

Barbarians

the disordered insurgency

Crisso and Odoteo

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Translator's Preface

Barbarians by Chrissus and Odotheus is a text of some importance for anarchists and anyone else who sincerely desires the destruction of this social world of exploitation and domination. It presents a devastating critique of a book that has become one of the most significant theoretical influences on a major part of the so-called anti-globalization movement, *Empire* by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. When one reads these two texts together, two opposing ways of using language are exposed. Hardt and Negri use a language that is obviously meant to conceal at least as much as it reveals, and that should immediately tip one off to the recuperative nature of their text. Chrissus and Odotheus, on the contrary, use direct language as sharp as a barbarian's sword to cut through the murky web of Hardt's and Negri's postmodern doublespeak to reveal the essentially anti-revolutionary core of their perspective.

For example, Hardt and Negri claim to be post-dialectical and post-Marxist. It merely takes a slight rip of the veil to expose a historical determinism and a rigid dialectic of class struggle that reflects one of the crudest versions of Marxism. Negri and Hardt, in fact, justify the horrors of the present not merely as historically necessary for the development of communism, but as actual reflections of the *power* of the "multitude", their historical subject.

It is particularly useful that, as Italians, Chrissus and Odotheus are familiar with the various movements that have been influenced by Negri, as well as with recent works of his that are not available in English. This allows them to place *Empire* in a context that further exposes its recuperative significance.

Chrissus and Odotheus clearly expose the love Hardt and Negri actually have for the Empire and its methods of homogenizing the world. This love, in fact, reaches the point of support for the European Union. Negri recently co-edited a collection of texts by leftists in praise of the political unification of Europe (choosing however to ignore the fact that this unification is a reality mainly in terms of the needs of the ruling class: a free flow of capital, the unification of policing networks and so on).

More frightening is Negri's and Hardt's unquestioning support of the totality of technological development — proclaimed to be expressions of the desires of "the multitude". They go so far as to call for the "recognition [...] that there are no boundaries between [...] the human and the machine" (*Empire*, p. 215) and, thus, the acceptance of ourselves as cyborgs (see for example, *Empire*, p.92). For them the project of technologizing life — i.e., biotechnology integrated with cybernetics — is desirable and necessary, simply because it exists.

Chrissus and Odotheus also clearly expose the nature of the "subjectivity" Hardt and Negri speak of repeatedly. This term, as the professors use it, has nothing whatsoever to do with individual choice, will, desire or self-activity. Instead it refers to the production of relationships which *subject* us to the needs of the social institutions. This is why "the production of subjectivity" must be grounded "in the functioning of major institutions, such as the prison, the family, the factory, and the school" (*Empire*, p.195).

In fact, Hardt and Negri absolutely reject the individual, seeing the very concept of individuality as contrary to their project. On page 388, they tell us that "No ontology, except a transcendent one, can relegate humanity to individuality", and two pages later they say, "...there is corruption as individual choice that is opposed to and violates the fundamental community and solidarity defined by biopolitical production". Thus, singularity is not a trait of individuals, but of "groups

and sets of humanity”¹ biopolitically singularized by “the multitude” (p. 395). And “the multitude” to which they refer repeatedly is finally defined on page 316 of their book as “the universality of free and productive practices”. To put it more clearly: the forces of social production. The Marxist-leninist roots of their perspective are clearly exposed. For them the subject of liberation is precisely the productive apparatus for which we are mere cogs.

With a notion of liberation that, in fact, means the absolute subjection of individuals to the productive apparatus, Hardt and Negri are correct to see their path as going “through Empire”, because their project *is* that of Empire. But once the barbaric sword of Chrissus and Odotheus cut through the professors’ convoluted language, it becomes clear that those of us who desire our own liberation as individuals, who want the freedom to create our lives on our times have a project “*absolutely other*”: the total destruction of the Empire here and now.

The time of the barbarians is at hand.

¹This parallels the perspectives of many neo-racists who base their ideology on “culture” and “ethnicity” rather than on skin color and “blood”.

Introduction

Someone has noted that one of Marx's greatest tricks was that of having invented Marxism as a *lingua franca*². Since ancient times it has been known that the art of persuasion consists of being able to use speaking or writing to cause a precise psychological effect in the one who listens or reads that goes well beyond the contents developed in the reasoning. The Greeks said that persuading meant to "lead minds to oneself". Many Marxian expressions — and, one could say, the "insidious clamor" of his prose — have enchanted, terrorized, produced thousands of competing readings. Expressions such as "Historically determined social conditions, extraction of surplus value, objectively counter-revolutionary elements", certain journalistic techniques and the famous genitive inversions ("philosophy of misery, misery of philosophy"): this jargon has supplied many aspiring bureaucrats and true dictators with a reservoir of pre-made phrases with which to justify their power. And it has supplied just as many social democrats with a smoke-screen with which to please anyone who is satisfied that capitulation in practice is connected to radicality in style. The important thing was and is to assume the attitude of one who knows what he/she is talking about with scientific precision.

Antonio Negri's texts play the same role today, if you will. In fact, there are two "theoretical centrals" of the thing which journalistic newspeak describes as the *anti-globalization* movement: the *Le monde diplomatique* collective and our Paduan professor to be precise. The monthly publication named after the collective, the organization of conferences and seminars, the publication of books and the creation of the so-called movement for the Tobin tax³ (*Attac*) — various Italian sections of which now exist — owe their existence to the former. From the latter, who was one of the original founders of Workers' Power and then Workers' Autonomy, came much of the Italian workerist ideology and now the theory for which the White Overalls (*Tute bianche*), the Disobedient (*Disobbedienti*) and so many other global citizens are little soldiers. Reading any flyer from any *social forum*, one will indubitably find the following expressions: civil society, multitude, movement of movements, citizenship income, dictatorship of the market, exodus, disobedience (civil or civic), globalization from the bottom and so on. Likewise, having a more or less extensive history, these concepts, assembled in various ways, constitute the present-day Cliff Notes for the alternative recuperator and ideal reformist. One of the managers of this "ontological factory", one of the technicians of this "linguistic machine" is, once again, Toni Negri.

We will not fall into the banal error of believing that certain theories are unilaterally influencing the movement. The theories spread insofar as they serve specific interests and respond to specific needs. *Empire* by Negri and Hardt is an exemplary book in this sense. Together with the elaborations of their "diplomatic" French cousins, its pages offer the most intelligent version of the left wing of capital. The groups that refer to it are the globalized version of the old social democracy and the gaseous variants of Stalinist bureaucracy that have replaced the rigid hierarchy of functionaries with the model of the network (or the rhizome) in which the leader's power seems more fluid. In short, the communist party of the third millennium, the pacification of the present, the counter-revolution of the future. Built on the decline of the workers' movement and its forms of representation, this new method of doing politics no longer has privileged fields of intervention (like the factory or the neighborhood) and offers a more immediate terrain than

² A *lingua franca* is a hybrid language of the sort that often develops in places of international commerce — such as port cities — to allow communication.

³ An international tax on currency speculation. — translator

that of the old party secretariats to the ambitions of aspiring managers: the relationship with the mass media. This is why the parties and unions of Left pose as allies of this new “movement” and often go in tow to its initiatives, knowing well that beyond the piercings of whatever little leader and certain slogans from rhetorical guerrillas, the political disobedient represent the basis (electoral, as well) of the democratic power to come. It maintains the Stalinist role intact, but its future is inscribed above all in its capacity to set itself up as a force of mediation between subversive tensions and the necessities of the social order, leading the movement into the institutional riverbed and carrying out a function of denunciation of the elements that escape its control.⁴

On the other hand, after having progressively absorbed the social, the State managed to suffocate all creativity under the institutional burden; when forced to expel it again, it called this refuse *civil society*, decorating it with all the ideologies of the middle class: humanitarianism, voluntary service, environmentalism, pacifism, anti-racism, democracy. In the overflowing passivity, consensus needs continuous injections of politics. The disobedient politicians with their citizens serve this purpose. Indeed, for the orphans of the working class, it is the abstract figure of the citizen that now has all virtue. Ably playing on the meanings of the word (the citizen is at the same time the subject of the State, the bourgeois, the *citoyen* of the French revolution, the subject of the *polis*, the supporter of direct democracy), these democrats address themselves to all classes. The citizens of civil society oppose themselves to the passivity of consumers as much as to the open revolt of the exploited against the constituted order. They are the good conscience of the State (or public, as they prefer to say) institutions, those who will always invite the police to “isolate the violent” in any Genoa out of civic duty. With the complicity of the democratic mobilizations of the “disobedient”, the State can thus give greater force and credibility to its ultimatum: one either dialogues with the institutions or one is a “terrorist” to hunt down (the various agreements signed since September 11 are interpreted in this way). The “movement of movements” is a *constituent* power, i.e., a social surplus in relationship to *constituted* power, an institutionalizing political force that encounters and intervenes in established politics — in Negri’s conception, the militant version of Spinoza’s concept of *potency*.⁵ Its strategy is the progressive conquest of institutional spaces, of an increasingly enlarged political and union consensus, of a legitimacy obtained by offering its capacity for mediation and its moral guarantee to power.

In the Negrian account, the true subject of history is a strange beast of a thousand metamorphoses (first mass-worker, then social laborer, now *multitude*) and a thousand tricks. In fact, it is this being that has power even when everything would seem to bear witness to the contrary. All that domination imposes is really what this being has desired and won. The technological apparatus embodies its collective knowledge (not its alienation). Political power favors its thrusts from the bottom (not its recuperation). The legal Right formalizes its power relationship with the institutions (not its repressive integration). In this edifying historical vision, everything happens according to the schemes of a most orthodox Marxism. The development of the productive forces — authentic maker of progress — continually comes into contradiction with social relationships, modifying the order of society in the direction of emancipation. The arrangement is the same as classical German social democracy, to which the privilege of having broken a revolutionary assault in blood and then thrown the proletariat into the hands of Nazism is owed. And the illusion

⁴ *Ya Basta!*, the White Overalls and the Disobedient — all Negrian “radicals” — have carried out this function in a number of demonstrations in Italy, denouncing those who attacked banks, multi-national businesses, etc. to the cops. — translator

⁵ The Italian word, *potenza*, can be translated as power, potency, might, force, sway or *empire*. — translator

of opposing the power of political institutions to that of the multinationals is a social democratic illusion, one that Negri shares with the leftist statist of *Le Monde Diplomatique*. If both denounce “savage capitalism”, “fiscal paradises”, the “dictatorship of the market” so often, it is because they want a new political order, a new government of globalization, another New Deal. It is in this sense that one reads the proposal for a *universal income for citizenship*. Thus, the less “dialectical” Negrians have no scruples in openly presenting this demand as a recasting of capitalism.

