiplicity of fragmentary rationalities, as the working class—in the form of the PCI—taking control of the administration of the state, making up for a ‘deficiency in rationalisation ... the inefficiency of the political apparatus’?<sup>16</sup> Political decisionism or, more precisely, voluntarist formalism situates itself in the place of the negative.

Also because we are not speaking of the autonomy of *a part of power* in relation to other parts; but of the autonomy of *all of power* with respect to everything else that is not power; that is, to the rest of society. Hence, the autonomy of power with respect to what is or, better still, what was or was considered—generally—the *foundation* of power.<sup>17</sup>

In place of the foundation, then, we have the *beginning* of command over a process of rationalisation. The space of the Political is the space *between* language games, which negotiates their insoluble autonomy—which supports the negative that, in turn, determines their self-sufficiency.

Let us, therefore, understand the autonomy of each technology, of each game, to mean that it possesses *only* one-law-of-its-own [*una-propria-legge*] (which is the result of an infinity of variations, which has been played and re-played, which is transformable and in-transformation because it is played). Let us understand the term ‘autonomy’ in this sense of *limit*.<sup>18</sup>

Paraphrasing Sergio Givone, it is only once one has abandoned faith in a political subject as foundation of revolutionary political change that one can rediscover a professional political class that can take over the administration of the actual to bring change from above:<sup>19</sup>

14. Massimo Cacciari, ‘Critica della “autonomia” e problema del politico’, in V.F. Ghisi (ed.), *Crisi del sapere e nuova razionalità*, Bari, De Donato, 1978, pp. 123-35, p. 131.

15. Cacciari, *Krisis. Saggio sulla crisi del pensiero negativo da Nietzsche a Wittgenstein*, p. 66.

16. Mario Tronti, *Sull’autonomia del politico*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1977, p. 11.

17. Tronti, *Sull’autonomia del politico*, p. 9.

18. Cacciari, ‘Critica della “autonomia” e problema del politico’, p. 130.

19. Technically Cacciari would be correct in refusing to see the activity of the PCI as coming ‘from above’ since his account in *Krisis* refuses any pre-determined hierarchy. On the other hand, by—along with Mario Tronti—viewing political power as something fundamentally independent from the ‘rest of society’ (Tronti, *Sull’autonomia del politico*) and arguing for the need for the PCI to garner that power *in order* to effect political change, the space for the autonomy of state-driven political processes is prepared. This argument is central to Negri’s philosophical and political critique of the autonomy of the political and *Krisis*-thought.

The decision is preceded or pre-comprehended [*precompreso*] by nothing. Nothingness is the foundation of the decision.<sup>20</sup>

To what extent, then, does Cacciari succeed in escaping the metaphysical closure through this refusal of the ontological foundation produced by the saturation of rationalities in nothingness? This question is answered by Giorgio Agamben in his early book, *Language and Death*:

Today we live on that extreme fringe of metaphysics where it returns—as nihilism—to its own negative foundation (to its own *Ab-grund*, to its own unfoundedness). If casting the foundation into the abyss does not, however, reveal the *ethos*, the proper dwelling of humanity, but is limited to demonstrating the abyss of *Sigē* [silence], then metaphysics has not been surpassed, but reigns in its most absolute form.<sup>21</sup>

For the structure that defines metaphysical reflection on Being (including Heidegger's—as Agamben shows so well), stems not so much from *foundationalism* as such, as from *self-founding* as *negative* foundation. For Heidegger, being destines but withdraws behind that which it destines. This withdrawal, the fact that being opens a clearing but recedes behind that which it clears, is analogous to the mystical as Cacciari describes it. We could argue that Cacciari repeats the *logic* of transcendence through the fabrication of a negative foundation (the mystical limit encircled by nothingness). It is no use his claiming that the mystical does not *found* the world but merely *delimits* it, that there is no receding being, for his actuality—the set of rationalities, of new rationalized orders—is nevertheless borne, supported by the nothing that surrounds the limits of the various language games in their very being formulated. In so doing the infinite movement of immanence is contained and constrained and we are left with the manipulation of dead terms by professional technicians of actuality.

Before unpacking the consequence of these manoeuvres it is important to explore this relation to Heidegger a little further.

#### IV

In 'What is Metaphysics?', and in the famous 1943 'Postscript', Heidegger does more than flirt with the identity of Being and nothingness:

As that which is altogether other than all beings, being is that which is not. But this nothing essentially prevails as being ... we must prepare ourselves solely in readiness to experience in the nothing the pervasiveness of that which gives every being the warrant to be. That is being itself.<sup>22</sup>

Nihilation is not some fortuitous incident. Rather, as the repelling gesture toward

20. Sergio Givone, *Storia del nulla*, Bari, Laterza, 1995, p. xxi. I would like to thank Alberto Toscano for bringing this important, although very problematic, book to my attention.

