A politics of love? Antonio Negri on revolution and democracy

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Abstract This article critically analyzes Antonio Negri's democratic theory by exploring the theoretical significance of a concept that begins to appear in his writings after the 1990s, namely the concept of 'love'. Negri's turn to love in the closing pages of his most recent books is puzzling, especially given his earlier recourse to notions of antagonistic struggle, direct confrontation and even violence. Using Jacques Derrida's conception of 'the supplement' for interpretive purposes, I argue that the concept of love not only enriches Negri's account of democracy, but also points to a lack within his political thought. During the 1970s, as one of the leading figures of autonomist Marxism, Negri called for a radicalization of antagonism and the use of violence to ensure the political organization of the revolutionary subject without giving up on the emancipatory potential of 'direct and immediate' action. In his recent writings, Negri has supplemented the notion of 'love' for his earlier emphasis on antagonism to address autonomist Marxism's unresolved question of political organization. And yet, this turn to love comes at a price. Negri's understanding of love as the creative force of revolutionary consciousness leads him to erase the *process* of political contestation and mediation involved in the constitution of political struggles. Love, then, operates as a dangerous supplement, undermining Negri's commitment to multiplicity and diversity as central aspects of his democratic theory.
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Antonio Negri's tumultuous career as a revolutionary thinker took a dramatic and welcome turn after the publication of *Empire* in 2000. Negri had been a prominent and productive theorist of the Italian far left since the late 1950s. Yet, as many scholars agree, it was the unexpected popular success of *Empire*, co-authored with Michael Hardt, that finally opened up the way for Negri's political thought to receive the worldwide attention it had long deserved (Callinicos, 2001; Macdonald, 2003). Although some commentators identified

Negri as one of the most original theorists of our time (Murphy and Mustapha, 2007), many others criticized the eclecticism of his democratic theory, charging him of being, among others, a Bergsonian vitalist (Rustin, 2003), a Schmittian decisionist (Balakrishnan, 2003) and a disguised political anarchist whose so-called Marxist analysis utilizes the language of neo-liberalism (Brennan, 2003). This article intervenes in this ongoing debate and critically analyzes Negri's democratic theory by exploring the theoretical significance of a concept that begins to appear in his writings after the 1990s, namely the concept of 'love'.

To date, the concept of love has largely been overlooked by readers of Negri. This lack of interest is surprising, especially given Negri's curious and frequent recourse to love in the closing pages of his most recent books. Negri concludes *Insurgencies* by arguing that the revolutionary task of our day is to accelerate the strength of constituent power and 'to recognize its necessity in the love of time' (Negri, 1999, p. 336). Hardt and Negri's collaborative work *Empire* ends on a hopeful note, suggesting that the revolution undertaken by the multitude will be 'a revolution that no power will control – because … cooperation and revolution remain together, in love, simplicity, and also innocence' (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p. 413). In *Multitude*, Hardt and Negri call for the transformation of the multitude's desire for democracy through a 'strong event'. The very last sentence of *Multitude* identifies that event as 'the real political act of love' (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. 358). It is only in *Commonwealth*, the final installment of what has now become the '*Empire* trilogy', where we find a sustained discussion on love (Hardt and Negri, 2009, pp. 179–198). Even then, the authors devote the concluding pages of their book to an exploration of how to 'restore or reinvent … political conceptions of happiness, joy and love for our world' (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. 380).

The similar endings of these different books raise a number of crucial questions. Why does love always figure as a concluding note in Negri's latest works? What does love do for Negri's political theory, when it seems to be a mere addition, nothing but a supplement, to his account? What are we to make of this turn to love in light of Negri's frequent recourse to notions of antagonistic struggle, direct confrontation, and even violence in his writings during the 1970s? What explains this radical shift in Negri's revolutionary terminology? Most importantly, what does Negri's recourse to love tell us about his theory of democracy?

While exploring these questions, I draw on an interpretive insight that takes its bearings from Jacques Derrida's understanding of the 'logic of the supplement' (Derrida, 1997, p. 165). For Derrida, the concept of the supplement harbors within itself two contradictory significations. On the one hand, a supplement is a 'surplus'. On the other hand, the supplement 'supplements'; it adds only to establish itself in the place of something else. According to this second signification, rather than enriching something's presence, the supplement underscores its absence by pointing to a gap within its

structure (Derrida, 1997, p. 144). Using Derrida's notion for interpretive purposes, I suggest that as a supplement, the concept of love not only enriches Negri's account, but also, and at the same time, points to a lack within his political thought. It is my argument that this gap emerges from Negri's ongoing difficulty, throughout his intellectual career, in finding a way to ensure the political organization of the revolutionary subject without giving up on the emancipatory potential of 'direct and immediate' forms of action.

Throughout the 1970s, Negri's suspicion of any form of mediation that rested on political institutions resulted in his call for a radicalization of antagonism and the use of violence as a means to generate revolutionary consciousness. Following the defeat of the revolutionary project of the 1970s, however, Negri moved away from class antagonism and embraced a more expansive notion of the revolutionary subject. As the 'multitude' replaced the working class, I argue that love, understood as the driving force of democratic politics and the creative force of revolutionary consciousness, took the place of antagonistic struggle in Negri's recent works. Yet, as I demonstrate in the concluding section of the article, this turn to love comes at a price. As love takes on the role that was formerly played by antagonism in Negri's accounts of political struggles, it becomes a dangerous supplement that undermines Negri's own commitment to multiplicity and diversity in his democratic theory.