Despite two decades of heavy social conflict, capitalism succeeded in turning the revolutionary threat around through a process that reached its completion at the end of the 1970’s with the dismantling of the productive centers and their spread over the territory and with the complete subjection of science to power. This conquest of every social space corresponds to the entry of capital into the human body, as the final frontier that remains empty, through the very life processes of the species itself. Necrotechnologies are the latest examples of its longing for an entirely artificial world. But for Negri, this is the expression of the creativity of the multitude. For him, the total subordination of science to capital, the investment in services, knowledge and communications (the birth of “human resources” according to managerial language) expresses the “*becoming-woman*” of labor, i.e., the productive force of bodies and of sensibility. In the epoch of “immaterial labor”, the means of production that multitude must secure for itself as common property are the intellects. In such a sense, technology increasingly democratizes society, since the knowledge that capital turns to its account surpasses every waged sphere, in fact coinciding with the very existence of the human being. This is what the demand for a minimum guaranteed wage means: if capital makes us produce at every moment, then it should pay us even if we are not employed as wage workers and we will make money for it by consuming.

The conclusions of Negri and his associates are the complete overturning of the ideas of those who, already back in the 1970’s, maintained that the revolution passes through the body, that the proletarian condition is increasingly universal and that daily life is the authentic place of social war. The aim of recuperators is always the same. In the ‘70’s, in order to gain their place in the sun, they spoke of sabotage and class war; today they propose the constitution of civic lists, accords with the parties, entry into the institutions. Their jargon and their linguistic acrobatics show that the Marxist dialectic is capable of every gallantry. Passing from Che to Massimo Cacciari,⁶ from the peasants of Chiapas to the small Venetian endeavors, it now justifies snitching just as it justified theoretical dissociation yesterday. On the other hand, as they themselves recognize, it is not the ideas or the methods that are important, but rather “the peremptory words of command.”

For “disobedient” theorists, the political institutions are hostage of a multinational capital, mere registration chambers of global economic processes. In reality, the development of technological power is the material basis for the thing defined as *globalization*; and from the nuclear to the cybernetic, from the preparation of new materials to genetic engineering, from electronics to telecommunication, this development is linked to the fusion of the industrial and scientific apparatus with the military apparatus. Without the aerospace sector, without the high-speed railroad, without the connections through fiber-optic cables, without ports and airports, how could a global market exist? We add the fundamental role of military operations, the continuous exchange of data between banking, insurance, medical and police systems, the State management of environmental pollution, the increasing spread of the net of surveillance, and it becomes clear

⁶A leftist politician, formerly in the Communist Party of Italy, now part of the Left Democratic party, who speaks with every one from White Overalls to fascists.

that it is a mystification to speak of the decline of the State. What is changing is merely *one specific* State form.

Unlike other social democrats, for Negri the defense of the “social” national State is no longer possible, inasmuch as it is a political formation that is already surpassed. But this opens an even more ambitious prospect: European democracy. In fact, from one side, power is posed the problem of how to pacify social tensions caused by the crisis in representative politics. From the other side, the “disobedient” seek new paths for making the institutions democratic, rendering the movement more institutional. Here is the possible encounter: “Who then has an interest in the politically united Europe? Who is the *European subject*? They are those populations and social classes that want to build an absolute democracy on the plane of Empire. What they propose is *counter-Empire*. [...] Thus the new European subject does not refuse globalization, but rather builds the political Europe as a place from which to speak *against* globalization *in* globalization qualifying itself (starting from the European space) as *counter-power* with respect to the *capitalistic* hegemony of the Empire.” (from *Political Europe Reasons for a necessity*, edited by H. Friese, A. Negri, P. Wagner, 2002).

We have come to the end. Under a dense smokescreen of slogans and catch phrases, under a jargon that both flirts and terrorizes, here is a program that is simple for capital and magnificent for the multitude. We’ll try to summarize it. Thanks to a guaranteed wage, the poor could be flexible in the production of wealth and the reproduction of life and thus relaunch the economy. Thanks to the common ownership of the new means of production (intellect), the “immaterial proletariat” could “begin a long Zapatista march of the intellectual labor force through Europe”. Thanks to new universal citizenship rights, power can pass through the crisis of the nation-State and socially include the exploited. The masters don’t know it, but finally left free to develop themselves, the new means of production will actually realize that which they already potentially contain: communism. It is only necessary to come to terms with obtuse capitalists, reactionaries, neoliberals (in short with “bad” globalization). The entire thing seems to be purposefully conceived to confirm what Walter Benjamin ascertained more than seventy years ago, a few weeks after the non-aggression pact between Stalin and Hitler: “There is nothing that has corrupted German laborers as much as the belief in swimming with the current. For them technological development was the benefit of the current with which they decided to swim.”

But the agitated waters of the current hide dangerous traps, as Negri himself warns: “now we find ourselves in an imperial constitution in which monarchy and aristocracy struggle between them, but the plebeian assemblies are absent. This creates a situation of imbalance, since the imperial form can only exist in a pacified manner when these three elements are counter-balanced among themselves.” (from *MicroMega*, May 2001). In short, dear Senators, Rome is in danger. Without the “dialectic” between social movements and institutions, governments are “illegitimate”, thus *unsafe*. As first Titus Livy and later Machiavelli demonstrated wonderfully, the institution of the plebeian tribunal served to counterbalance the continual Roman imperial expansion with the illusion of popular participation in politics. But the famous fable of Menenius Agrippa — who addressed the mutinous plebeians telling them that only thanks to them Rome lived, as a body lives only thanks to its limbs — effectively risks coming to an end. The Empire seems to have less and less need for the poor it produces, left to rot by the millions in the reserves of the mercantile paradise. On the other hand, the plebeians could become dangerous as a horde of *barbarians* — and descend from the hills to the city, but *with the worst intentions*. For the restless and unreasonable exploited, the mediation of the managers might be as hateful as

the powers in office and as ineffective as a lesson in public spirit made to one who already has his feet on the table. Police, even in white overalls, might not be enough.

Waiting for the barbarians

What are we waiting for, assembled in the forum?

Today the barbarians are coming.

Why is the Senate so idle?

Why do the Senators pass no laws?

Because today the barbarians are coming.

What laws could the Senators pass?

When the barbarians come, they will make them.

Why did the emperor rise so early,

to sit at the main gate of the city, solemn,

on his throne wearing the crown on his head?

Because today the barbarians are coming,

and the emperor waits to receive their chief.

Indeed, he has prepared a scroll to give to him

on which many names and titles are inscribed for him.

Why have our two consuls and the praetors appeared

this morning in their embroidered, crimson togas;

why are they wearing bracelets studded with amethysts,

and rings with brilliant, glistening emeralds;

and why are they carrying their costly canes today,

wonderfully carved with silver and gold?

Because today the barbarians are coming,

and such things dazzle barbarians.

Why don't the eminent orators turn up as usual

to have their say?

Because today the barbarians are coming,

and barbarians disdain eloquence and long speeches.

Why this sudden uneasiness and confusion?

(How serious the faces have become.)

Why are the streets and squares emptying so quickly,

As everyone turns homeward, deep in thought?

Because it is night, and the barbarians have not arrived.

And some people have come from the borders
saying that there are no longer any barbarians.

And now what will become of us, without any barbarians?

After all, those people were a solution.

— Constantine Kavafis

“The dream of the formation of a world empire is not only found in ancient history: it is the logical outcome of all the activities of power, and it is not limited to any specific period. Though it has gone through many variations, the vision of global domination connects with the rise of new social conditions and has never disappeared from the political horizon...”

— Rudolf Rocker

“The servitude to which the subjects of Rome were subjugated was not slow to extend itself to the Romans themselves [...]. There was no way to avoid the servitude, and those who were called citizens were ready to get on their knees even before they had a master. [...] In Rome, it was not before the emperor as a man, but before the Empire that everyone submitted; and the strength of the Empire consisted in the mechanism of a very centralized, perfectly organized administration, in a large, mostly disciplined permanent army, in a system of control that extended everywhere. In other words, the State, not the sovereign, was the source of power.”

— Simone Weil

“A single law, the law imposed by Rome, reigned over the Empire. This Empire was not in any way a society of citizens, but only a herd of subjects. Up to now, the lawmaker and the authoritarian admire the unity of this empire, the unitary spirit of its laws, the beauty — in their opinion — and the harmony of this organization.”

— Peter Kropotkin

(Page numbers in parentheses following quotes refer to Empire by Hardt and Negri)

Empire

A nightmare torments the servants of the Empire — the nightmare of its collapse. All the courtiers scattered around the world, political celebrities and generals, administrative delegates and advertisers, journalists and intellectuals, are asking themselves how to avert this terrible threat.

The Empire is present everywhere, but doesn't govern anywhere. Its military invincibility shines in the sun dazzling its obsequious admirers. But its foundations are rotten. The social order within its borders is constantly called into question. In 1989, the fall of the Berlin Wall was presented as the symbolic act that would ratify the end of the “cold war” between the two opposed super-powers, the dawn of a new era of peace and stability. The unification of the planet

under a single model of life, the private capitalist model, was supposed to guarantee the definitive banishing of all conflict. In a certain sense, one could say that the very opposite has happened. In modern history, there have never been so many violent conflicts bathing the world in blood as after 1989. If up to then, the various armies were in a state of permanent readiness, now they are in continuous mobilization. The military forces no longer spend their time training, but rather fighting on the field. War has gone from cold to hot, in some places boiling, and it is generalizing itself. Only now the slaughter dictated by the State is no longer called war, but rather police actions. Having extended itself everywhere, the Empire no longer has external enemies from which to defend itself, only internal enemies to control and repress. As the servants of the Empire love to remind us, there is no longer an outside; there is only an inside. But this inside is literally imploding.

In order to make space for itself, the Empire has swept away the old model of the nation-State. But how does one convince entire populations that were held together and rendered tame up to now by the glue of popular identity that — for example — Serbs and Kosovars, or Israelis and Palestinians, no longer exist, that instead there are only subjects made similar through obedience to a single social system? Thus, in the moment of its triumph, the Empire stirs up and renews fierce civil wars.

In order to consolidate itself, the Empire has fused political and economic power, scientific and military power in a single apparatus. But how can it do without the specific political activity indispensable to maintaining equilibrium — the mediation that is above all moderation — without rushing at full speed into the unbridled search for maximum profit? Thus in the moment of its triumph, the empire rouses strong social tensions.

In order to take root the Empire has imposed the religion of money everywhere. But how could anyone think that the transcendence of the rites and traditions of thousands of years, which have saturated every sphere of social life and given meaning to the existence of millions of devotees, could abandon its place to the immanence of the commodity without rousing rebellions? The sacred book of Christianity itself, the Bible, records the fury of Christ before the presence of merchants in the temple and their violent removal: “It is written: My house will be called a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves” (Matthew 21:13). Thus, in the moment of its triumph, the Empire rouses religious fundamentalism.

We find ourselves facing a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, the reign of capital has succeeded in conquering an absolute domination in uniting East and West under a single banner, in annulling every vision of human existence that is not based on the laws of the economy. But on the other hand, with all the power acquired, with its Praetorians spread to every corner to protect profits, capitalism is demonstrating that it is not in a position to control anything. The Empire is feared, but it is not loved. It is endured, not chosen. It possesses force, not consent. If it wants to remove the threat of collapse as far as possible, it has only one path to travel: that of making people accept it not through imposition, but through participation, that of being recognized as right, necessary, inevitable.