21. Agamben, *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*, p. 53. Also see Agamben, *Il linguaggio e la morte. Un seminario sul luogo della negatività*, p. 67.

22. Martin Heidegger, 'Postscript to "What is Metaphysics?"', *Pathmarks*, ed. and trans. William McNeill, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 233.

beings as a whole in their slipping away, it manifests these beings in their full heretofore concealed strangeness as what is radically other—with respect to the nothing.<sup>23</sup>

Heidegger refuses to render nothingness unthinkable, as has occurred in the metaphysical tradition since Parmenides, but he does so only by conjoining being and nothing. Whether he does this by presenting the ‘occurrence of nihilation in the essence of Being itself’<sup>24</sup> or by claiming that ‘nothingness appears to be the foundation of being’<sup>25</sup>—in two rival formulations that are closer than at first appears given Givone’s concession that the being ‘that is preceded by nothing, that is determined by nothing ... *at bottom* [*in fondo*] is like nothing’<sup>26</sup>—Heidegger is unable to fully satisfy Cacciari’s demand that the nothing not be positivized. Cacciari’s response is to forget being and Heidegger’s nothing (*das Nichts*), and to affirm in a perverse appropriation of Heidegger—and yet against him—the ‘actuality of the actual’ (*die Wirklichkeit des Wirklichen*).<sup>27</sup> Cacciari’s idea is to turn the negative, not into a positive element of language-games, but into their residual, produced condition. It is at once inactive, derived, and foundational. To fully pervert this appropriation, Cacciari affirms what has been best described by Heidegger as ‘exact thinking’ against the latter’s demand for ‘essential thinking’:<sup>28</sup>

All calculation lets what is countable be resolved into something that can then be used for subsequent counting. Calculation refuses to let anything appear except what is countable. Everything is only whatever it counts. What has been counted in each instance secures the continuity of counting. Such counting progressively consumes numbers and is itself continual self-consumption. The calculative process of resolving beings into what has been counted counts as an explanation of their being .... Calculative thinking compels itself into a compulsion to master everything on the basis of the consequential correctness of its procedure.<sup>29</sup>

One final lengthy quotation from Heidegger’s ‘Postscript’ I hope will confirm my interpretation of Cacciari’s peculiar faithfulness to Heidegger:

Understood as a fundamental trait of the beingness of beings, ‘will’ is the equating of beings with the actual, in such a way that the actuality of the actual comes to power in the unconditional attainment of pervasive objectification .... As a way of objectifying beings in a calculative manner, modern science is a condition posited by the will to will itself, through which the will secures the dominance of its essence.<sup>30</sup>

23. Martin Heidegger, ‘What is Metaphysics?’, in William McNeill (ed.), *Pathmarks*, trans. David F. Krell, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 90.

24. Dennis J. Schmidt, *The Ubiquity of the Finite: Hegel, Heidegger, and the Entitlements of Philosophy*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1988, p. 90.

25. Givone, *Storia del nulla*, p. 200.

26. Givone, *Storia del nulla*, p. 205.

27. Heidegger, ‘Postscript to “What is Metaphysics?”’, p. 231.

28. Heidegger, ‘Postscript to “What is Metaphysics?”’, p. 235-6.

29. Heidegger, ‘Postscript to “What is Metaphysics?”’, p. 235.

30. Heidegger, ‘Postscript to “What is Metaphysics?”’, p. 231.

Precisely the denial of a natural *Ratio*, of any structuring *Aufhebung*, means—for Cacciari—that there is no pre-given ought (*Sollen*), whether ethical or logical, by which irreducible heterogeneity can be reduced or can be reconciled once and for all, but only *Wille zur Macht* as the:

... vital necessity to com-prehend, order [*sistemare*], logicize the world, to *have power* over it .... Power is not synthesis—were it synthesis, there would no longer be any need for power.<sup>31</sup>

As Negri makes clear, what we are then left with is a calculable and manipulable set of elements, circumscribed by nothingness that delimits the serialized elements into language-games or rationalisation procedures, all of which are organized by a political decisionism—Will to Power, Will to Rationalisation—that determines the:

... historical necessity ... of a political class and a professional political class to which the management [*gestione*] of power is to be entrusted. ... In this way arises the moment of a war of manoeuvre [*guerra manovrata*], made-up of successive moves, all of which are scientifically calculated [*previste*] and tactically prepared.<sup>32</sup>