The article begins with an account of Negri's involvement in the Italian extra-parliamentary left during the 1970s in order to elaborate the role that antagonistic struggle, and eventually violence, played in his early works. The second section focuses on what I call Negri's 'philosophical turn'. In this section, I propose rethinking Negri's turn to democratic theory as his attempt to develop a philosophically grounded solution to the organizational problems he has faced as an activist theorist since early on in his career. The concluding section explores how, and to what effect, love supplements Negri's theory of democracy.

Negri in Context: The Italian Extra-Parliamentary Left, the Legacy of *Operaismo*, and Autonomist Marxism

From 1971 to 1977, Negri wrote a number of pamphlets that established him as one of the most influential thinkers of *Autonomia Operaia*,[1] an Italian extra-parliamentary movement that originated from a distinctly Italian Marxist theoretical current called *operaismo* (workerism). Through these 'essentially political' pamphlets (Negri, 2005f, p. xlviii), Negri both directly intervened in the ongoing political struggles and aimed to establish the theoretical foundations of autonomist Marxism by working through the problems that led to workerism's demise as a political movement in the early 1970s. To achieve this goal, he critically engaged with three core tenets of workerism.

The first core tenet of workerism was the idea of the primacy of labor over capital. Challenging the structuralist Marxism of the 1960s, theorists of workerism emphasized the importance of the subject over structure and highlighted that – whereas capital is completely dependent upon labor's productivity for its existence – labor can, and does, create value independently of capital. This emphasis on the 'autonomy of labor' led many activist thinkers involved in workerism, such as Mario Tronti, Sergio Bologna, Romano Alquati, and Negri, to move away from an account of the laws of the development of capitalism to an analysis of the development of the working class through detailed empirical studies of workers' struggles (Wright, 2002, pp. 46–62). These studies underscored that the 'class composition' of the working class was shaped by 'an ongoing interplay between the articulations of labour-power produced by capitalist development, and labour's struggles to overcome them' (p. 78). For workerists, an in-depth understanding of this dynamic and inherently antagonistic process was 'a necessary precondition for effective worker organization and activism' (Bove *et al*, 2005, p. xxxii).

The second core tenet of workerism was its emphasis on the immediate process of production, that is, the factory, as the privileged realm of struggle (Wright, 2002, p. 85). The factory is *the* privileged realm of struggle, workerists argued, because it enables workers to confront capital directly without the mediation of political parties or trade unions. As the production process is completely dependent upon labor, production can easily be interrupted through acts of resistance ranging from wildcat strikes and fragmentary refusals to work to desertion and sabotage (Tronti, 1964, p. 6).

Finally, theorists of workerism argued that the attempt to control the revolutionary potential of the 'mass worker' (*operaio-massa*) of the Fordist system of production through the Keynesian welfare-state resulted in a new form of domination. Workers' struggles during the years that followed World War II forced capitalists to find new ways to control the lives of workers who had revolted in the factory; production was reorganized in such a way that society itself was reorganized along the lines of factory life. In his influential work 'Workers and Capital', Tronti called this society the 'social factory', where 'the whole society exists as a function of the factory and the factory extends its exclusive domination over the whole society' (Tronti, 1971). In the social factory, relations of production, which are always power relations, diffuse into every aspect of life, rendering the distinction between economy and politics obsolete.

During the 1960s, these influential arguments served to unite activist thinkers from different strands of the Italian extra-parliamentary left under the banner of workerism. They also gave rise to two major points of tension within the movement. The first point of tension surrounded the effectiveness of insurrectional tactics such as sabotage and desertion. Although certain

intellectuals held on to the revolutionary potential of immediate action on the part of workers and called for non-traditional organizational solutions, others argued that these kinds of activities could become effective only when they were organized along the lines of a party program (Wright, 2002, p. 87). The second point of tension emerged around the notion of the 'social factory'. In light of Tronti's suggestion that the factory had subsumed all of society, it became difficult to justify workerism's exclusive focus on workers' struggles in large factories. The need to expand the realm of struggle beyond the boundaries of the shop floor implied that the definition of working class had to be broadened as well. Because the idea of the 'social factory' implied that capital had become a diffused form of power, it became necessary to rethink what it meant to 'directly' oppose capital.

These theoretical tensions soon turned into lines of fissure within workerism. Some intellectuals, including Tronti himself, argued that, given contemporary circumstances, spontaneous and direct forms of action required an explicitly political form. In 1966, Tronti called for 'a new use for old institutions' and decided to join the Italian Communist party in the early 1970s (Wright, 2002, pp. 68–73, 86–87). Others, who followed Negri, sought to maintain the fight *within* production although recognizing the need to update workerism's theoretical contributions.