But how can the Empire — synonymous with a social order based on tyranny and arrogance, cause of cruelty and suffering — manage to make itself loved by its subjects? It imposes control with weapons. It obtains consent with blandishments. If the Empire wants to instill its reasons into its subjects with the aim of making them accept and appreciate these reasons, it must play tricks, having recourse to the aid of emissaries. Those who shine only in the art of adulation are certainly not among the most cunning since they would quickly be unmasked for what they are —

servants among servants. No, such a complex and delicate task could only be brought to term by those who know how to display the limits of imperial order. Biting observations with regard to the Empire always fascinate the quarrelsome subjects who are drawn into a fictitious complicity by these emissaries and therefore don't realize that the critique of imperfection is functional to the achievement of perfection, transforming the Empire from something we need to get rid of into something we need to correct but that we cannot do without.

As evidence of the urgency with which the labors of restructuring and enlargement of the imperial edifice must be carried out, its emissaries are making themselves increasingly numerous. Two of them, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, have recently published a book that is gaining a reasonable success. Flaunting their academic jargon in order to subdue the ignorance of the subjects, the usual stale and blunted intimidating weapon of intellectual terrorism in search of approval, these two professors put the finger on the festering spots of the Empire, seeking at the same time to explain to their reader why they really cannot do without accepting it. The title of this masterpiece of Empire-loving dissent is a homage to its beloved parent: Empire.

Unwillingly

How is a condition of dispossession, of alienation, of exploitation made acceptable without rousing some feeling of rage and rebellion? The answer is only apparently impossible. It is sufficient to instill the belief that what they are living through, governed by a tragic as well as fatal necessity, is unavoidable in anyone who suffers this condition. The instilling of dominant values, in fact, forms the basis of social reproduction. Etienne De La Boetie, in his immortal Discourse on Voluntary Servitude, makes note of how the servile acceptance of the power of the few by the many can be traced back to coutume, the meaning of which fluctuates between that of historical-traditional custom and that of psychological habit: it points to a process of adaptation to the form of society into which the human being finds her/himself inserted, a process that ends up determining a great portion of her/his behavior.

The main reason why people accept their submission to power is because they are born and raised as servants. "It is still true" — La Boetie argues — "that at first man serves unwillingly, constrained by a greater power; but those that come later, having never seen freedom, and not even knowing what it is, serve without any regrets and willingly do what their ancestors did under duress. And so people who are born with the yoke on their neck, nurtured and raised in servitude, without raising their eyes even a little before themselves, are satisfied to live as they were born, without managing to imagine good and right things different from those that are to be found in front of them, they take the conditions in which they are born as natural." This means that we can only become aware of the lack of freedom if we have had a way of experiencing or knowing it. The experience of prison is only a tragedy if we are able to compare it with an experience of freedom, however supervised and conditioned it may be, from which we were snatched at the moment of our capture. Our desire for escape, for revolt, springs from the profound difference that exists between these two lived experiences. But if we are born and grew up in prison, if the walls of a prison formed our entire horizon, filled all our dreams, marked all our actions, how could we desire a freedom we had never known? Since detention had been our sole and customary condition of life, perhaps we would consider it natural and, finally accepting it willingly. Or even thinking, as Orwell warned, that slavery is freedom.

Like other forms of domination, the Empire bases its continuity on the supposed naturalness of the power that it wields. The critique of Empire as such, in its totality and not in its individual aspects, is made to appear as a form of madness or aberration. But this objectification of domination requires further support, more solid and convincing, beyond that of habit. As the same La Boetie recalls: "There is no heir so thoughtless and indifferent that at some time he doesn't take a look at the family register to see if he enjoys all the rights of succession or if instead there has not been some machination against him or his predecessors." Habit by itself is not enough. Someone might end up getting bored with it and abandon this individual psychological mechanism. Therefore, it is necessary to fix the "family registers" with a collective historical mechanism, in such a manner that their reading decrees a univocal and definitive result for everyone. But how?

It is easy to comprehend that a total censure of our rights, the exclusion of any of us from the registers to the exclusive profit of the one who holds power would appear at least suspicious and might provoke a furious reaction: and us, who are we? If nothing is given to us, we will take it all! Rather, it is more intelligent to include us in the legacy, to integrate us attributing the responsibility for what happens to us, to deceive us with the request of participation in the events of the family, in such a way as to make us perceive the reality that surrounds us not as something that dominates us, but as a product that we resolutely desire and to which we have directly contributed with our activity and that consequently belongs to us. If "when the State prepares to kill it calls itself the fatherland," as Durrenmatt said, it is because it wants citizens to fight, believing that they are doing it for themselves, without noticing that they die "for the bank vaults" (Anatole France, quoted on p. 93). In the same way, the reason that the bosses call it a company when they prepare to make profit is because they want their "subordinates" to work, thinking that they do it for themselves, without noticing that they are exploited exclusively for the bosses' benefit. Obedience becomes absolute, sheltered from doubt, when it is no longer seen as coercion or hereditary weakness, but as the expression of a social will.

In this regard, the two emissaries seem exceedingly bashful in affirming that "Flirting with Hegel, one could say that the construction of Empire is good in itself but not for itself" (p. 42). In reality, their relationship with the father of dialectics is not mere coquetry; it is an authentic love story. Their analysis of the Empire is carried out in conformity with the Hegelian dialectic. This is no accident. Hegel was convinced that his philosophy would represent the spirit of the time in which it had emerged. Therefore, thanks to its superiority over philosophies of the past, he felt compelled to claim as its task the demonstration that the society in which it arose (i.e., the historical reality of the Prussian State) constituted the peak of all previous civilizations. On careful consideration, it is the same ambition that moves the two emissaries with regard to the Empire.

One of Hegel's peculiarities, that for which the shrewdest functionaries of domination should remember him with gratitude, consists in his understanding that unity — to which every form of power aspires — would appear invincible if, rather than basing itself on the exclusion of the multiplicity — i.e., the opposition — it found its realization in the assimilation of the latter. In other words, for Hegel, concrete unity could be achieved by reconciling differences, not by exterminating them. It is only through the differences between the multiplicity of things and through their conflicts that one can achieve concrete, lasting unity. Thus, for Hegel, unity really springs forth from the continuous struggle between the multiplicity of things that compose it. His lie is manifest: if this unity doesn't suppress the multiple, it doesn't realize it either, since it is limited to domesticating it in order to place it in the service of the initial thesis. This is the meaning of the

dialectic to which Hegel entrusts the task of revealing the most intimate processes of reality. In the Hegelian dialectical process, the affirmation of a concept forms the thesis; its negation forms the antithesis. From the conflict between the thesis and the antithesis, the synthesis will be born, which coagulates thesis and antithesis in a higher unity in which both are conceived as different moments. But the synthesis represents in a particular way a return to the thesis, in fact being a matter of a return enriched by all the things that have been contributed by the antithesis. It seems clear that the pure existence of two contraries is not enough to generate a dialectical relationship. To achieve such an end, something more is needed: mediation between the two contraries. To mediate two contraries means to take away their irreducibility, to bind them together, to create a communicative bridge between them. It means to pacify them through reconciliation, but to the advantage of one particular side — the one that was strongest from the start.

According to Hegel, the dialectic was not just “the nature of thought itself”. Maintaining the identity of the rational and the real, he interpreted the dialectic as the law of reality as well. All reality would move dialectically, following an objective mechanism. In such a way that what is at the same time constitutes what must be, i.e., it is self-justified in all its manifestations that are therefore “necessary” in the sense of not being able to be different than what they are. For Hegel, to oppose that which is something other to reality means to abandon reason in favor of self-interest or individual free will, a thing utterly mad since, in his opinion, only the rational is real. Under the gears of this determinist mechanism, history becomes the realization of a providential plane, and the State becomes nothing less than the incarnation of the world spirit — a kind of realization of God on earth.

What Hegel, as an honest subject of the Prussian State, never takes into consideration is the possibility of a completely autonomous, sovereign, uncompromising opposition — a multiplicity that does not allow itself to be enrolled in any synthesis.

It is necessary to acknowledge that Hegel was an excellent emissary of the Empire. His recognition of the role developed for the opposition in the production of reality rendered him attractive to the left. His synthesis that mediated contraries to the benefit of the original thesis, i.e., the existent, rendered him attractive to the right. This cheerful bourgeois man taught at the university of Berlin due to the gracious permission of the king, not failing to celebrate the anniversary of the fall of the Bastille each year with a bottle of wine. The fact remains that the internal dynamic of the dialectic as he conceived it is inseparable from the ideological proposition of the justification of the status quo — it is enough to consider the ironic observation of Bataille according to which “it is not romantic poetry, but ‘obligatory military service’ that appeared to guarantee the return to that common life without which, in his opinion, no knowledge was possible.” The Hegelian supercession is nothing other than a movement of conservation, of validation, of ratification of the past. In a few words, Hegel was an important philosopher of recuperation: power becomes stronger if, rather than closing itself in its castle and putting dissidents to death — blind intolerance capable of fomenting social hatred —, it welcomes their innovative ideas and even puts them partially into practice, after proper sterilization, with the aim of reinforcing its own legitimacy.

Hardt and Negri are scrupulous disciples of Hegel, as we will see. But their analysis draws inspiration from other thinkers as well, some of whom passed into history as subversives, although the effort to justify the necessity of authority and the order it imposes is evident in their work. Hegel’s most famous student, the Marx who was so convinced that “the bourgeois has had a highly revolutionary function in history” is another constant point of reference for the two emissaries of the Empire, especially in the elaboration of political perspectives. In fact, interpreting the

entire history of humanity in light of the Hegelian determinist philosophical mechanism, Marx openly supported the progressive growth of capitalism as the way to reach communism: “the development of big industry, thus, removes the very terrain on which it produces the products and appropriates them for itself from under the feet of the bourgeoisie. First of all, it produces its gravediggers. Its decline and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.”

For Marx and for his crony, Engels, revolution did not constitute the negation of the civilization of capital, a breaking point in its deadly progression, but rather its felicitous final outcome. In the certainty that the triumph of the bourgeoisie would automatically provoke the triumph of the proletariat, he ended up supporting the development of capitalism and fighting against those who opposed it. This sort of disguised fatalism led him to assume rather reactionary positions such as, for example, hoping for the victory of Prussia in the war with France, in the conviction that the foundation of the German empire by Bismarck would bring about the political and economic centralization of Germany, a factor that in his opinion formed the initial condition for the advent of socialism. Moreover, his idea of social transformation as completion rather than rupture pushed him to advocate the necessity of modeling the means and ends of proletarian struggle on those of their adversary, theorizing that the workers would have to organize in a party in order to conquer State power.