We can see, then, how Cacciari's re-conceptualisation of the notion of 'mysticism' serves an unsettling political project: to employ 'mysticism' for the task of a political *technics*—to the point of in-distinction of power and formal/ul-isation, and so to a technocracy of political action in which effectiveness is all. This will become the core focus of Negri's violent critique. Thus, Cacciari's thought shows a paradoxical adoption and disavowal of Heidegger. The withdrawal of Being, its retreat, 'ground[s] ... the dimension of being in its difference with respect to the entity'.<sup>33</sup> As we have seen, for Cacciari, this ontological difference results in the advent of language games that *confirm* that Being has always already only ever been understood in terms of beings (although Cacciari severs the etymological link between 'Being' and 'beings'). It is this that permits the reduction of politics to efficacy, to technology. In other words, we could say that the actual 'forgetting of Being' in Cacciari is both the condition of and conditioned by ontological difference, but for *Krisis*-thought this 'forgetting' frees itself of any sense of loss (or the possibility of recollection), such that the forgetting of Being—as the condition for beings to be, to be formulated and utilized—is, beyond this—and in contrast to Heidegger<sup>34</sup>—nothing, a nothing that circumscribes and (de-)limits, making possible, manipulable. It is as though Cacciari asks us to climb up and through Heidegger's propositions on the meaning and forgetting of Being, only to then 'throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it'.<sup>35</sup> What is left is the ontic world of the merely formulated, the calculable world of the will

31. Cacciari, *Krisis. Saggio sulla crisi del pensiero negativo da Nietzsche a Wittgenstein*, p. 65 & 9.

32. Tronti, *Sull'autonomia del politico*, pp. 17-8.

33. Agamben, *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*, p. 85. Also Agamben, *Il linguaggio e la morte. Un seminario sul luogo della negatività*, p. 105.

34. Agamben points out that Heidegger aims to think Being outside of its relation to beings (i.e. beyond metaphysics as he defines it) through the concept of 'Appropriation' (*Ereignis*) in his essay 'Time and Being' in Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1972.

35. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961, prop. 6.54.

to will, which in being formulated, becomes utilisable.

The different language games co-exist but between them there is no chance of synthesis, no possible ontological resolution but only the persistence of conflict and the need to negotiate it:

*Reality [Reale] is logicalisation [logicizzazione], Rationalisierung, which refuses the metaphysics of Language, the logic of *reductio ad unum*, the idea of the substance-subject—that takes on board the whole weight of the contradictoriness of the processes, of the multiplicity of languages, constituting its space and, so, allowing its form to emerge.*<sup>36</sup>

On the one hand, the Political is a language game like the others, with its own specific rules and immanent possibilities of transformation and, on the other hand, it has other language games for its content. The Political then situates itself in such a way as to keep the confrontation between the various language games continuously open. It ‘imposes this continual confrontation, it prevents any game from withdrawing [*sottrarvisi*] from it.’<sup>37</sup> The only possibility is an endless compromise between different autonomies—between different language games characterized by the laws that specify them.

In *Krisis* we see the result of negative thought’s refusal to give in to the temptation of dialectical resolution, to what Cacciari terms the ‘recoverable contradiction’<sup>38</sup> that turns all antagonism into a moment of the development of the system of capital. The critique of the dialectic by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche that Cacciari had discussed in his important essay of 1969, enabled him to pin-point the *positivisation of the negative* as what was at stake in bourgeois thought. But what Cacciari was after in his 1976 book, through his analysis of Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, etc., was a way of re-conceiving the negative such that it would no longer be thought of as a moment by means of which the system develops itself and to turn it. Instead, it develops into a barrier that can be perpetually displaced and consumed as a moment of expansion of domination—of the Will to Power. Cacciari shows that all preceding notions of the negative end up neutering it, always already virtually resolving it—making conflict little more than an epiphenomenal form hiding a fundamentally pacific unity. This view of the dialectic as—in its classical Hegelian form—fundamentally reactionary, is one that Negri largely shared with Cacciari.<sup>39</sup> However, Cacciari’s solution merely served to confirm the theoretical and political break that had already taken place between them.<sup>40</sup>

36. Cacciari, *Krisis. Saggio sulla crisi del pensiero negativo da Nietzsche a Wittgenstein*, p. 185.

37. Cacciari, ‘Critica della “autonomia” e problema del politico’, p. 133.

38. Cacciari, ‘Sulla genesi del pensiero negativo’, p. 131.

39. Negri’s own relationship to the dialectic is extremely complex and cannot be easily summarized. His peremptory tone when discussing it is quite often misleading, as is the all too hasty suggestion that Negri refuses the dialectic in a manner analogous to Deleuze and Foucault. This is both false and—ultimately—fails to shed light on any of these thinkers’ take on the question. I have discussed Negri’s nuanced conception of the dialectic in Mandarini 2005.

