Sovereignty in Ruins

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War or Production?

In *Commonwealth*, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt discuss two different forms of understanding antimodern forces. Both of them refer back to Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno’s analyses in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. For them, while it is obvious that freedom in society is inseparable from Enlightenment thought, enlightened societies keep within themselves the germ of their regression toward despotic barbarism. Horkheimer and Adorno’s examples are Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union under Stalin, which causes the authors of *Commonwealth* some moral consternation. According to the latter, there is a need to posit two opposite types of antimodern reaction: the despotic type, which aims to enslave the multitude, and the reaction of those who “do not stand in a specular, negative relation to modernity but rather adopt a diagonal stance, not simply opposing all that is modern and rational but inventing new rationalities and new forms of liberation.”

The dialectical assimilation of antimodernity to the dark forces of regression ends up closing a vicious circle unable to understand “how the positive, productive monsters of antimodernity, the monsters of liberation, always exceed the domination of modernity and point toward an alternative.” The posited alternative, of course, is one with the communist or neocommunist revolution of the multitude that Hardt and Negri seek or, rather, confidently expect. It is simple: the problem of total or absolute democracy is a mere matter of letting the forces of total or absolute democracy triumph. Foregone conclusion: it is enough to keep the other ones from triumphing. The other ones are those whose antimodern polemical orientation consists of liberating the sovereign from his obligation toward his subordinates, as Juan
Donoso Cortés or Carl Schmitt would have suggested, not to mention the Nazis, the Ku Klux Klan, the proposers of ethnic cleansing, or the American neoconservatives dreaming of world domination. There are two positive tasks, say Negri and Hardt: “The first is to pose a clear distinction between reactionary antimodern notions of power that seek to break the relationship by freeing the sovereign and liberatory antimodernities that challenge and subvert hierarchies by affirming the resistance and expanding the freedom of the subordinated. The second task, then, is to recognize how this resistance and freedom always exceed the relationship of domination and thus cannot be recuperated in any dialectic with modern power. These monsters possess the key to release new creative powers that move beyond the opposition between modernity and hierarchy.”

War or production? Is the revolutionary question today a matter of war, antimodern war, reactionary war, or war that seeks the liberation of the dominator, as could be the case were the revolution a populist revolution led by the hordes of the U.S. tea party or by the Islamic fundamentalists? Or is revolution simply the foreseeable result of a development of productive forces in the biopolitical economy, at the time of the total subsumption of life into capital? The question is not new. To read Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels’s “Communist Manifesto” is already to ask that question, where a lot more than a possible response to the conditions of constitution and overcoming of modernity lies. That the “Communist Manifesto” may itself presuppose a productionist or polemological primary orientation is important only to the extent one considers the previous question regarding an exit from capitalism important. But—do we know whether capitalism is primarily a question of production or a question of war?

In his seminar “Society Must Be Defended,” Michel Foucault says that the end of the politico-juridical dispositif of sovereignty theory marks the beginning of modernity in the transition toward a historical conception that privileges an ontology of war. It is not easy to determine how far Foucault wanted to go—things are rather tentative in those seminars that he was not thinking of publishing directly. Foucault analyzes the notion of war in modernity against sovereignty theory, and we know that he finds in the responses to the political situation of seventeenth-century Britain, not just the most remarkable and exhaustive formulation of sovereignty theory (in Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan*), but also the practical beginnings of an ontologico-political alternative based on war as the real engine of political existence. This ontologico-political development, Foucault thinks, will be-
come central for the constitution of modernity, that is, of the second modernity, the modernity whose conventional beginning dates back to the second half of the eighteenth century. Although Foucault makes no explicit reference to the “Communist Manifesto,” it is obvious that its initial sentence (after the famous exordium about ghosts and Europe), that is, “The history of all society up to now is the history of class struggles,” marks the seminar. The sentence resounds through it, and it is a sentence that cannot be made compatible with sovereignty theory. It is the sentence that would make the 1848 Marx-Engels text one of the central texts of political modernity. The “Manifesto” has a performative dimension insofar as it does what it says, that is, as it participates in the struggle it announces, and in that sense it is within the region of experience that Marx’s 1845 eleventh thesis “On Feuerbach” opens up: “The philosophers have only interpreted the world in different ways; the point is to change it.”