From this point of view, the analysis of the two emissaries is rigorously Marxist. And given the nature of their mission, they could certainly not do without the valuable suggestions of the counselor of the Prince, the “democratic Machiavelli” who is considered the father of modern politics, that is to say the Reason of State, expert in swindling the people and keeping them in chains. They sing his praises, omitting to mention his maxim according to which there is “nothing [...] more vain and insolent than the multitude”. Even a theologian who smells of heresy like Spinoza proves to be of use to them, both for his philosophical reflections on the concept of potency and for his theological-political reflections on the relationship between democracy and the multitude. The family portrait is finished with the philosophers known as post-structuralists, those French thinkers who, in order to defend this society from the subversion caused by the death of God — that in May ’68 had found a way to concretize itself in their country in the form of the largest wildcat strike in history — announced the death of man in every sphere, with the aim of spreading resignation by making the individual into a mere lump of social, political, technological and linguistic devices. The influence of the “desiring machines” of Deleuze and Guattari is particularly strong.

A certain involuntary sincerity in the two emissaries about the true nature of their mission takes us by surprise when. In dealing with a possible social transformation, they invite us to abandon the old metaphor of the revolutionary mole in favor of the snake. In fact, they expound, feeding the suspicion that “Marx’s old mole has finally died. It seems to us, in fact, that in the contemporary passage to Empire, the structured tunnels of the mole have been replaced by the infinite undulations of the snake.” (p. 57) The mole has done its time. Its extinction in the sphere of political zoology will be caused by its blindness that renders it immune to calculation. And yet, if this animal inspires sympathy, it is precisely because it is incapable of intrigues. Armed only with stubbornness and guided by intuition, the mole keeps on digging without ever losing its spirit, in hope of emerging at the right place. The snake is a completely different beast. It doesn’t dig, but crawls. It advances with “undulations”, from right to left, from left to right (the image of opportunism). Furthermore, since the time of Adam and Eve, it is known for its forked tongue (symbol of the lie). Thus, at best, it represents the dual nature of the two emissaries and their

supposed fathers, prodigals with bundles on their backs and broad smiles for the subjects insofar as these latter intend to remain such.

Go to work!

The two emissaries describe the subjects as “multitude”, a neutral term of the quantitative sort taken from some scholars of the past that is useful for avoiding the encumbrance of using a qualitative description of sides. Their aim is to convince the subjects that although it may be true that the Empire shows many defects, it is also true that its existence is the result of a right and inevitable necessity. That if the Empire is the One that represents the Many, it is only because it expresses them in a precise arithmetical sum, not because it annihilates them inside itself. That its functioning is not something that the multitudes now suffer, but that they themselves have determined, intentionally or not. In a word, that the will of the Empire is not, in fact, opposed to the desires of the multitude, but that, on the contrary, it is their expression and realization, even if lacking — which is why there is no reason whatsoever for wanting its destruction. Quite so!

But let’s consider how the emissaries liquidate Etienne De La Boetie’s critique. They are aware that “when the boss hails you on the shop floor, or the high school principle hails you in the school corridor, a subjectivity is formed. The material practices set out for the subject in the context of the institution (be they kneeling down to pray or changing hundreds of diapers) are the production processes of subjectivity” (pp. 195–6) and that consequently “the various institutions of modern society should be viewed as an archipelago of factories of subjectivity” (p.196). But, in fact, the two emissaries do not denounce the process of the reproduction of the existent with its social division that, in everyday actions, in their serial repetition, in the daily habit that accompanies us from birth to death, day after day, without giving us a moment of autonomy, is the thing that destroys the uniqueness of the individual. Rather they hail the thing that constructs its subjectivity. The extraordinary mystifying power of words! The misunderstanding is created through the use of the concept of “subjectivity”, which they clearly prefer over that of “individuality”. In themselves, the observations of the two emissaries are accurate, but the meaning that is drawn out of them is totally distorted, since the subjects are led to look with benevolent eyes upon these “factories of subjectivity”. But ultimately, what is so bad about this? Isn’t subjectivity “the quality of one who is subjective”? And isn’t the subjective “that which is relative to the subject, that which derives from the way of feeling, thinking and deciding proper to the individual as such”? Any dictionary could testify to this without uncertainty, but let’s take our consultation further, to the bottom. What is the subject? The subject is “the person or thing taken into consideration”, but it is also “one who is subordinate, submissive, subjugated.” Indeed, these terms derive from the Latin *subiectus*, past participle of *subicere*, or to subject. To affirm that subjectivity is relative to the individual means rendering submission natural, transforming a historical event into a biological fact. So subjectivity expresses the quality of one who is underneath, subordinate, submissive, subjugated. And what is the quality of one who is subjected if not that of obeying, something that one will do so much more willingly if one thinks that this is included in the nature of the individual as such? This is how it is possible to use the persuasive force of rhetoric to push the subjects to go to work in these “factories of subjectivity”, i.e., of servitude, rather than blowing them up.

Of course, a factory is more productive when discipline reigns among the worker-subjects, but there is a problem. Far too often, the subjects have the ugly defect of considering discipline a form of domestication. This is why throughout history they have sought to avoid it or shatter it in every way. ‘What ever for then?’ the two emissaries ask themselves, convinced that “discipline is not an external voice that dictates our practices from on high, overarching us, as Hobbes would say, but rather something like an inner compulsion indistinguishable from our will, immanent to and inseparable from our subjectivity itself” (p. 329). It is undeniable that discipline is inseparable from our subjectivity since, as we have just seen, subjectivity indicates submission. But it is the claim that the strict observance of the master’s rules by the slave is due not so much to the fear of the lash as to “an inner compulsion indistinguishable from our will” that Mr. Hardt and Mr. Negri cannot support without admitting on which side of the barricades they are to be found: on the side of those who uphold slavery. Their entire historical reconstruction of the birth and development of the Empire goes in this direction. The slave desires his chains and builds them himself. The subjects desire the Empire and have built it themselves. Its formation is inevitable because it expresses the biological outcome of human nature and the dialectical out come of the history of humanity at the same time.

The preoccupation with legitimating imperial determinism is also manifested in the tiresome mechanistic language used by the two emissaries, ultimately persuaded that they human being must fade into the gear, that autonomy must give way to automatism, and that fantasy must surrender before functionality. What is Empire? “Empire thus appears in the form of a very high tech machine” (p. 39) or to be clearer “Empire constitutes the ontological fabric”⁷ (p. 354). What are the subjects, the “multitude”? “The multitude not only uses machines to produce, but also becomes increasingly machinic itself, as the means of production are increasingly integrated into the minds and bodies of the multitude” (p. 406). What is desire? Desire is described as an “ontological motor” (p. 389). What is language? Unfailingly, the answer arrives: “by language we mean machines of intelligence that are continuously renovated by the affects and subjective passions” (p. 366). These are only a few examples of the technical – and, as such, above sides – language that fills this text.

But presenting the evolution of civilization as the mechanism of a megamachine is not enough. In saying this one justifies resignation in the presence of the social pollution it produced, but the rage at being changed into mere cogs is not neutralized. The two emissaries must thus carry out another effort. They must make the subject understand that “In reality, we are masters of the world, because our desire and labor regenerate it continuously” (p. 388) and that consequently we have very little to complain about. We, the masters of the world?

The reverse side of the coin

In our unspeakable ignorance, we thought that the ambition of every power was to consolidate and expand itself to the point where it assumes true and proper imperial significance, but that the final realization of this depends on the relations of existing forces. And of course, this objective can only be achieved by knowing how to generate the shockwaves necessary to disperse one’s adversaries. On the contrary, the two emissaries declare: “The multitude called Empire into being” (p. 43) since “the class struggle, pushing the nation State toward its abolition and thus going

⁷In Italian, this word “fabbrica”, usually means “factory”. – translator

beyond the barriers posed by it, proposes the constitution of Empire as the site of analysis and conflict” (p. 237).

We thought that labor was synonymous with human activity only within capitalist society, a bit like animals in captivity are synonymous with nature only in a zoo. An equation that is decidedly repugnant to everyone except for those who think that “work makes us free”, as the Nazis announced at the entrance of concentration camps, or who hold that the bars of a cage serve to protect animals from external dangers. On the contrary, the two emissaries don’t hesitate to argue that: “Living labor... is the vehicle of possibility... labor... now appears as general social activity. Labor is productive excess with respect to the existing order and the rules of its production. This productive excess is... the force of collective emancipation...” (p. 357), which is why “The new phenomenology of the labor of the multitude reveals labor as the fundamental creative activity that through cooperation goes beyond any obstacle imposed on it and constantly creates the world” (p. 402).

We thought the identification of human life with the production of goods was one of the most insipid advertising lies, incapable of conceiving of anything other than economic balance sheets. This is the sort of fraud that has reduced poetry to a source of inspiration for advertising. On the contrary, the two emissaries inform us that “the desire to exist and the desire to produce are one and the same thing” (p. 349).

We thought that the hegemony conquered by the great multinationals over international economic and political life, with the consequent transformation of the world into one huge shopping center had brought about the homogenization of lifestyles as well as the disappearance of all singularity. As a noted American journalist pointed out, the choice today is between Coke and Pepsi. On the contrary, the two emissaries observe that “Far from being unidimensional, the process of restructuring and unifying command over production was actually an explosion of innumerable different production systems. The processes of the unification of the world market operated paradoxically through diversity and diversification...” (p. 252).

We thought that the blackmail which the subjects have to undergo, working to survive or dying of hunger, was the element that forced millions of people to abandon the land of their birth to go in search of a morsel of bread. No one is so idiotic as to confuse emigration caused by lack with the spirit of adventure born from exuberance. On the contrary, the two emissaries hold that uprooting and mobility constitute “a powerful form of class struggle within and against imperial postmodernity” (p. 213) since “through circulation, the multitude reappropriates space and constitutes itself as an active subject” (p. 397).

We thought that for over half a century technological progress was maintained by research conducted in military experimental laboratories, and was exploited for civilian purposes as well only at a propitious moment. Through it Empire is able to reinforce its war apparatus, perfect social control and maximize economic profit. On the contrary, the two emissaries are convinced that only struggles “constrain capital to adopt ever higher levels of technology and thus transform labor processes. The struggles force capital continually to reform the relations of production and transform the relations of domination” (p.208).

We thought that the Internet represented a kind of New World for the Empire: on the one hand the invention of yet another universe to colonize, and on the other hand a way to ease internal social pressures. Navigating in electronic limbo, the subjects can savor a virtual freedom in exchange for real obedience. On the contrary the two emissaries are moved, noting that “in the expression of its own creative energies, immaterial labor thus seems to provide the potential

for a kind of spontaneous and elementary communism” (p. 294).

We thought that through information technology the Empire had succeeded in imposing a reduced language based on technological necessity and not on the richness of meaning. The subjects are forced to give up meeting in a real plaza in direct communication, since this is replaced by a virtual plaza with mediated communication; thus, they are no longer able to discuss, expressing ideas and emotions with all their incalculable shading, but only to exchange cold facts and figures. On the contrary, the two emissaries are happy to “participate in a more radical and profound commonality than has ever been experienced in the history of capitalism. The fact is that we participate in a productive world made up of communication and social networks, interactive services, and common languages. Our economic and social reality is defined less by material objects and that are made and consumed than by co-produced services and relationships. Producing increasingly means constructing cooperation and communicative commonalities” (p. 302).