With this in mind, in *Proletarians and the State* (1975), a pamphlet hailed by many as the first programmatic statement of *Autonomia*, Negri critically engaged with Tronti's account of the mass worker. For Negri, the reorganization of capitalist production in response to the workers' struggles in the late 1960s led to a change in the class composition of the proletariat. In Italy the student revolt of 1968 triggered a wave of workers' protests, which culminated in the 'Hot Autumn' of 1969. The new contracts won in early 1970 provided considerable gains for the working class, tipping the balance of power in large factories in favor of workers (Abse, 1985). Negri stated that these developments led to a process of 'capitalist restructuring' that aimed to 'institute a greater force of capitalist command through maximum flexibility in the use of labor power' (Negri, 2005c, p. 142). Management of factories moved away from the large factory model to forms of flexible production. According to Negri, this technical dismantling of the Fordist system did not simply result in the devastation of the mass worker. It also gave way to a 'new class composition' (Negri, 2005c, p. 120) with unprecedented antagonistic potential. Negri called this new class figure the 'social worker' (*operaio sociale*). Unlike the mass worker, which it replaced, the social worker was not confined to a particular sector. Instead, it referred to a 'new unity of workers' interests' among industrial workers and marginalized groups such as racial minorities, the unemployed, gays and lesbians, and women (Negri, 2005c, p. 144).

The conceptual shift from the mass worker to the social worker enabled Negri to give Tronti's notion of the 'social factory' a positive valence. 'The presence of one single law of exploitation over the entire … capitalist society' (Negri, 2005c, p. 145), he declared, was not necessarily a negative development. Insofar as capitalist power relations diffused into all aspects of life, they opened up the possibility for the constitution of a new political subject that could unite seemingly disparate struggles. With his emphasis on the 'immense revolutionary potential' (Negri, 2005c, p. 144) of the social worker, Negri highlighted this political possibility.

Broadening the scope of the proletariat through the notion of the social worker, however, neither automatically resolved workerism's unanswered question of how to organize the revolutionary subject nor explained what it means to 'directly' oppose the power of capital in a 'social factory'. Cognizant of this fact, during the 1970s, Negri constantly turned to 'the problem of the relation between class composition and revolutionary worker organization' (Negri, 2005a, p. 11; 2005b, p. 74; 2005c, p. 120; 2005d, p. 222). The problem of organization, he argued, was crucial because the social worker could gain consciousness of its 'unity' (Negri, 2005c, p. 172) only through a process of organization 'from *within*' (Negri, 2005b, p. 82). According to Negri's account of self-organization, revolutionary consciousness was not an 'external and superimposed ideology' (Negri, 2005c, p. 167) but a form of awareness generated through antagonistic struggle whose conduct could not be delegated to the mediating mechanisms of a political party (Negri, 2005c, p. 160). Understood this way, the antagonistic production of the revolutionary subject entailed different and inventive forms of *direct* action, such as 'housing occupations' and 'organized lootings'. And yet, notwithstanding their significance in carrying the struggle beyond the boundaries of the shop floor, Negri was convinced that such practices of 'reappropriation of social wealth' (Negri, 2005c, p. 158) were insufficient for the task of bringing about the revolutionary subject. According to him, at this level of capitalist development, the productive potential of unmediated antagonism could not be fully realized without further radicalizing the antagonistic struggle and moving it onto 'the militant plane' (Negri, 2005c, p. 174).

Negri maintained that the effectiveness of practices of reappropriation by the masses could be ensured only when combined with the use of 'vanguard violence' to strike, 'in equal and opposing measure at … mechanisms of command' (Negri, 2005a, p. 48). As during its recent restructuring capital had evolved into a system of pure command embodied in the state, any attack on mechanisms of command implied an immediate confrontation with the state's organized forces. In the social factory, Negri underscored, the working class found 'its direct adversary, its essential enemy' in the state (Negri, 2005c, p. 140). Negri deemed the use of violence and 'armed struggle' against the state

(Negri, 2005b, pp. 87–88) necessary for three reasons. First, violence made it possible to 'defend the frontiers of proletarian independence' (Negri, 2005e, p. 276) and to open up space for practices of reappropriation. Second, the use of violence by 'a militant vanguard force' (Negri, 2005c, p. 164) could deepen the crisis and destabilize the regime by forcing the state to reveal its violent and arbitrary nature (Negri, 2005e, p. 236). Finally, and most importantly, as a part of the working class' existential battle with its direct adversary, proletarian violence was a positive power that could potentially play an essential role in the constitution of revolutionary consciousness by nourishing 'subjectivity with a mass content' (Negri, 2005e, p. 236) and generating a sense of 'proletarian community' (Negri, 2005e, p. 259).

As Steve Wright argues and Alex Callinicos concurs, at a time when militant organizations such as the Red Brigades were gaining power, Negri's stress on a further radicalization of antagonism and his emphasis on violence as 'a productive and an anti-institutional force' (Negri, 2005e, p. 282), which is necessary for the constitution of the revolutionary subject, were particularly troubling (Callinicos, 2001; Wright, 2002, p. 174). By 1978, it became evident that, despite his efforts, Negri was unable to distance his position from that of the radical militant organizations.[2] An escalation of violence, followed by the murder of Christian Democrat Aldo Moro by the Red Brigades in 1978, unleashed a wave of state repression that put many activists of Italian autonomist Marxism, including Negri, into prison. The criminalization of extra-parliamentary movements isolated the entire far left, leading to its eventual fall. Partly because of this significant weakening of leftist opposition, by the end of 1980, factory workers lost many of the rights that they had gained in the late 1960s (Callinicos, 2001).