40. For all the criticisms Negri would direct at *Krisis*-thought, he recognizes the ‘wonderful attempt to positively recuperate the efficacy of negative thought’ as late as 1981 (see Antonio Negri, *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza’s Metaphysics and Politics*, trans. Michael Hardt, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1991, p. 211ff. & n.3). This is well after the vigorous critique directed at *Krisis* in *aut aut* and of his

## V

In this way, a cynical conventionalism—placed between an unstoppable [*irrefrenabile*] logicalising pressure [*pulsione*] and an hypocritical postulation of the mystical—represents the ruling class’s gradual *prise de conscience* of the passage to capital’s real subsumption of social labour and to negate the antagonism that sustains [*sostanza*] that passage as well as the claim [*rivendicazione*] to ontological truth the social subject expresses.<sup>41</sup>

The object of this scathing attack is Wittgenstein, but it is clear that the name ‘Wittgenstein’ also denotes Negri’s erstwhile collaborator, the author of *Krisis*. One may, perhaps, free the power of the negative from *positivisation* by consigning it to the role of ‘determining factor in the process of integration and rationalisation’.<sup>42</sup> But is not the result of this that the negative becomes domesticated? The process of de-ontologisation, that is, of the excision of the referent that allows the multiplicity of formal, conventional rules to be deployed, as a pure free-floating *technics* of manipulation and efficacy, reduces thought to what works and, hence, to the apologetic subordination to existing states of affairs or—at best—to a ‘fetishistic overdetermination’<sup>43</sup> from above, i.e. to ideology and political opportunism. Once one excises all ontological foundation, power is necessarily defined by the level of integration into the system, by one’s ability to ‘work it’.

It is not the degree to which one approaches an illusory substance but the degree of integration with which it operates in the process of rationalisation [that] decides the value and the power of logical form.<sup>44</sup>

According to Cacciari, substance is illusory, Being is equally so—both represent merely utopian moments of synthesis. In their place there is nothing. Nothing circumscribes and conditions the wholly immanent nature of the conventional, formal rules—thus establishing the worldliness of the mystical. But, as we have already seen, it is clear that this negative foundation, the condition for the ‘concrete search for re-foundation’, does not signal an escape from metaphysics or even from a constraining of immanent processes of change. Indeed, that the ‘processes of re-foundation’, of formalisation and conventionalisation are constituted as ‘movements *internal* to the “negative”’,<sup>45</sup> is by no means evident since the process of formalisation *presupposes* a negative foundation as denial of Being, Substance, etc. Thus the mystical, the Nothing that circumscribes, marks the

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angry tirades against ‘Nietzsche in parliament’ (see Antonio Negri, ‘Domination and Sabotage’, in Timothy S. Murphy (ed.), *Books for Burning: Between Civil War and Democracy in 1970s Italy*, trans. E. Emery, New York, Verso, 2005), which followed the election of Cacciari to the Italian parliament in 1976 under Berlinguer’s strategy of ‘historic compromise’ between the Italian Communist Party and the ruling Christian Democrats. It is clear that Negri is affirming negative thought’s refusal of dialectical synthesis, of domestication or positivisation of the negative. But to stop there, he will argue, is to remain within the formal antinomies of thought and to subordinate practice to technocratic negotiation or national compromise.

41. Negri, *La macchina tempo. Rompicapi Liberazione Costituzione*, p. 33.

42. Cacciari, *Krisis. Saggio sulla crisi del pensiero negativo da Nietzsche a Wittgenstein*, p. 8.

43. Negri, *La macchina tempo. Rompicapi Liberazione Costituzione*, p. 43.

44. Cacciari, *Krisis. Saggio sulla crisi del pensiero negativo da Nietzsche a Wittgenstein*, p. 68.

45. Cacciari, *Krisis. Saggio sulla crisi del pensiero negativo da Nietzsche a Wittgenstein*, p. 8, my emphasis.

formal condition for immanence but also *delimits* the immanent and, in so doing, turns the negative into the presupposed product of the very process it must condition. The ‘movements internal to the “negative”’ may be immanent but the negative remains abstract, unrelated, undetermined and a merely manipulable epiphenomenon.