We thought that biotechnology represented the highest point of the triumph of capital over nature, economic reason’s inroad into the organic body. The proposal for genetically reprogramming the human being, for suppressing differences in favor of the dominant normality, made a brief appearance behind the promises of eternal health and happiness (but it has now come in arrogantly). On the contrary, the two emissaries do nothing but applaud this new conquest since “Biopower — a horizon of the hybridization of the natural and the artificial, needs and machines, desire and collective organization of the economic and the social — must continually regenerate itself in order to exist” (p. 389).

How many other untimely thoughts could still be expressed? If it has been noted from more than one side how Marx could not hide a certain admiration for the behavior of the bourgeoisie despite his criticisms, for their part, the two emissaries show all their unbridled enthusiasm for the world born from the planetary domination of capital, which they pass off as the planetary triumph of the subjects: “Is it possible to imagine US agriculture and service industries without Mexican migrant labor, or Arab oil without Palestinians and Pakistanis? Moreover, where would the great innovative sectors of immaterial production, from design to fashion and from electronics to science in Europe, the United States, and Asia, be without the ‘illegal labor’ of the great masses, mobilized toward the radiant horizon of capitalist wealth and freedom?” (p. 397). Even the greatness of the Egyptian pyramids could not form a valid justification for the terrible suffering endured by the slaves who built them, let’s just imagine whether transgenic corn, oil wells, the procession of fashion or the microchip could be this justification!

But one last move is allowed to us. We thought that throughout history, subjects, faced with great imperial power and Praetorian arrogance, have always had very few alternatives: to obey or to rebel. In the moments that they obey, the subjects merely reproduce the Empire and guarantee its stability. Therefore, it is only in the times of revolt against the order of the Empire that they can cease to be subjects and determine themselves as free individuals, going to storm the heavens of their aspirations. The two emissaries know this well, but they also know that their task is really to place revolt in the service of the Empire. It’s a matter of putting the unforgotten lesson of Hegel into practice. The two emissaries themselves concede that “The Empire does not fortify its boundaries to push others away, but rather pulls them within its pacific order, like a powerful vortex” (p. 198). Thus, the dialectic shows that the thesis is the Empire and its foul⁸ order; the

⁸In Italian there is a play on words here — “immondo” is the Italian word for “foul”; “mondo” is the Italian word for “world”.

antitheses are the subjects, the “multitude”, and their struggle; the synthesis is reconciliation, the overcoming of contradictions, which in reality conceals the return to the thesis: the order of the Empire enriched by the creativity expressed in the struggles of the subjects. It’s an outline that isn’t very far from Marx’s interpretation of the servant-master dialectic that is found at the origin of his concept of class struggle.

Interpreted in this way, it is possible for the long process that led to the formation of the existent to no longer be perceived by the subjects as domestication, but rather as liberation. That which is — that is at the same time also that which must be — should no longer be seen as a misery, but as a richness. Given that: “The multitude is the real productive force of our social world whereas Empire is a mere apparatus of capture that lives only off the vitality of the multitude” (p. 62), one must deduce from this that “The refusal of exploitation — or really resistance, sabotage, insubordination, rebellion and revolution — constitutes the motor force of the reality in which we live, and at the same time its living opposition” (pp. 208–9) The final conclusion of such reasoning is imposed by itself: “The proletariat actually invents the social and productive forms that capital will be forced to adopt in the future” (p. 268). In short, it is not the Empire, through the exercise of power, but the subjects, with their struggle’s against the Empire’s power, who are creating the world that surrounds us. Thanks to their dialectical proceedings, the two emissaries overturn reality and try to make the defeats of the subjects pass for victories in perspective. Thus paradise approaches.

The heads of the eagle

It is true, however, that in doing so, Hardt and Negri occasionally fall into some significant contradictions. It is not always easy to convince the subjects that “The organization of mass trade unions, the construction of the welfare State, and social-democratic reformism were all results of the relations of force that the mass worker defined and the overdetermination it imposed on capitalist development” (p. 409). Whereas earlier they maintained that “Against the common wisdom that the US proletariat is weak because of its low party and union representation with respect to Europe and elsewhere, perhaps we should see it as strong for precisely these reasons” (p. 269).

Why would the proletariat ever have had to impose its representative forms on capital if its strength is greater without them? Starting from the conception that unions and parties were conceded by power because of the struggles carried out by the subjects, the two emissaries try to interpret this as meaning that these same struggles intentionally imposed them. Despite appearances, these two conceptions are not the same thing. In the first case, the institution of representation is a victory for power, a way to vanquish the combativeness of the rebels; in the second case, it is a conquest of the rebels, the objective attained by their battles. But if the proletariat is stronger without unions and parties, as Hardt and Negri acknowledge, then who benefits in instituting them? Clearly the one who has granted them, i.e., power, that in this way blocks the real threat brought about by a rebellion without mediation.

The first union did not appear until the second half of the 19th century. Any idea of class struggle, of the subversion of the capitalist order, was completely foreign to it since its only purpose was to reconcile the interests of the workers with those of the bosses. By organizing workers on the level of struggles for specific demands and seeking to limit exploitation to obtain a distribu-

tion of production that was less unfavorable for the workers, the union fights to obtain increases in wages, the reduction of working hours, guarantees against arbitrariness, etc. In other words, in the best of cases, the union aims to get a new division of the goods, but without directly calling the nature of the social order itself into question. Its function consists of offering correctives to the development of capitalism, because capitalism's ruthless search for profit renders it myopic in the evaluation of the possible social relapses provoked by its choices. This is why the nature of the union is intrinsically reformist. Any economic struggle conducted within the limits of capitalist society only permits the workers to remain workers, perpetuating their slavery.

The tune doesn't change when one examines the function of the party, the origin of which precedes that of the union by a few years. Both emerge in the period of the affirmation of the bourgeois class. In England, the country with the oldest parliamentary tradition, parties made their appearance with the Reform Act of 1832, which extended suffrage, allowing industrialists and business people of the country to participate along with the aristocracy in the management of public affairs; there is no need to say to whose detriment. The real function of parties appears in an even more visible manner in Germany, where they were born for the first time after the disorders of 1848. This means that it was the defeat of the revolution that gave birth to parties, not its victory. It was the fear of a possible new uprising of the masses that induced the State to loosen the chain of its subjects, "conceding" the representative institution.

But, no matter how much it is lengthened, no matter how much more movement it allows, a chain is still a chain. In any case, the history of Germany shows how social-democratic reformism was really spread in order to prevent a revolutionary solution to the social problem: Rosa Luxemburg was murdered by the hired assassins of the social democrat, Noske, who opened the way for Hitler's conquest of power by repressing the revolution of Councils.

The two emissaries start from an observation that could be considered accurate, but once again they turn its meaning on its head. They have reasoned perfectly in affirming that the reality that surrounds us, the entire world in which we live carries the indelible mark of social struggles under the cloak of grey conformity that envelops it. But what they don't mention is that this sign exists only in the negative. We are surrounded by the ruins of our defeats, not by the monuments of our victories.

An example for all. It is beyond doubt that the revolutionary movements of 1848 pushed the French government to entrust the architect, Haussmann, with the task of redesigning the city plan of Paris, but it is equally true that the great boulevards that are traveled by crowds of enraptured tourists were not devised with the aim of facilitating "the nomadism of the multitude", but rather the movement of troops and their cannons in the eventuality of new rebellions to repress!

It is true that the illegal activities of the subjects stimulate the application of the results of scientific research, but our streets are filled with video cameras in order to further social control, certainly not to express the "machinic community" achieved by man through technology. Rebellion pushes domination to perpetually remodel the world, but the final result of this restructuring always corresponds to the interests of those who govern, never of those who rebel.

If on the one hand the two emissaries exalt the rebellions of the subjects while on the other hand they maintain that their objectives are realized by the Empire itself, it is because in this way they want to create a necessary dependence, an unbreakable link between the subjects and the Empire. Even the organic metaphors that they use are indicative of this purpose: "The emblem of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, an eagle with two heads, might give an adequate initial representation of the contemporary form of Empire. But whereas in the earlier emblem the two

heads looked outward to designate the relative autonomy of the respective territories, in our case the two heads would have to be turned inward, each attacking the other” (pp. 59–60). As if to say that, even if the aspirations are different, the body is the same. Thus, the imperial structure doesn’t just respond to the needs of the ruling class, but also to those of the ruled. The Empire — with its army, its police, its courts, its prisons, its factories, its commercial centers, its televisions, its expressways... — is desired by the emperor as well as by the subjects. It is simply a question of a problem between heads. Once this concept is brought in, the subjects understand that the aim of struggle is to bring about improvements in the Empire by choosing to follow the correct head, thus leaving the body unchanged.

The entire analysis of Hardt and Negri aims to exclude any space for autonomous revolt directed at destroying the body of the Empire as well. It is a possibility that the two emissaries don’t even take into consideration, so as not to evoke dangerous specters. When they describe the Empire as a “smooth world”, they only end up confirming the contrary so well noted by Benjamin in his time: “Celebration or defense endeavors to conceal the revolutionary moments in the course of history. The fabrication of a continuity stands at its heart. It confers value only to those elements of the operation that are already brought in to make part of its posthumous influence. The points at which tradition is interrupted get away from them, and thus the rough spots and crags that offer a hand hold to those who want to make their own way beyond it.”

Freedom’s corrections

The Empire is right. The Empire is necessary. But unfortunately, the Empire is not perfect. Its immense potentiality is held in check both by the survival of dogmas of the past from which some imperial functionaries have not managed to separate themselves and by the opposition without compromise carried forward by those subjects who refuse to be such with the greatest determination.

The excess or absence of the will to power are the two obstacles that must be removed according to anyone who only aims for a just balance of power: “The first is presented by the overbearing power of bourgeois metaphysics and specifically the widely propagated illusion that the capitalist market and the capitalist regime of production are eternal and insuperable. [...] The second impediment is represented by the numerous theoretical positions that see no alternative to the present rule except a blind anarchic other and that thus partake in the mysticism of the limit. From this ideological perspective, the suffering of existence cannot manage to be articulated, become conscious and establish a standpoint of revolt. This theoretical position leads merely to a cynical attitude and quietistic practices. The illusion of the naturalness of capitalism and the radicality of the limit actually stand in a relationship of complementarity. Their complicity is expressed in an exhausting powerlessness” (pp. 386–7).

It is the struggle against these two supposed cohabiting forms of impotence, accused of nothing less than preventing a mysterious liberatory experience of work, that the two emissaries propose to the subjects, who should certainly struggle against the Empire (i.e., against those functionaries who love it for itself), but they should also struggle in favor of the Empire (i.e., against those subjects who hate it in itself).