In many ways, it is possible to suggest that this decisive political defeat played a major role in convincing Negri that resolving the organizational questions that troubled Italian autonomist Marxism required a theoretically more rigorous analysis than what he was able to provide in his writings during the 1970s.[3] I argue that Negri's writings after 1980, starting with his first book written in prison, *The Savage Anomaly* (1981), can be best understood as his attempt to provide a philosophical grounding for workerism's insights so as to resolve the question of how to constitute the revolutionary subject without giving in to the traditional organizational solutions that undermine direct and immediate forms of action.

Negri's Philosophical Turn: From Autonomist Marxism to Democratic Theory

Negri's philosophical turn finds its most sophisticated and directly political expression in *Insurgencies*. Published in 1992, this work is marked by Negri's

effort to deal with the problems surrounding organizational questions he faced as an activist thinker in the 1970s by developing a theory of democracy. Negri's democratic theory revisits and revises the main tenets of workerism through an eclectic analysis that combines Marx's notion of living labor and a reading of Spinoza's ontology with a conception of revolution defined as a moment of decision on the part of a political subject. The utilization of this particular understanding of revolution, however, inadvertently brings back all the organizational questions that Negri aims to resolve in the first place.

For Negri, throughout history, democracy has always been a short-lived experience that comes about during moments of insurgency, characterized by the *re*surgence of 'constituent power'. Thus, Negri begins *Insurgencies* stating that 'to speak of constituent power is to speak of democracy' (Negri, 1999, p. 1). The concept of constituent power, which is central to Negri's understanding of democracy, has a long history in constitutional thought. For this reason, Negri's criticism of theories of constitutionalism is integral to his democratic theory.

In Negri's reading, theories of constitutionalism rightly highlight the importance of a conceptual distinction between 'constituent' and 'constituted' power. Ever since the American Revolution, many different thinkers, including Georg Jellinek, Hans Kelsen, and Carl Schmitt, have accurately identified constituent power both as 'an all powerful and expansive principle producing the constitutional norms' *and* as 'the subject of this production' (Negri, 1999, p. 1). Yet, for Negri, these theories take a deeply anti-democratic turn once they limit the role of constituent power to the legitimating principle of the constituted order. The claim that constituent power realizes its potential in constituted power helps theories of constitutionalism to legitimize the hierarchical structure of the state as the actualization of the power of the people. By giving primacy to institutional structures, theories of constitutionalism establish a hierarchical ordering between constituent and constituted power.

In *Insurgencies*, Negri counters constitutional thought's conservative stance by reversing this conceptual ordering. To do so, he redefines constituent power as an ongoing, autonomous, productive force. To support this interpretive shift in perspective, Negri draws on a terminological distinction that many languages mark between 'two kinds of power – *potestas* and *potentia* in Latin, *pouvoir* and *puissance* in French, *potere* and *potenza* in Italian' (Negri, 1999, p. 32). In each case, the first term refers to a centralized authority, whereas the second term, as the word *potentia* suggests, carries within it implications of potentiality. Grafting this terminological distinction onto debates in constitutional thought, Negri proposes to rethink the relationship between constituent power, understood as an expansive productive force (*potentia*) and constituted power, which is 'shaped by and into existing State and political institutions'

(*potestas*) (translator's note, p. 337), to reveal that the apparent superiority of constituted power is in fact nothing but the work of the productive potential of constituent power. Negri argues that to fully grasp the primacy of constituent power, it is necessary to follow Spinoza's lead in moving away from an ontology of transcendence, which relies on notions of mediation and representation, toward an ontology of immanence that 'sets power in immediacy and singularity' (Negri, 1995, p. 3).

In *Insurgencies*, Negri utilizes his interpretation of Spinoza's ontology to establish constituent power's autonomy from, and primacy over, constituted power. By asserting the *conceptual* priority of constituent power over constituted power, Negri both reiterates workerism's idea of the primacy of labor over capital in *political* terms and gives that idea an ontological grounding. Moreover, bringing Marx's conception of 'living labor' into this political discussion, Negri reformulates constituent power as a *social* concept that refers to 'the pervasive force of the entire society' (Negri, 1999, p. 251). In this formulation, as 'an absolute process [which is] all-powerful and expansive' (p. 13), constituent power retains its existence even when it is blocked by the institutional mechanisms of the State and the market, which are, in turn, completely dependent upon constituent power for their existence. Once turned into a socio-political notion, constituent power, which is both a productive force *and* a subject, enables Negri to revise the core tenets of workerism in three ways.

First, this reformulation of constituent power provides an ontological grounding to the sociological observation that in the 'social factory' the distinction between the economic and political spheres becomes obsolete. Understood as an 'inseparable social and political activity' (p. 267), this conception of constituent power implies that Tronti's historically specific diagnosis is in fact an ontological condition that has been obscured by constitutional thought. Thus, unlike Tronti, who, at least historically, accepts the possibility of a separate political sphere, Negri argues that throughout history the so-called relative autonomy of the 'political' has been celebrated only to 'dominate the omnipotence of the living labor' (p. 267). With this move, Negri closes the door to a new use for old institutions once and for all.