In short, Negri suggests that Cacciari pays a heavy price for having saved the negative from its positivisation in the development of Capital-*Geist*—he effectively domesticates it. He has been able to maintain the insolubility of crisis and prevent any easy synthesis, but—as Negri points out in his 1976 review—he has done so while losing any concrete conception of the negative, losing the ability to analyse struggles and ending up with a fundamentally domesticated, opportunistic conception of the negative and of politics. The problem for this epigone of the autonomy of the political, is that the moment of decision and the subject of decision cannot be understood independently of the process of rationalisation. Givone argues that in founding being on nothingness and thereby allowing beings to appear in their difference from being, as ‘not being nothing’,<sup>46</sup> Heidegger thereby establishes the possibility of freedom:

...precisely because to be ‘immersed in nothing’, Dasein is always already beyond the entity, beyond the world .... To be immersed in nothing means to transcend ... transcendence is freedom.<sup>47</sup>

But what happens if the nothing ceases to found being and instead becomes merely a manipulable element to be deployed, or a residual effect of rationalisation procedures? This effectively collapses the problem of the relation between the autonomy of the antagonistic class subject into that of its organisation, since the subject is defined merely by its ability to effectively negotiate the formal rules of the multiplicity of languages and so cannot be an object of analysis independently of those formal rules. As Negri argues in his review, the problem of the relation between class autonomy and its political organisation is not thereby resolved but merely exorcized by transferring autonomy to the ideological structures or language games/conventions and the level of its organisation is defined precisely by the effectiveness of those same formal structures. The truth of a language game or rationalisation procedure is given by the principle of efficacy that is determined by the level of organisation of the language game ... i.e., by its efficacy. In Negri’s words:

The complete sophism is: the guarantee of truth of organisation is given by the principle of reality that only that organisation can guarantee.<sup>48</sup>

Autonomy collapses into organisation and organisation into effective management. For Cacciari, whether the working class or the capitalist class gains power is merely a question of efficacy, of degrees of integration.

46. Givone, *Storia del nulla*, p. 199.

47. Givone, *Storia del nulla*, p. 200.

48. Negri, *La macchina tempo. Rompicapi Liberazione Costituzione*, p. 48.

## VII

What are we then to make of the usage of the negative in Negri's thought? In the small space that I have left, I can only hope to outline the skeleton of an alternative that I believe can be uncovered in Negri's writings. I shall attempt to summarize this in some baldly stated theses:

*The question of the nature and position of the negative is the question of politics:* specific struggles between classes determine the nature and position of the negative. Conversely, the question of the nature and position of the negative has concrete political effects, i.e. co-determines particular relations between classes in struggle. How the negative is played out in struggles between classes—in the form of antagonism, contradiction, terror, or alternation<sup>49</sup>—is, therefore, intimately linked to the question of politics.

We have already seen that the question of foundation at issue in metaphysics *cannot be understood independently of the nature and position of the negative*. For the question of foundation—so crucial to the history of metaphysics—is intimately related to that of the position of the negative.<sup>50</sup>

For Negri, the question of metaphysics cannot be grasped independently of the question of politics—and *vice versa*. Moreover, both the question of metaphysics and that of politics are intimately related to the question of the negative.

As a corollary to this: *the question of the nature and position of the negative is the question of method*. Where 'method' is understood as immanent to the real, as a practice that is ontologically constitutive—*politics as metaphysics as ontology*: the 'real movement which abolishes the present state of things'.<sup>51</sup> This is what Negri means when he speaks of a method that

...dispenses with all that remains of the exterior, gnoseological, and methodical connotations in order to become a substantial element, a constitutive key to the world. If this is a method, it is the method of being.<sup>52</sup>

For such a method involves situating the negative *within* the specific antagonism of class forces within a determinate, i.e. a concrete, social formation—and projecting the specificity of that antagonism, i.e. of the nature and position of the negative, into alternative standpoints of metaphysics and of politics. That is:

When capital constitutes the political as the domination of one class by another, metaphysics is affected [*subisce*] by both poles of the relationship: it is the forces in

49. One fundamental contribution to the political function of the negative has been provided by Mao, for whom the negative, or antagonism had to be comprehended in a complex interplay of principle and secondary 'contradictions'. See for example the analysis in Mao Tse-Tung, *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People*, Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1957.

50. For, in the history of metaphysics, being is always conceived in terms of the question of foundation, even when that foundation is entirely negative. In the words of Giuseppe Cantarano, 'the nothing has always supported the stability of being. The nothing [*Das Grundlose* of being] is the foundation of being'. See Cantarano, *Immagini del nulla. La filosofia italiana contemporanea*, p. 305.

51. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1976.