In order to resolve this problem, Marx’s contribution is fundamental. Just as Marx proclaimed that the development of industry desired by the bourgeoisie would lead the proletariat to victory,

in the same way Hardt and Negri maintain that the development of the Empire will lead to the victory of the “multitude”: “The teleology of the multitude is theurgical: it consists in the possibility of directing technologies and production toward its own joy and its own increase of power. The multitude has no reason to look outside its own history and its own present productive power for the means necessary for its constitution as a political subject” (p.396). This is why the best way to fight the Empire consists, paradoxically, in facilitating its growth. In fact, the two emissaries claim to be certain of the fact that: “The passage to Empire and its processes of globalization offer new possibilities to the forces of liberation. Globalization, of course, is not one thing, and the multiple processes that we recognize as globalization are not unified and univocal. Our political task, we will argue, is not simply to resist these processes but to reorganize and redirect them toward new ends. The creative forces of the multitude that sustain Empire are also capable of autonomously constructing counter-Empire, an alternative political organization of global flows and exchanges. The struggles to contest and subvert Empire, as well as those to construct a real alternative, will thus take place on the imperial terrain itself — indeed, such struggles have already begun to emerge. Through these struggles and many more like them, the multitude will have to invent new democratic forms and a new constituent power that will one day take us through and beyond Empire” (preface, p. xv).

It is thus necessary to pass through Empire in order to overcome it. It’s not so much a question of resisting its processes as of reorganizing them, possibly entrusting such a task to the right people! Its formation is a positive event, because it offers infinite possibilities to all. To think of acting otherwise, of attaining an absolute break with the imperial universe, is an illusion born from impotence. “The only strategy available to struggles is that of a constituent counterpower that emerges from within Empire” (p. 59) the two emissaries pound out without too much imagination. Who does not recognize the notes of this song? It ultimately plagiarizes the dismal refrain of Marxist-leninism: the counter-power of the multitude in opposition to imperial power, counter-Empire in opposition to Empire, counter-globalization opposed to globalization. And yet, who can ignore how the mad conviction that the bourgeois State had to be fought and replaced by a proletarian State only led to the installation of particularly repugnant totalitarian regimes, where courts presided over farce-trials, soldiers took part in firing squads, police filled the gulags with dissidents, the ruling class formed a grotesque bureaucracy, the population suffered a tremendous oppression and misery?

But the two emissaries don’t pay attention to such trifles, confident in the ability of the imperial model to welcome the differences expressed by the “multitude” into itself without standardizing them. It is sufficient to have the right constitutional form. It is no accident if the principle rage that troubles them is: “What does it mean to be republican today?” (p.208). The incredible aspect is that they point to this question as fundamental and urgent for anyone who intends to fight the Empire. The answer that they give doesn’t allow for a reply: “Being republican today, then, means first of all struggling within and constructing against Empire, on its hybrid, modulating terrains. And here we should add against all moralisms and all positions of resentment and nostalgia, that this imperial terrain provides greater possibilities for creation and liberation. The multitude, in its will to be-against and its desire for liberation, must push through Empire to come out the other side.” Notice that the only thing to do is to go through Empire in order to come out on another side!

Besides, our two emissaries discreetly resort to the texts of Deleuze and Guattari who maintain that, instead of resisting capitalist globalization, it is necessary to accelerate its pace: “‘But which’

— they ask — ‘is the revolutionary path? Is there one? — To withdraw from the world market...? Or might it be to go in the opposite direction?’” Hardt and Negri aggravate the matter: “Empire can be effectively contested only on its own level of generality and by pushing the processes that it offers past their present limitations. We have to accept that challenge and learn to think globally and act globally” (pp. 206–7).

From close up, this far-seeing hope of theirs greatly resembles that of Leninists who take an oath on the temporary nature of the dictatorship exercised by the party and on the imminent extinction of the State (as soon as it has entered into their possession, of course) and perjure themselves. It was sufficient to have the correct communist program. In reality, once it has tasted power, with all the vast privilege connected to it, no ruling class will ever voluntarily renounce it. No State will ever extinguish itself on its own initiative. In the same way, no Empire will ever respect and express the multiple differences present within its borders. At most, it could engulf them and grind them down like Moloch, in order to later spit them back out in the form of substitutes (as the economic empire of McDonald’s is doing to a slight extent in its various franchises around the globe, where, along with the hamburger for which it is unfortunately famous, it presents typical local plates which share nothing with the native dishes but the name with which they are advertised).

The Empire is not inclusive; it is exclusive. Even the history of the pre-eminent Empire, that of Rome, is significant from this perspective. No autonomy was conceded in the conquered territories. It is enough to consider that in the language of ancient Rome, the two concepts of foreigner and enemy are indicated by a single word: *hostis*. The conviction that the Roman Empire was only interested in the economic exploitation of subject peoples and that it was guided by cosmopolitan ideals in their treatment is completely mistaken. As soon as the Praetorian divisions extended military and political subjection, the romanization of the occupied territories was also carried out with implacable energy. The Roman Empire was nothing but a State, a State intent on building up a colossal centralization of all social energy. And annihilating difference — through repression or homogenization — is part of the logic of every State that must necessarily strain toward general unification in order to survive. Whatever the idea it represents, whatever the social structure it is manifested in, whatever individual or group of individuals exercises it, in every epoch and in every social context, power is always synonymous with exploitation and oppression. Since it cannot be exercised by all individuals at the same time and without distinction, equally and in conditions of absolute mutuality, power is therefore the decision-making force concentrated in the hands of the few, carried out and protected by armed force. Whether they are few or many, capable or inept, this few will end up imposing their will and making their interests prevail over all; they will end up becoming oppressors.

This trait is so very visible in any epoch and in any human gathering, that the two emissaries take good care not to ignore it. On the contrary, they confront the problem directly, but in their own way: “In the process of the constitution of sovereignty on the plane of immanence, there also arises an experience of finitude that results from the conflictive and plural nature of the multitude itself. The new principle of sovereignty seems to produce its own internal limit. To prevent these obstacles from disrupting order and completely emptying out the project, sovereign power must rely on the exercise of control. In other words, after the first moment of affirmation comes a dialectical negation of the constituent power of the multitude that preserves the teleology of the project of sovereignty. Are we thus faced with a crisis in the elaboration of the new concept? Does transcendence, first refused in the definition of the source of power, return through the

back door in the exercise of power, when the multitude is posed as finite and thus demanding special instruments of correction and control?” (p. 165).

To the enamored eyes of the two emissaries, the virtuous exercise of power “seems” to meet with an insurmountable obstacle: the “conflictive and plural nature” of the multitude. Unable to live together with this freedom, power “must” correct and control it. An unavoidable necessity, but one that may contradict its virginal rectitude. Not wanting to escape this dead-end through an act of force, the two emissaries are constrained to have recourse to an act of faith. Through great stage tricks, they become converts — after chewing it over a bit — to the old illusion of an American Constitution without authority, a technical-juridical solution to the “intrinsic limits” of power. “That outcome is a constant threat, but after having recognized these limits, the new US concept of sovereignty opens with extraordinary force toward the outside, almost as if it wanted to banish the idea of control and the moment of reflection from its own constitution” (p. 165). A truly astounding conclusion if one considers the fate of the Native Americans, the Indian tribes exterminated because their way of life was incompatible with that of the young United States of America. Their genocide — cleared away by the two emissaries as “a squalid event” — constitutes the best example of the ability for any piece of paper to welcome, express and guarantee the desires of the “multitude”.

It is clear that the infinite multiplicity present in the human spirit can never be solicited, developed and protected by any form of power. Chance does not love to see itself sewn onto a uniform. Fantasy dies as soon as a legal code is applied. Even all the solicitude, the prudence, the forbearance made available by a hypothetical counter-power master of tolerance are only televised chattering and academic speculation. No one can any longer ignore that in spite of its supposed best intentions, counter-power will still end up liquidating its rebels — guillotining them in the square in Paris, cutting them down like partridges on the bastions of Kronstadt, shooting them along the roadsides of Barcelona (or denouncing them to the police in the alleys of Genoa). Excess cannot be contained in any unity of measure,⁹ no matter how generous it may appear or be. This is why Empire is to be destroyed. Not reorganized, reoriented, redefined, remodeled — but annihilated down to its foundation. In their own way, even the two emissaries must confront the moment of imperial decline and collapse. Having come to this point, the use of the imperial conception itself forces us to come to terms with those responsible for the end of the most famous Empire in history, the Roman Empire.

It is time to speak of the barbarians.

⁹In Italian, there is a play on words in this sentence: “excess” is “*dismisura*” in Italian and “measure” is “*misura*”, which, according to my dictionary can also mean “limit” or “standard”.

The young are reproached for the use of violence. But don't we find ourselves in an unending state of violence? Given that we are born and raised in a prison, we know longer notice that we are in stir, with hands and feet chained and a gag in the mouth. What is it that you call legal status? A law that makes an enslaved herd of the great mass of citizens, in order to satisfy the unnatural needs of an insignificant and corrupt minority?

— Georg Buchner

In civilization, I vegetate; I am neither happy, nor free; why then should I desire this homicidal order to be conserved? There is no longer anything to conserve of that which the earth suffers.

— Ernest Coeurderoy

We will not have demolished everything if we don't destroy the ruins as well.

— Alfred Jarry

Barbarians

The Empire has counted the hours. Hardt and Negri nurture no doubts on this point, cherishing the certainty that "A new nomad horde, a new race of barbarians will arise to invade or evacuate Empire." (p.213). Once the joyful tidings are announced, the only thing left then is to again propose the question already raised by Nietzsche — where are the barbarians? A basic question, but one to which it is impossible to give an answer if one does not first confront another question — who are the barbarians?

At his point it becomes necessary to deepen the concept of barbarian, the definition of which contains more than one meaning. Etymologically this term indicates the foreigner who came from another country and who was unable to make him/herself understood and expressed him/herself falteringly because s/he did not know the language of the polis. Historically it points to an individual who is characterized by blind, devastating violence, by savage roughness. The barbarian is the one who does not speak the language of the city-State and also the one who breaks loose with fury. On first view, it is not easy to understand how this dual interpretation that appears illogical could exist united in one word. Why ever should one who doesn't speak our language be a brutal savage? Why ever would one who resorts to the most ferocious violence not be able to express him/herself through the same words we use?

In reality, there is a profound link between the lack of a common language and inexplicable violent behavior. Within a society, a common language allows the sides to know each other, to reconcile differences, to find an arrangement. In the case of a conflict, it allows the adversaries to distinguish between friends and enemies, limiting the use of force. Without this possibility of understanding, there is no place for mediation, but only for uncontrolled violence. Opposed forces can descend to pacts only if they are able to communicate with each other. In the situation in which they fight, the possibility for dialogue still places a limit on their violence. It establishes a threshold beyond which not to go so that future negotiations will not be nullified. But without this common language, without the concrete possibility of knowing any thing about the other —

the basic premise for discovering the thing that can harmonize the interests of the antagonists — nothing remains but to fight to the last drop of blood.