Second, theorized as a socio-political concept, constituent power provides a solution to the question of what it means to 'directly' oppose capital once it has become a diffused form of power. Negri's appropriation of constituent power as living labor provides every productive act with immediate political significance. This move enables Negri to argue that even though constituent power can be blocked through the creation of the State, it continues to operate as a *social* force without which constituted power cannot exist. Inseparability of the social and the political also makes it possible for Negri to retain his emphasis on refusal, sabotage, and desertion while providing a theoretically

more rigorous explanation of his previous rejection of workerism's claim that the factory is *the* privileged realm of struggle.

Both in *Insurgencies*, and in his recent collaborative works with Hardt, that is, *Empire*, *Multitude*, and *Commonwealth*, Negri defines refusal and subtraction as revolutionary forms of resistance (Negri, 1999, p. 23; Hardt and Negri, 2000, pp. 204, 212–213, 2004, pp. 131–132, 332, 334, 347). In *Multitude*, Hardt and Negri claim that 'without the active participation of the subordinated' sovereignty cannot but crumble (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. 334). With this claim, they both appropriate workerism's emphasis on refusal and desertion as effective forms of resistance and broaden the scope of what counts as direct action. Still, Hardt and Negri note that such forms of direct action are only 'the beginning of a liberatory politics' (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p. 204). What is required is to 'construct … a new community' (p. 204). And, according to Negri, the solution to that problem lies in 'identifying a subjective strength adequate to this task' (Negri, 1999, p. 25).

Negri's theorization of constituent power as a revolutionary subject constitutes his third revision of workerism. By suggesting that construction of a new community is a task that can be accomplished only by an adequate subject, Negri follows the lead of constitutional thought. In his discussion of this revolutionary subject, Negri alters workerism by refusing to identify the working class as the embodiment of constituent power. In *Insurgencies*, revising his former conception of 'social worker', which was, despite its broadened scope, still a strictly class concept, and liberally borrowing from Spinoza, Negri argues that the adequate subject of *democratic* politics can only be the 'multitude'.

The multitude is carefully distinguished from the working class in Negri's recent writings. Whereas the working class is an exclusionary, and inherently antagonistic, concept defined in opposition to the owners of the means of production, Hardt and Negri underscore that the multitude is an 'open, inclusive concept' that brings together all the 'diverse figures of social production' (Hardt and Negri, 2004, pp. xiv–xv). Although the working-class struggle depends on a deepening of social antagonism, the struggle of the multitude rests on the constitution of a common 'composed of multiplicities' (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p. 184).

All of this is not to say that the multitude has already become the subject of democratic action. Negri underlines that although the multitude is a subject '*in* itself', it is not yet a subject '*for* itself' (Negri and Scelsi, 2008c, p. 102). Although the current composition of 'biopolitical labor' presents 'a political opening' (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p. 151), the transformation of the multitude into a *political* subject capable of sustaining 'an alternative democratic society on its own' (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. 357) is by no means a 'spontaneous' occurrence (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p. 175). A revolutionary change of this

kind can come about only when the self-organization of the multitude reaches 'a threshold and configure[s] a real event' (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p. 411). In *Multitude*, Hardt and Negri define that revolutionary event as a moment of rupture when 'a decision of action is made' (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. 357). And yet, this decision-focused understanding of revolution brings back all the organizational problems of Italian autonomist Marxism that Negri intended to resolve in the first place.

Above all, this account of revolution raises a familiar question: how can the multitude, an amalgam of a diverse set of singularities, attain the quality of a subject that can decide and act as some sort of unity? In *Multitude*, the authors try to resolve this question by suggesting that the 'economic production of the multitude … tends itself to *become* political decision-making' (Hardt and Negri, p. 339, italics in the original). Despite this emphasis on the economic production's political potential, Hardt and Negri's depiction of revolution as a 'moment' of decision still equates the multitude's 'self-organization' to the development of a decision-making capacity, thereby bringing back an issue that had been a major point of contention in both autonomist Marxism and workerism – namely the role of political organization in the 'development of a revolutionary consciousness' (Negri and Scelsi, 2008d, p. 49). In *Commonwealth*, Hardt and Negri acknowledge this point: '[t]he terrain of organization is where we must establish that the multitude can be a revolutionary figure' (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p. 178).

Negri's current response to the question of political organization contains important similarities to the organizational position he developed during the 1970s. In line with his former position, Negri concedes that the revolutionary task of our day is to generate a revolutionary consciousness (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p. 399). At the same time, he refuses to give up on the revolutionary potential of 'immediate and direct' forms of action. Accordingly, he still argues against the view that constitution of the revolutionary subject requires 'the external political mediation' of a vanguard party (Negri, 2005c, p. 159). In *Multitude*, Hardt and Negri find a concrete alternative to the political party in loosely connected organizational networks such as the 'White Overalls' (Hardt and Negri, 2004, pp. 264–267). Decentralized and innovative as they are, however, the activities of such networks hardly explain how the multitude can attain the quality of a subject with the capacity to decide, in Spinoza's words, 'as if by a single mind' (Spinoza, cited in Balibar, 1998, p. 74). As we have seen, during the 1970s, Negri tried to resolve the question of the development of revolutionary consciousness by calling for a further radicalization of the antagonistic struggle. In his most recent writings, Negri has supplemented this emphasis on antagonism with the notion of 'love', with the avowed intention of developing 'a theory of political organization adequate to the multitude' (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p. 178).