52. Negri, *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics*, p. 150. Also see Antonio Negri, *L'anomalia selvaggia*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 1981, p. 182.

struggle that assume the sense of a metaphysical tradition and oppose it to another one.... A metaphysics, distinct metaphysical positions and the alternatives they represent are the most concrete of historical objects. They are 'concrete' because they are swollen [*gonfio*] with antagonisms and possibilities.<sup>53</sup>

The history of the transformations of the nature and the position of the negative is the history of the antagonism between 'blessed' versus 'damned' metaphysics of which Negri speaks in his Spinoza book. Thus, ultimately, it is the reflection of class struggle.

### VIII

Negri argues that the only way to concretize the negative, to not leave it entirely in the hands of the theorists of the mystical, is to conceive the negative as *immanent* to struggle, i.e. in terms of the specific characterisation of the negative within class struggle. But by so doing, does he not end up returning the negative to its subjection to the dialectical *Aufhebungen* and so to the development of *Kapital-Geist* or—at best—*Kommunismus-Geist*? For is the negative able to escape synthesis, i.e. does it not merely get *resolved* one way or another in the result (as is the case with determinate negation)? In either case, is not the result a final pacifying *telos* with all that it entails? That is, does not the negative become literally nothing, i.e. it is absent for it is always already accounted for, reduced, *aufgehoben* in the result, thus effectively repeating Parmenides' inaugural gesture of the state tradition of metaphysics, whereby the source of all conflict is to be excised to leave us with the One?

Being is ungenerated and imperishable, entire, unique, unmoved and perfect; it never was nor will be, since it is now all together, one, indivisible.<sup>54</sup>

This, the 'blessed' tradition of state-thought, is the ancient but still active origin of bourgeois thought.<sup>55</sup> *Contra* Cacciari then, bourgeois thought is, rather, defined as one where the horizon of war is perpetually refused in favour of security, where the negative is excluded from the commonwealth, indeed where the commonwealth is entirely *constituted* by a foundational exclusion of the horizon of war. This is the fundamental problem of reactionary thought (Hobbes *per tutti*). Instead, Negri wants to champion that other thread (of politics and of metaphysics), which views

...war as the fundamental and insuperable condition: where it is not a case of eliminating it but of making it function without precipitating into a simple massacre. Instead, making it operate against the relations of production and in favour of the

53. Antonio Negri, 'Note sulla storia del politico in Tronti', *L'anomalia selvaggia*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 1981, p. 290. The essay 'Note sulla storia del politico in Tronti' was published as an appendix to Negri's *L'anomalia selvaggia* along with another two short articles.

54. Parmenides and A. H. Coxon, *The Fragments of Parmenides: A Critical Text with Introduction, and Translation, the Ancient Testimonia and a Commentary*, trans. A. H. Coxon, Assen, Van Gorcum, 1986, pp. 60-2, frag. 5.

55. Is this *still active origin* not evident even in that danger against which Tronti cautions us, even as he proposes his notion of the autonomy of the political, as the 'risk of a more organic relation [*azione*] between the state and capital, the danger of a formidable power-block that—at that point—could not be attacked and would be invincible'? Quotation from Tronti, *Sull'autonomia del politico*, p. 19.

productive forces and their free expansion.... Only by going back over the history of metaphysics, only by discriminating within it real alternatives do we have the possibility of contributing to the construction of new models for the refounding of class politics within antagonism.<sup>56</sup>

Once again, we see that the nature and position of the negative is the question of politics. For how are we to conceive of this ‘within antagonism’, i.e. how are we to comprehend the nature and position of the negative in a way that leaves it open, without resolution but without rendering it merely formal—without throwing us onto the mystical, and so opportunism, or back into the arms of the dialectic? This problem, I believe, is one that haunts Negri’s thought for over four decades—from his writings on labour and the constitution, to his detailed work on the state-form, from his reappraisal of Spinoza through to his most recent reflections on time and ontology.