In recognizing the barbaric traits that characterize many of the most recent social struggles, the analysis of the two emissaries of the Empire allows a bit of worry over their possible development to leak out. Behind the formal flattery, the attempt to civilize the barbarians, to educate them in the language of the polis-Empire with the aim of averting their devastating and, above all, uncontrolled violence, seems obvious. Hardt and Negri are aware that “Struggles in other parts of the world and even our own struggles seem to be written in an incomprehensible foreign language” (p. 57), and that this is why they are barbaric. And they don’t notice any positive sign in this, quite the opposite.

Not being able to admit the subversive potentiality of such extraneousness, they prefer to announce that “these struggles not only fail to communicate to other contexts but also lack even a local communication, and thus often have a very brief duration where they are born, burning out in a flash” (p. 54). The incommunicability of the barbarians — the notorious “autism” of modern insurgents that has caused so many rivers of ink to flow from the journalistic and sociological rabble — becomes in the final analysis a dangerous phenomenon not so much for the Empire as for the barbarians themselves, inasmuch as it would not allow their action to spread more widely in time and space. But would this be the motive that moves the two emissaries to support the necessity to “construct a new common language” (p.57), defining its realization as “an important political task” (p.57)? Or isn’t the real reason that “Perhaps, precisely because all these struggles are incommunicable and thus blocked from traveling horizontally in a cycle, they are forced instead to leap vertically and touch immediately on the global level” (p. 55), a most dangerous matter since “the more capital extends its global networks of production and control, the more powerful any singular point of revolt can be” (p. 58)?

Bringing it down to earth, if the struggles were not manifest in such an uncontrolled way — i.e., if they were not as irrecoverable as they are incommunicable — they would be able to extend themselves on the quantitative level, but would be qualitatively less meaningful. Here it is possible to ascertain the real interest of the two emissaries: better to spread struggle at low conflictuality, the eternal poverty of making demands, than to support struggles with radical characteristics and high conflictuality. Teaching barbarians the language of the Empire (which is only able to express itself through concepts such as State, party, constitution, politics, productivity, work, democracy and withering away), the two emissaries indeed invite them to multiply their struggles horizontally, but only because they know that, once civilized, these struggles would become impoverished vertically. They want to increase the quantity of struggle, aware that this will occur at the expense of their quality, in faithful observance of an inflexible law of capitalism.

Let’s take the concrete examples put forward by Hardt and Negri. If the unification of markets has overcome every barrier in favor of the free circulation of goods, then it should also smash every border in favor of a free circulation of workers. Nonetheless, the “nomadism of the multitude” knows a very precise obstacle: crossing the borders may indeed be getting easier in some situations, but once one has arrived at one’s destination, how does one respond to the police who demands papers? So “global citizenship” is described as “a first element of a political program for the global multitude” (p. 400). Once every one of us has documents for residence, i.e., once we are recognized as citizen-subjects of the Empire, “all should have full rights of citizenship in the country where they live and work” (p. 400). In fact, it is necessary not to forget that for the two emissaries, as for the Nazis, it is work that makes one free, and it is really the access to work that

requires a universal constitution: “In effect this political demand insists in postmodernity on the fundamental modern constitutional principle that links right and labor, and thus rewards with citizenship the worker who creates capital” (p. 400). In the battles of all the irregular workers and undocumented immigrants who work and demand to be legalized, Hardt and Negri see the just claim for compensation that is due to the slave who is obedient to the orders of the master. When it is accompanied by assent, subjection deserves citizenship. What is completely absent in their outlook is the possibility that the slave might rebel against orders and try to break the chains that imprison him/her. Certainly identification papers are to be numbered among these chains. The two emissaries are quite careful not to consider that there are two fundamentally opposed ways of obtaining freedom of movement. The first is the one that they hope for, the one that foresees documents for everyone (even complete with fingerprints!¹⁰). The second is the one that they do not consider, the one that does not foresee any documents. The first conception requires the modernization of the Empire’s bureaucracy; the second requires its destruction. Either everything is placed in order before the police, or we put an end to all orders and all police.

The same discourse applies to the other war-horse of the two emissaries, that of the social wage and of the guaranteed income for everyone. “Once citizenship is extended to all, we could call this guaranteed income a citizenship income due each member of society” (p. 403), Hardt and Negri propose, in the poorly hidden hope that the subject will be satisfied by a social reward — owed to them for their mere consent, quite apart from the activity carried out — and will therefore cease rebelling as those oppressed by the Empire and put themselves to work as members of society. As opposed to those who continue to think that communism is a world without money, the two emissaries hold that it must inevitably take on the form of a waged world — meaning a capitalistic world. This absolute inability of theirs to imagine human existence outside the orbit traced by the imperial institutions is not trivial: anyone who wants to communicate with the Empire must learn to speak like the Empire, anyone who speaks like the Empire ends up thinking like the Empire.

The inadequacy of the no

The conversion of the barbarians operates on all levels. They must not only learn the language of the Empire; they must also renounce their violence. But if convincing them to go to school is relatively easy — it is enough to promise a quantitative leap — what reasoning can be used to invite those who consider the use of force a virtue to lay down their swords? Through a game of rhetorical trickery that turns the stainless myth of the Resistance around. Quoting an antifascist partisan, the two emissaries recall that “Resistance is born of desertion” (p. 205). Strengthened by this historical truth, Hardt and Negri maintain that “Whereas in the disciplinary era sabotage was the fundamental notion of resistance, in the era of imperial control it may be desertion. Whereas being-against in modernity often meant a direct and/or dialectical opposition of forces, in post-modernity being-against might well be most effective in an oblique or diagonal stance. Battles against the Empire might be won through subtraction and defection. This desertion does not have a place; it is the evacuation of the places of power” (p.212).

As often as they display their whole inventory as word manipulators, in this instance, the trick they use is much too shabby. Resistance is born of desertion, but it is not desertion. Desertion

¹⁰The Italian state is going to require fingerprints on all new identification documents.

only consists of a non-participation, a non-collaboration in the projects of the enemy. Resistance however is direct intervention, face-to-face conflict with the enemy. At most, one could say that desertion was a form of passive resistance, while the partisan struggle was a form of active resistance. Those who become aware of living in an intolerable social situation, in a world based on the wealth of the few and the misery of the many, those who no longer want to feel responsible for the horrors committed every day, can cease to make their contribution to the continuation of the existent. For example, they can stop going to the polls or acquiring merchandise from the large multinationals. But however much one may appreciate the intentions, this choice is completely inadequate since in itself it is not able to concretely call the social order into question and ends up as a rather limited gesture of refusal. It pacifies the guilt feelings of the conscience, but it doesn't change the surrounding reality. In order to stop the enemy, it is not enough to refuse to give your service or to abstain from associating with it. It is necessary to attack it and strike it with the intention of destroying it.

Supporting desertion at the expense of sabotage, the two emissaries do nothing more than support the Empire. Just as Nazism continued to occupy and oppress Italy despite its deserters, in the same way, the Empire will continue to occupy and oppress the entire planet in spite of its deserters. All this rhetoric about the resistance of desertion awkwardly pursues a single aim, that of pacifying the rage of the subjects by offering them the safety valve of abandonment and denying the necessity and urgency of the direct attack against the Empire. Through these charlatans' subterfuges, the barbarians are invited to take as an example not the determination of the deserters, which would have led them to active resistance, but rather the initial behavior, in other words, they are invited to emulate the gesture for which the deserters became famous: throwing down their arms and refusing to fight.

It is clear that once Hardt and Negri had used the imperial metaphor, they could not do anything but await the coming of the "new barbarians". It is enough that these barbarians simply cease to be so: yes to a comprehensible language, no to violence. The latter is no longer useful: on the one hand, "Imperial corruption is already undermined by the productivity of bodies, by cooperation, and by the multitude's designs of productivity. The only event that we are still awaiting is the construction, or rather the insurgence of a powerful organization" (p. 411); While on the other hand, "Militants resist imperial command in a creative way. In other words, resistance is linked immediately with a constitutive investment in the biopolitical realm and to the formation of cooperative apparatuses of production and community" (p. 413). For fear of being misunderstood, the two emissaries are forced to explain themselves with a certain clarity: They do not, in fact, hope for the coming of the barbarian horde, but rather of a powerful organization of militants! They don't appreciate those who struggle furiously, but rather those who work productively! They don't demand that one follows one's passions, but that one carries out one's obligations! They don't desire one to wreak havoc among the enemies, but to resist creatively!

Hardt and Negri appreciate the Empire to such a degree, they are so molded by its values, worshipful of its organization, assimilated to its technology, accustomed to its language, as to conclude that militancy "knows only an inside, a vital and ineluctable participation in the set of social structures, with no possibility of transcending them" (p. 413). Here we are before yet another example of dialectical acrobatics. While they launch vibrant appeals to the subjects so that they start off on the road to exodus, at the same time they affirm many times that within the Empire there is no elsewhere, no outside with respect to an inside.

But if the Empire is everywhere, If limits that define its territory no longer exist, where would this Promised Land toward which to lead the exodus of the “multitude” ever be found? Does a free zone exist on this planet, a place that remains uncontaminated by the logic of power and profit? Unfortunately, the world is One, and it is completely under the domination of the Empire. No substantial alternatives are permitted within it. At most, it allows us to adapt ourselves to its arrangements, giving up any existence of our own. This corresponds to extinguishing us — the quiet life of resignation. At best, it is possible for us to survive in a way that is less bad, inserting ourselves in any of its cracks. This is why anyone who desires to live, that is to determine for herself the content and the form of his days on this earth, has only one card to play. Before being the indispensable, preliminary condition of real freedom, the insurrection against the Empire is a question of dignity.

Without any reason

Today the barbarians no longer camp at the gates of the City. They already find themselves inside it, because they were born in it. There are no longer cold lands of the North or barren steppes of the East from which to start the invasion. It is necessary to recognize that the barbarians arise from the ranks of the imperial subjects themselves. In other words, the barbarians are everywhere. For ears accustomed to the language of the polis, it is easy to recognize them, because when they express themselves, they stammer. But there is no need to let oneself be fooled by the incomprehensible sound of their voices; there is no need to confuse the one without a language with the one who speaks a different language.

Many barbarians really are deprived of a recognizable language, rendered illiterate by the suppression of their individual awareness — a consequence of the extermination of meaning carried out by the Empire. If one does not know how to talk, it is because one does not know what to say, and vice versa. And one does not know what and how to speak because everything has been banalized, reduced to mere symbol, to appearance. Meaning, which was considered one of the greatest sources of revolt, a radiant fount of energy, has been eroded in the course of the past few decades by a whole company of imperial functionaries (for example, the French structuralist school so dear to the two emissaries). They have shattered, pulverized and minced it in every sphere of knowledge. Ideas that expound and incite to transformative action have been cancelled and replaced by opinions that comment and rivet in conservative contemplation. Where there was once a jungle full of danger because it was wild and luxuriant, a desert has been created. And what does one say, what does one do, in the midst of a desert? Deprived of words with which to express rage for the suffering one has undergone, deprived of hope with which to overcome the emotional anguish that devastates daily existence, deprived of desires with which to struggle against institutional reason, deprived of dreams toward which to reach in order to sweep away the repetition of the existent, many subjects become barbaric in action. Once the tongue is paralyzed, the hands quiver to find relief from frustration. Inhibited from manifesting itself, the compulsion toward the joy of living is turned on its head, becoming its opposite, the death instinct. Violence explodes and, being without meaning, manifests itself in a blind and furious manner, against everything and everyone, overturning every social relationship. Where there is not a civil war going on, there are the rocks thrown from overpasses or the murders of parents, friends or neighbors. It is not revolution or even revolt; it is a generalized slaughter

carried out by subjects who have been made barbaric by the wounds inflicted on their hides every day by a world that is without meaning because it is forced to have a single meaning. This dreary and desperate violence annoys the Empire, disturbed in its presumption of guaranteeing total tranquility, but it is not worried about this. In itself, this does nothing but feed the demand for greater public order. And yet, however easily recuperable once it is brought out to the surface, it shows all the restlessness that stirs in the depths of this society, all the precariousness of the imperial hold over the circumstances of the modern world.