The Role of Love in Negri's Democratic Theory

In almost all his works written since the early 1990s, including *Insurgencies*, *Empire, Multitude*, and *Commonwealth*, Negri resorts to the concept of love at a particular point (toward the end of each work) and to address a specific problem (that is, the constitution of a revolutionary subject with the capacity to decide). Despite these crucial textual clues, which underscore the supplementary role of love in Negri's recent works, the elusive character of the concept of love makes it difficult to clarify what exactly love does for Negri's democratic theory. To make matters more complicated, love takes numerous forms in Negri's works. What is referred to as 'love of time' in *Insurgencies* (Negri, 1999, pp. 334–336), becomes 'intellectual love' in *Empire* (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p. 78). Love transforms into a conception of patriotism or '*amor patriae'* in *Multitude* (Hardt and Negri, 2004, pp. 50–51). In *Commonwealth*, Hardt and Negri evoke Diotima, Socrates' famous instructor in Plato's *Symposium*, to 'arrive at a political concept of love' (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p. xii) and draw on Deleuze and Guattari's story of 'wasp-orchid love' to illustrate 'a model of the production of subjectivity' (p. 188). Notwithstanding this dizzying array of forms, it is possible to identify certain defining features of Negri's conception of love.

Negri's understanding of love is shaped by his interpretation of Spinoza developed in *Savage Anomaly*. In this book, through an analysis of the *Theologico-Political Treatise* and the *Ethics*, Negri develops an account of what Hardt calls, 'the real, immediate, and associative movements of human power, driven by imagination, love, and desire' (Hardt, 2000, p. xv). In *Savage Anomaly*, Negri emphasizes that, for Spinoza, love is an affect rather than a relation. *Cupiditas* (desire), Negri writes, 'is not a relationship, it is not a possibility, it is not an implication: It is a power … its being is full, real and given' (Negri, 2000, p. 154). Love (*amor*) strengthens and affirms desire; it does not negate or overcome it. Hardt and Negri clarify this point in *Commonwealth*, where they suggest that, for Spinoza, unlike what contemporary notions of romantic love suggest, the goal of love is not to reach a higher unity by 'making the many into one' (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p. 183). Far from being a mode of mediation between two separate beings, according to this reading of Spinoza, love is a productive force with constitutive effects. Through love, Hardt and Negri write, 'we … expand our joy, forming new, more powerful bodies and minds' (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p. 181). This 'ontologically constitutive capacity' (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p. 181) of Negri's conception of love is crucial in grasping the significance of the concept's supplementary role in his writings.

In his recent discussions on revolution, Negri argues that although revolution requires the use of the multitude's decision-making capacity, the

emergent decision does not have to be a negative force. Revising his previous theorization of the revolutionary struggle as an existential battle between two opposing forces, and arguing against certain theorists of constitutionalism such as Carl Schmitt, Negri refuses to portray the constituent event as a moment of destruction. In *Multitude*, Hardt and Negri define the revolutionary decision as a 'deployment of force that defends the historical progression of emancipation and liberation; it is, in short, an act of love' (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. 351). This utilization of love as a productive force enables them to differentiate the constituent event from those moments of direct action fueled by fear and directed toward the destruction of an enemy. Hardt and Negri reinforce this point by calling for a conception of love 'as strong as death' (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. 352) to move beyond a Hobbesian notion of politics that utilizes 'fear of death' as the foundation of community (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. 356).[4] Only such a conception of love, they argue, can replace the struggle for survival as the driving force of politics and serve as the basis for a democratic society.

Thus, Negri's move away from the working class toward constituent power, along with his introduction of the multitude to take the place of the social worker, lead him to drop his former emphasis on antagonism as the driving force of politics and to replace it with the productive power of love. In Negri's account, the concept of love is productive in another sense as well. Love's 'power of the creation of the common' (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p. 193) functions together with its power to make the multitude a revolutionary subject. Hence, in *Multitude* the authors call for a revival of the tradition of *amor patriae*, 'a love that has nothing to do with nationalisms' (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. 50), to make 'decisions through the common desire of the multitude' possible (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. 51). Patriotism is a call to action for the multitude to gain awareness of its revolutionary potential and to transform itself into a political subject whose 'primary decision' is to create a new humanity (p. 356). Hardt and Negri elaborate on this point in *Commonwealth* by defining love both as 'an ontological motor, which produces the common and consolidates it in society' (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p. 195) and as a 'constituent political force', which is necessary for 'making the multitude' (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p. 196). As a constituent force, '[l]ove composes singularities, like themes in a musical score, not in unity but as a network of social relations' (p. 184). Conceptualized in this manner, love has the potential not only to produce a revolutionary consciousness, but also to enable the 'organization of singularities', both of which are required for the multitude to become a subject capable of 'political action and decision making' (p. 175).

The concept of love, then, enriches Negri's democratic theory in two significant ways; love serves as the driving force of democratic politics and the creative power of the multitude's revolutionary consciousness. And yet, as a supplement that takes on the role that was played by antagonistic struggle in

Negri's former writings, 'love' also points to a gap within the broader structure of his political thought. The supplementary role of love highlights that Negri's democratic theory still lacks an adequate answer to the question of how to ensure the political organization of the revolutionary subject without giving up on the radical emancipatory power of 'direct and immediate' forms of action. More importantly, as a last-minute solution to the resurgence of the unresolved organizational questions of autonomist Marxism, love becomes, in Derrida's words, a *dangerous* supplement to Negri's theory – dangerous because it risks undermining Negri's own theoretical and political commitments to multiplicity and diversity.