## IX

Negri gropes his way towards a solution to this apparently extremely abstract (i.e. theoretical) but—as we have seen—completely concrete (i.e. political) problem in the late 1970s and early-to-mid 1980s. At this time, he argues that it is only by making the negative into an element of concrete practice and, therefore, ontologically substantial, that it can escape formalisation or auto-dissolution in a pacifying synthesis. The answer is not that negative thought must be rejected but that alone it is insufficient. In negative thought the negative is purely logical or ideological, i.e. it is parasitic upon that which it negates or, more precisely, its evacuation of all ontological foundation from what it critiques nevertheless enables the object of its critique to persist as the de-substantialized, de-ontologized form of languages and rationalities. Since none of them are invented, they can at best be re-articulated. Such an ideological negation is ideological in the strong sense: all that remains is ideology. Thus, Cacciari’s negation allows the proliferation of ideologies as it removes their material support. With the excision of the ontological referent, ideological struggle becomes entirely formalistic, opportunistic and divorced from the subjects of struggle. Against Cacciari’s intentions (but not so far away from his recent practice), this appears to be an early anticipation of the political logic played out today in the contemporary discourses of ‘beyond left and right’ and ‘modernisation’—where to modernize is little more than to *make adequate* to the dominant conditions of accumulation and exploitation, while negating those conditions (ideologically). The Fordist factory—at least in the West—hardly exists anymore. Thus, as the current champions of the ‘beyond left and right’ argue, the referent, the space of exploitation as well as its subject, no longer exist. Exploitation is no longer a battleground, the battle today becomes the purely social one against ‘social exclusion’. Poverty is thus ascribed to individuals’ disconnection to a supposed space of possibility, of opportunity—an eminently ideological space from which the substantial ontological body of the exploited is excluded. What is demanded by the ‘modernizers’ is that the excluded be

<sup>56</sup> Negri, ‘Note sulla storia del politico in Tronti’, pp. 291-2.

increasingly integrated into this rich space of possibility. The excluded must be able to learn and speak the different languages: 'It is *inexorable* [*inesorabile*] to learn to play a language if we want to experiment with its gaps, differences, limits and aporias ...'.<sup>57</sup> The specular double of Thatcher's 'there is no such thing as society' is the Blairite and Communitarian claim that all that exists is society. The question is how individuals can be made to participate *more* fully, *more* inclusively.

Is this so far from Cacciari's claim, '[To have] power is to be integrated into the system'?<sup>58</sup>

It is this logic that Negri defies by ontologising the negative. Subordinating philosophy and practice to *Krisis*, to *Das Grundlose* of the foundation, fails to pit the negative against Power—to generate any antagonism that cannot be compromised by it—and so it remains prisoner to Power. As Negri argues vociferously in various places in the mid-1970s, *Krisis* cannot be made to operate as motor or condition for a communist politics—for such a politics, this conception of the negative would forever subordinate it to the transcendence of Power. The 'historic compromise' proved an historic failure, as became increasingly evident in the course of the 1970s. The policy of the PCI became increasingly subordinate to that of the Christian Democrats (DC) to the point that the DC increasingly excluded the PCI from the levers of power while drawing the PCI into the fierce repression and criminalisation of a large number of the extra-parliamentary left. Subordination to the State became total. Yes, the conflict was not resolved in a pacifying dialectical synthesis, but the un-synthesisable discourses of the PCI and DC became elements of a *dispositif* subordinated to the maintenance of a means to maintain the continuity of dialogue, i.e. of this 'continuous confrontation'.<sup>59</sup> *Entrismo* quickly became *trasformismo*.<sup>60</sup> I seriously doubt Negri knew just how prescient his critique of Cacciari in 1976 would be.

Nevertheless, the years spent in prison following the infamous 'April 7<sup>th</sup>' verdict, were an extraordinarily fertile period theoretically for Negri and his endeavour to achieve a thought and practice of the negative that would integrate the lessons of negative thought while refusing the logic of integration and the correlative state-terrorist repression. It is interesting to see Negri take up again his study of seventeenth-century philosophy after a decade. To his previous study of Descartes (1970), Negri now adds his influential study of Spinoza. This may appear a strange way to approach the very pressing failure of communist (reformist and revolutionary) politics of the 1970s but Negri emphasizes the timeliness of this study by titling one of the final sections of the book, 'Negative Thought and Constitutive Thought'.<sup>61</sup> There he argues that, in contrast to Descartes, Spinoza refused to be satisfied with subordinating thought to its crisis and to de-ontologize the

57. Cacciari, 'Critica della "autonomia" e problema del politico', p. 127.

58. Cacciari, *Krisis. Saggio sulla crisi del pensiero negativo da Nietzsche a Wittgenstein*, p. 66.

59. Cacciari, 'Critica della "autonomia" e problema del politico', p. 133.

60. The PCI's attempt to find a point of entry into government through compromise with the DC resulted in the transformation of its policy into one of defence of governmentality.