And yet there are other barbarians of a different sort. They are barbarians insofar as they are refractory against the words of command, certainly not insofar as they are deprived of awareness. If their language seems obscure, irritating, stuttering, it is because it does not endlessly conjugate the imperial Verb to the infinitive.¹¹ These barbarians are all the ones who deliberately refuse to follow the institutional itinerary. They have other paths to travel, other worlds to discover, other existences to live. To the virtuality — understood as simulation — of technology that originates in sterile laboratories, they oppose the virality — understood as possibility — of aspirations that originate in the palpitations of the heart. In order to give form and substance to these aspirations, in order to transform them from virtual into real, they must snatch the time and space necessary for their realization from the Empire by force. That is to say, they must manage to reach a total rupture with the Empire.

These barbarians are also violent. But their violence is not blind toward those they strike, but rather toward imperial reason. These barbarians don't speak or understand the language of the polis, and they have no desire to learn it. They have no use for the social structures of the Empire, the American constitution, the current means of production, identification papers or the social wage to which the two emissaries so much adhere. They have nothing to demand of imperial functionaries and nothing to offer them. The politics of compromise has failed from the start, not due to a ridiculous ideological process, but due to their inadequacy to this world. These barbarians only know that to realize their desires, whatever they are, they must first clear out the obstacles that they encounter on their path. They have no time to ask themselves how "capitalism is miraculously healthy, its accumulation more robust than ever" (p. 270), as the two emissaries comically slow down to do, perturbed that history refuses to function in compliance with the well-oiled mechanisms of a machine. The "mystery of capital's continuing health" (p. 270) doesn't manage to rouse the passion of these barbarians as much as the urgency of its death. This is why they are ready to lay waste to the metropolises — with their banks, their shopping centers, their police-oriented city planning — at any moment, individually or collectively, in the light of the sun or in the dark of the night. If they don't have a single reason for doing so, it is because they have all of them.

In opposition to the discontented subjects who want to become contented subjects, the possibility of another world does not concern these barbarians. They prefer to fight because they think that a world absolutely other is possible. They know that "another world" will be like "another day", the empty and boring repetition of what has come before it. But a world absolutely other is a completely unknown world to dream, to create, to explore. Having been born and raised under the imperial yoke, without ever having had the possibility of experimenting with radically different ways of living it is not possible to imagine a world absolutely other except in negative

¹¹The Italian phrase is "...coniuga all' infinito il Verbo imperiale" with a wordplay on "all'infinito" which means both "the infinitive" and "endlessly".

terms, as a world without money, without laws, without work, without technology and without all the numberless horrors produced by capitalist civilization.

Unable to conceive of a world without masters to serve, the two emissaries interpret this absence as a lack. It is their ridiculous belief that the Empire is the destiny of humanity that causes them to say: “The refusal of work and authority, or really the refusal of voluntary servitude, is the beginning of liberatory politics [...]. In political terms, too, refusal in itself (of work, authority and voluntary servitude) leads only to a kind of social suicide. As Spinoza says, if we simply cut the tyrannical head off the social body, we will be left with the deformed corpse of a society” (p. 204). The tyrant is the head, the reason that guides; The subjects are the muscles, the strength that works. Rather than Spinoza, the two emissaries should have quoted the patricians of ancient Rome, who informed the plebeians who were on the verge of rebelling that if the subjects rise up and put the tyrant to death, they commit suicide, because there cannot be life without someone who commands.

The eternal lie that maintains all exercise of power finds two fervent followers in Hardt and Negri, who are available to argue that that the refusal of authority is suicide and that anarchism is a form of impotence. As has been noted many times and from many sides, it is really destruction that opens the door to creation; mere refusal does nothing more than render the ground fertile for a new affirmation. Contrary to what the two emissaries think, the tyrant — and every power structure is tyrannical — is not the head of the social body, but rather the parasite that poisons its organism. Killing it is an act of liberation. The Parisian revolutionary clubs did not suffer from the beheading of king Louis XVI, nor did the Russian workers’ councils suffer from the fall of Tsar Nicholas II. Rather, the liquidation of power, i.e., the insurrectional context that brought down the ancient customs and released new energies, is what really allowed their birth and their spread. And the reintroduction of power, in Jacobin or Bolshevik form, is what really brought about the stalemate and the ruin of the process of social regeneration, bringing that which is Unknown back to that which is State.¹²

Whoever does not speak with me and like me has nothing to say. Whoever does not act with me and like me is sick with impotency. Whoever does not live with me and like me desires to kill herself. This is the teaching that the Empire spreads among its enemies from the mouths of the two emissaries. But the barbarians are deaf to such foolish warnings; their ears are sensitive only to the voices that call them to the assault against the Empire, to making a clean sweep of the existent. Their fury even inspires terror in many enemies of the Empire who indeed desire to defeat it, but with good manners. As civilized cutthroats, they share the dissent but not the hatred; they understand the indignation but not the rage; they hurl protests slogans but not war cries; they are ready to shed saliva but not blood. They too — it is clear — desire the end of the Empire, but they wait for it to happen spontaneously, as a natural phenomenon. Pushed by the certainty that the Empire is seriously ill, its most educated enemies hope that a collapse frees humanity from its cumbersome presence as soon as possible. Besides, no one can deny that it is much less dangerous to obtain freedom after the peaceful departure of the master, like a hereditary fortune, rather than conquering it in battle. This indisputable observation leads them to sit on the banks of the river waiting to see the corpses of their enemies pass by carried by the currents.

The barbarian nature is quite different; it doesn’t know this gentle patience. In fact, the barbarians are persuaded that it is vain to wait for the death of the Empire, which above all might not

¹²In Italian this is a wordplay “riportando ciò che è Ignoto a ciò che è Stato” can also mean “bring the Unknown back

be quite so imminent as its civil enemies hope. Besides, this all leaves one to assume that at the moment of its collapse the Empire will bury everything, really everything, under its ruins. Then what is the purpose of waiting? Isn't it better to go in search of the enemy and do everything possible to get rid of it? This barbaric determination rouses horror. The two emissaries are horrified; according to them the identification of the enemy is "the first question of political philosophy" (pp. 210–211) and as such cannot be concerned with barbarians, who in their coarseness are able at best to move "round in such paradoxical circles" (p. 211).

But the well brought up enemies of the Empire are also horrified. Accustomed to using up their days in waiting to be able to start living, they mistake barbaric immediacy for bloodthirstiness. And how could it be otherwise? They are completely unable to comprehend what the barbarians are fighting for, since barbaric language is still incomprehensible to their ears. The cry of the barbarians is much too infantile for them, their boldness much too gratuitous. In the face of the barbarians, they feel as powerless as an adult at grips with roused children. In fact, for the ancient Greeks the barbarian was quite similar to the child, while in Russian the two concepts are expressed with the same word (and let's consider the Latin *infans*, infant, that literally means not speaking). Well then, the thing that those who don't speak, the stammerers, are most reproached for is the lack of seriousness, of reasonableness, of maturity. For barbarians, as for children, whose nature has not yet been completely domesticated, freedom does not start with the elaboration of an ideal program but with the unmistakable din of broken crockery. This is the thing that raises the protests of those who think, with Lenin, that extremism is only an "infantile disorder". Against the senile disorder of politics, the barbarians affirm that freedom is the most urgent and terrifying need of human nature. And unbridled freedom makes use of all the world's products, of all the objects, using them as playthings.

But the offspring of the goddess Reason don't allow for a social transformation that is not based on the edification of the Public Good. It's either a question of a return to a mythical past (the primitivist illusion) or of the fulfillment of a radiant future (the messianic illusion). As for the barbarians, they love neither nostalgic sighs nor architectural diplomas. That which is is not destroyed in the name of that which was or of that which will be, but in order to finally give life to everything that could be, in its boundless possibilities, here and now. Right now.

To put an end to it

It is useless to try to teach one who has no tongue how to speak. It is useless to take fright in the face of guttural sounds and thoughtless acts. It is useless to propose mediation to one who wants the impossible. It is useless to beg for freedom from one who imposes slavery. Let's leave pedagogy to the two emissaries, together with their police and missionary spirit. May the barbarians break loose. May they sharpen their swords, may they brandish their battleaxes, may they strike their enemies without pity. May hatred take the place of tolerance, may fury take the place of resignation, may outrage take the place of respect. May the barbarian hordes go to the assault, autonomously, in the way that they determine. And may no parliament, no credit institution, no supermarket, no barracks, no factory ever grow again after their passage. In the face of the concrete that rises to strike the sky and the pollution that fouls it, one can well say with Dejacque that "It is not the darkness that the Barbarians will bring to the world this time, it

to that which has been". The idea is that if we storm the unknown, the state will be a thing of the past.

is the light.”

The destruction of the Empire could hardly assume the customary forms of social revolution, as we have come to know them from the history books. (the conquest of the Winter Palace, the popular reaction to a blight, the general wildcat strike).

There are no longer any noble ideas capable of stirring the great proletarian masses, there are no longer sweet Utopias ready to be fertilized by their lovers, there are no longer radical theories that only wait to be put into practice. All this has been overwhelmed, swept away by the imperial slime. There is only the disgust, the desperation, the repugnance of dragging our existence through the blood spilled by power and the mud flung up by obedience. And yet in the midst of this blood and mud, the will — confused in some and clearer in others — to put an end to the Empire and its deadly order once and for all can be born.

“And each time the sufferings of the past, with all the horrors and torments that wracked my body, would be thrown to the wind as though from a distant age, and I would abandon myself joyfully to dreams of adventure, beholding with heated imagination a world that I knew not in life but in desire, a world that no man has known in life but that many of us have known in dreams. And dreaming, time would fly by, and my body would stand weariness at bay, and I would redouble my enthusiasm, and become bold, and go out on reconnaissance at dawn to find out the enemy’s position and...All this in order to change life, to stamp a different rhythm onto this life of ours; all this because men could be brothers and I among them; all this because joy that surges forth even once from our breasts must surge out of the earth...”

— An uncontrollable of the Iron Column, March 1937, Spain

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