By assigning to love the role of transforming the multitude into a political subject, Negri, in Bradley J. Macdonald's words, moves away from his former 'genealogical characterization of … the constitution of the political subject, in which there is an emphasis on the importance of struggle and contestation' to an 'ontological characterization' of insurgency (Macdonald, 2003, p. 94). This ontological turn is not, in and of itself, a problematic theoretical move. What is troubling is that as love, instead of antagonistic struggle, becomes Negri's answer to the organizational questions involved in the formation of the revolutionary subject, his analyses of political struggles begin to lose their original complexity in significant ways. The attempt to resolve the problem of the multitude's organization into a revolutionary figure by having recourse to love's 'power of composition' (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p. 184) results in an account that ignores the existence of specific and discordant elements within the multitude. Because of this failure in grasping the concrete complexity of the multitude's composition, in his recent writings Negri constantly resorts to surprisingly simplistic accounts. Coming from a theorist who was formerly known for his meticulously detailed studies of working-class struggles, this shift is notable. Perhaps the most striking examples to illustrate this point can be found in Negri's various discussions of what he calls the 'new international cycle of struggles'.

According to Negri, this new political cycle, which became the first international cycle since the global struggles of 1968, began with the protests in Seattle in 1999, further developed in the demonstrations against the G8 meeting in Genoa in 2001 and ended with the antiwar movement of 2003 (Negri and Scelsi, 2008, p. 62). These instances are crucial for Negri because they demonstrate that within modernity there lives 'an explosive potential' that can come to recognize its own strength and challenge the repressive forces of global capitalism and state sovereignty (Negri and Scelsi, 2008b, p. 66). And yet, Negri's appreciation of the multiplicity of the multitude's ways of expressing its power falls flat in light of his analyses of each of these moments of 'direct' action. For in his discussions, Negri signs onto curiously similar accounts of these different events. Consider the following widely criticized account of the 1999 Seattle protests from *Multitude*.

Highlighting the 'carnival like' nature and the 'peaceful even festive' atmosphere of the protests in Seattle, Hardt and Negri point to the sheer diversity of the protestors. 'The real importance of Seattle', they write, 'was to provide a 'convergence center' for all grievances against the global system. Old oppositions between protest groups seemed 'suddenly to melt away' (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. 287). This 'sudden' disappearance of conflicts between groups such as 'trade unionists and environmentalists, church groups and anarchists, and so forth' constituted 'the magic of Seattle' (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. 217). For Hardt and Negri, Seattle signaled the beginning of something new as it brought together innumerable groups expressing their grievances against different manifestations of the global system. The protests demonstrated that 'these many grievances were not just … a cacophony of different voices but a chorus that spoke in common against the global system' (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. 288).

This description, in its utter lack of detail, is so generic that it could easily be applied to numerous other contemporary protests. A description of this kind not only undermines the singularity of each struggle, thereby ignoring the importance of differences among them, but also erases the multiplicity within each struggle even as it praises the diversity of its participants. The issue here is not simply empirical. When Hardt and Negri, in their op-ed piece published in *The New York Times* on 20 July 2001, describe the demonstrations that took place in Genoa with exactly the same phrases they utilized to paint a vivid picture of the protests in Seattle, they do not simply fail to analyze each event in its own right; they also sidestep crucial questions about the political work required to bring together people with diverse and at times conflicting interests to create such moments of action.

In the same op-ed piece, after claiming that one of the most remarkable characteristics of the demonstrations in Seattle and Genoa 'is their diversity: trade unionists together with ecologists together with priests and communists', Hardt and Negri assert that what the different protestors in Genoa actually want is a single simple demand, namely 'to eliminate inequalities between rich and poor and between powerful and powerless, and to expand the possibilities of self-determination' (Hardt and Negri, 2001). Even leaving aside the paternalistic tenor of this statement that presumes to speak in the name of the protestors to give an account of what *they* want, this description of the immediate unity of diverse interests is still deeply problematic. As Emanuele Saccarelli rightly suggests, even a cursory assessment of these demonstrations would clarify that 'what Hardt and Negri take as already solved by the virtue of their own assumptions *remains an open political question that can only be solved through actual struggle*' (Saccarelli, 2004, p. 584, italics in the original).

Through their depiction of the protests in Seattle and Genoa as acts of the multitude fueled by love and a desire for democracy, Hardt and Negri oversimplify the inner dynamics of these moments of 'direct' action. By

identifying love as the driving force of the protests, and delineating the 'magic' of Seattle as the sudden disappearance of conflict among opposing groups, the authors assume the immediate unity of the differences among the participants. Hardt and Negri's insistence on the immediacy of democratic action leads to accounts where all the coalition-building efforts among different groups – such as environmentalists and trade unionist – along with the *process* of political contestation and mediation that such efforts involve are completely erased. For Hardt and Negri (2004, p. 338), instances of insurgency become moments of pure 'cooperation' like the harmony 'of an orchestra that through constant communication determines its own beat' without any contestation among its players or 'the imposition of a conductor's central authority'. This reference to the creation of musical harmony by multiple and diverse participants is apt. And yet, in their desire to argue against the central role of a leader, Hardt and Negri seem to ignore the critical import of the analogy.