61. See chapter 9, § 1 of Negri, *L'anomalia selvaggia*; Negri, *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics*.

negative, and was able instead to give the negative its autonomy by turning it into an element of his ontology. So, against the ‘reformist’ strategy of Descartes, Negri postulates the constitutive and productive one of Spinoza.<sup>62</sup> Negri’s strategy, then, is to suture negative to constitutive thought. It is to re-ontologize Krisis:

If dialectics cannot be conceived as the form by which determination is resolved,<sup>63</sup> if—nevertheless—the terms of a dialectical problematic remain, and finite elements oppose one another without encountering *Aufhebungen*, what shifts, passages, relations will the existent terms have to experience [*che pure i termini dell’esistenza debbono conoscere*] on the negative edge of this situation? Certainly, it is not a case of a logical sequence; there is no linearity given on this horizon of being. In contrast, we encounter ruptures, crises, and suffering. *But all of this is given within being, against an ontological backdrop that contains and relates these emergent elements [emergenze].*<sup>64</sup>

It is clear, then, even in 1984–85 when Negri was completing his little-known but hugely significant book on Leopardi, that he was still trying to find a way to insert crisis and negation into ontology and so refuse the logic of *Das Grundlose* of being. Politically, the failure represented by Cacciari’s *Krisis* was evident, and the 1980s and 1990s would only confirm the neutering of the negative once it is subordinated to the Political in terms of a ‘continuous confrontation’. Theoretically, however, the problem remained.

Whilst accepting the rejection of the foundation that characterized negative thought, Negri would refuse to either neuter the negative or allow it to be resolved ideologically through the ‘autonomy of the political’ —i.e. by de-ontologising it. Instead, he would endeavour to turn it into an element for the production of new being:

...reality as origin [as *archē*]<sup>65</sup> is negated and it presents itself instead as a creative surface. ... There is only the revelation of the polarity of being and poetic subjectivity, within a relationship that negates every pre-existing reality and returns being to us as revolution, as radical transformation.<sup>66</sup>

In this way, ‘Ontology becomes the science of the rupturing [*rottura*] of being’<sup>67</sup>—ontology is the science of revolution; revolution is the practice of ontology. We could also say, therefore, that ontology becomes the science of the negative. Thus, *Krisis* understood

62. See Antonio Negri, *Descartes politico. Della ragionevole ideologia*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 1970, Antonio Negri, *The Political Descartes: Reason, Ideology, and the Bourgeois Project*, trans. Matteo Mandarini and Alberto Toscano, London, Verso, 2007. In particular the ‘Postface to the English edition of *The Political Descartes*’.

63. For Hegel determination is, of course, negation—and vice versa, since in the terms of his dialectic, negation stops being abstract and formal because it is always a determinate negation. This must be borne in mind to understand the full import of refusing a dialectical resolution of the determinate. Negri wants to maintain the concreteness of Hegelian negation while refusing its insertion within the neutralising logic of dialectical synthesis—a difficult balance to maintain.

64. Antonio Negri, *Lenta ginestra. Saggio su Leopardi*, Milano, Mimesis Eterotopia, 2001 [1987], pp. 44, my emphasis.

65. When speaking of the origins of the Greek word ‘*archē*’, Reiner Schürmann reminds us that ‘Aristotle is the one who explicitly joins the more ancient sense of *inception* with that of *domination*’. See Reiner Schürmann, *Heidegger on Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy*, trans. Christine-Marie Gros, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1987, p. 97.

66. Negri, *Lenta ginestra. Saggio su Leopardi*, p. 154.

67. Negri, *Lenta ginestra. Saggio su Leopardi*, p. 167.

as de-ontologisation of the negative is refused—nothing, negation is instead understood as the potentiality of being<sup>68</sup> insofar as it refuses characterisation as stasis, constant capital, death.

Although Negri cannot be said to have resolved these difficulties to his satisfaction or ours, his work has been crucial in bringing to light this pivotal problem for the development of communist philosophy and politics. He also set out the markers that separate his own endeavour from those who have attempted to trace back to Heidegger the theoretical tools towards, if not a revolutionary, at least to a progressive politics. How pressing this problem remains for Negri and for any of us who wish to be able to think the political, to think the negative, is summarized in a recent preface Negri wrote to a book on Deleuze by Francesco Lesce:

I believe that once all dialectical mediation is set aside, once Heidegger's hypostasis of being has been criticized, the problem of the negative reappears. How can one confront it *inside*, within, in the heart of materialist ontology? ... The negative is consistent [*consiste*]. How can it be assumed, resolved, how can one suffer it and destroy it in a world without an outside? How can the painful consciousness of the negative be grasped within and against the positive reconciliations of being?<sup>69</sup>

These intractable questions continue to assail contemporary thought and demand theoretical, and—more importantly—practical resolution.

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68. 'There is no being other than the being that we produce'. See Negri, *Lenta ginestra. Saggio su Leopardi*, p. 215.

69. Antonio Negri, 'Prefazione', in Francesco Lesce (ed.), *Un'ontologia materialista. Gilles Deleuze e il XXI secolo*, Milan, Mimesis, 2004, p. 6.

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