The music produced by an orchestra powerfully demonstrates that different sounds do not have to devolve into cacophony. For this reason, throughout history, many thinkers have turned to musical analogies to describe how different people can act in concert. Even the phrase 'acting in concert' is suggestive in this regard. The term 'concert' shares the same etymological origin as the musical term 'concerto'. Both words come from the Italian word *concerto*, whose original meaning elucidates what is lost in Negri's most recent accounts of political struggles.

First used in the early 1500s, the term *concerto* embodied two opposing and seemingly mutually exclusive meanings. On the one hand, *concerto* referred to, as it still does in Italian and English, 'agreement' or the state of being 'in concert'. On the other hand, the term had the meaning of 'competing' or 'contesting' from the Latin *concertare* (to contend) (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2008). The original use of the term *concerto*, as well as the musical form that took the same name around that time, brought together what appeared to be mutually exclusive meanings of agreement and contestation. In so doing, the term demonstrated that rather than referring to an inert state of being that points to the immediate unity of singularities, concord is a dynamic process, a contestation that rests on continuing efforts to negotiate differences.

In his recent accounts of contemporary moments of insurgency, by turning to love to account for the 'immediacy' and 'directness' of such instances, Negri reduces action in concert to mere agreement. Thus, in trying to resist the temptation to resort to mediating mechanisms and/or political organizations for the purposes of creating a revolutionary subject, Negri reduces democratic action to an act of pure cooperation. And more than anything else, it is this aspect of Negri's recent work that undermines his main contribution to democratic theory, namely his former emphasis on the difficult work of politics, that is, struggle and contestation, required for the constitution of a

common among a diverse of group of people who act together. What is lost in Negri's account is the recognition of the laborious and contentious efforts of building unlikely coalitions and creating networks among different groups. And the effacement of such mediating practices is a crucial loss, for only by focusing on those practices can we adequately understand, and hopefully advance, contemporary forms of democratic action.

Conclusion

For those who are familiar with his frequent recourse to notions of antagonistic struggle, direct confrontation, and even violence during the 1970s, it is a puzzling fact that Negri has recently come to be recognized as the 'most unabashed' champion of love (Marasco, 2010, p. 644). In this article, I analyzed the reasons behind this perplexing shift in Negri's political terminology to develop a deeper understanding of his democratic theory. Accordingly, rather than extrapolating whether it is possible to re-invent a political conception of love from Negri's use of the term, I sought to find an answer to the question of what Negri's attempt to supplement his latest accounts with the concept of love tells us about his theory of democracy.

As we have seen, introduced as a supplement, which takes the place of antagonism, love puts into question the success of Negri's attempt to overcome the organizational problems of autonomist Marxism through his democratic theory. Both Negri's emphasis on the radicalization of antagonistic struggle in the 1970s and his recent recourse to love underscore one point: insofar as emancipatory politics is theorized in terms of 'direct and immediate' forms of action, the political organization of the revolutionary subject presents itself as an insurmountable problem. Negri's understanding of love as a productive force helps him evade this thorny issue by erasing the process of political contestation and mediation from his accounts. And this aspect of Negri's turn to love is of crucial significance for democratic theorists of all stripes. For, rather than pointing to the dangers of the concept of love *per se*, the supplementary role of love in Negri's work serves a powerful warning sign that brings to light the problems of a particular understanding of democracy, which, in its insistence on immediacy and directness, loses sight of the foundational significance of multiplicity and diversity in democratic action.

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Notes

1 As Steve Wright writes, '[m]aking sense of *autonomia* as a whole is no simple matter'. *Autonomia* was composed of numerous collectives which were '[i]deologically heterogeneous, territorially dispersed, organizationally fluid, politically marginalized' (Wright, 2002, p. 152).

2 By making this point, I do not want to imply, in any way, that Negri supported, or even condoned, the activities of these radical militant organizations. As Timothy Murphy convincingly argues, a careful reading of Negri's writings from this period demonstrate that while he highlighted the need for the working class resistance to make use of 'its own organic forms of illegal mass violence', Negri 'consistently and adamantly' 'criticized the elitist forms of violence' such as the ones utilized by the Red Brigades (Murphy, 2005, p. xv).

3 In 1986, reflecting on the effects of the escalation of violence on 'the defeat of the 1970s' (Negri, 2005g, p. 163), Negri made a case for exploring alternative methods of militancy to invent a new life from which 'terrorism and state violence are banished' (Negri, 2005g, pp. 167–168). Such an exploration required a degree of theoretical rigor which, as Negri accepts, was missing in his pamphlets from the 1970s, since at the time '[i]t was not possible, on the terrain of political practice, to do a theoretical analysis as complete as the analysis made in French post-structuralism' (Negri, 2005f, p. xviii).

4 The move away from this particular notion of politics is another aspect of the shift that took place in Negri's political thought after the 1970s. In contrast to his former position, which called for the use of violence against the state, during the 1980s, emphasizing the nuclear state's enormous destructive potential, Negri wrote that to eliminate fear from politics, it is necessary 'to transform the general conditions of collective existence and to destroy the destructive content which … the nuclear state carries within itself … Peace is thus the basic watchword of our times' (Negri, 2005h, p. 198).

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