All history is the history of class struggle: “Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guildmaster and journeyman, in short, oppressor and oppressed stood in continual conflict with one another, conducting an unbroken, now hidden, now open struggle, a struggle that finished each time with a revolutionary transformation of society as a whole, or with the common ruin of the contending classes.” There has always been war. Sometimes the real situation is hidden, and there is an appearance of peace; sometimes the situation is open, and what is apparent is war. But open or hidden war, not peace, defines the state of things, and that is so not now or yesterday but through history. Or at least through history “up to now,” as Marx and Engels say.

If war is, in modernity, the name of being, then politics is effectively a continuation of war, in the Foucauldian phrase that inverts von Clausewitz, and the end of politics is either to win the war or to keep on winning it, that is, to hold on to the benefits of victory. That means above all to keep the situation of domination of the enemy open as a situation of domination. When one says, “the history of all hitherto existing society up to now is the history of class struggles” from a militant position such as that of the “Manifesto,” one would seem to seek the place of victory, to occupy the position of the victor. But Marx and Engels never say that the proletariat must permanently assume a position as the oppressing class—that the proletariat must aim to keep a situation of endless domination open. “Let us win the war” means “let us make the enemy lose it.” To have the enemy lose means that the enemy will be made to pay the consequences of having lost. Or not?
Can Marx and Engels be saying that the proletariat as the universal class, as the class whose historical function is to rush and accomplish the end of class division, must win the last of the wars, that is, the war whose real result will be the very end of war, and the end of the paradigm of war? “Up to now” we have only had war, my friends, but if we win this war, then we will be in a position to promise that there will be no further wars. My friends, there will be no enemies anymore. Or at least there will be no internal enemies, until the time when we take victory in the war to its properly universal and interplanetary stage.

But the promise of the end of war by the winner of the war is always everywhere the announcement of the eternity of victory, hence inevitably the announcement of the eternity of war. The obligation—a war obligation, or better, an obligation of defeat, the price of defeat—to consider the eternal enemy an eternal friend is a heavy one. Perhaps there is no worse slavery: it is the inquisitorial obligation par excellence. What is at stake here? Can we rescue real meaning from this apparent contradiction? In Foucault’s terms, to insist that the winner must be a winner forever, must become the unconditional sovereign and lord of all discourse, would seem to be a relapse into sovereignty theory. But Negri and Hardt call that a false problem, to the very extent that biopolitical economy will win, not through war, rather through the unconditional liberation of life from the chains of an inoperative and inefficient capitalism, from the ruins of capital. Class struggle will always have been a mirage, or rather: if there was struggle, it ended when one of the parts defeated itself, so now we only have to welcome the orphaned and exhausted soldiers that are surrendering. The resolution of war will not have been bellic. Could it be understood as an exception to war? Strange tropology.

Foucault says that war is, in modernity, that is, for instance, for Marxism, the very name of being, that war is ontological ground, and that politics is only the continuation of war. But if war is ontological ground, then politics cannot stop war, since politics could not transcend its own ontological conditions. Is the “Communist Manifesto,” as Foucault would seem to indicate, a polemology? Is there an identification of war and being in Marxist philosophy? Is there one in the Hegelian philosophy from which Marxism derives? If the “Communist Manifesto” posited the identification of war and being, then it would have to account for its own claim that communism is an exception to war:

Political power in its true sense is the organised power of one class for oppressing another. If the proletariat necessarily unites as a class in its
struggle against the bourgeoisie, makes itself into a ruling class through revolution, and as a ruling class forcibly transforms the old relations of production, then it will transform, along with these relations of production, the underlying conditions for class conflict and for classes in general, hence its own supremacy as a class. In place of the old bourgeois society with its classes and class conflicts there will be an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.8

“A world to win” implies “the end of class conflict,” and that is the direct consequence of proletariat domination, it is claimed.9 It would be a domination that looks for its self-annihilation as such, for the termination of its character as domination. To bring the class conflict to an end is to accomplish the eternity of the ontological exception. If all social history is the history of class struggle, then the history that initiates the triumph of the proletariat revolution is the history of an exception—the ontological exception of communist peace. But all exception is exceptional and cannot affect the rule it interrupts. Is it possible that communism or, now, neocommunism may confirm, rather than belie, as an exception to it, the thesis of the ontological priority of war?

One could say that this kind of reasoning was rejected by Marx avant la lettre a few years before writing the “Manifesto,” that is, in 1845, at the time of his study of Feuerbach, when he was trying to establish his own notion of materialism against the Hegelian left. I will quote three of the other theses on Feuerbach. In the second thesis we read, “The question whether human thinking attains objective truth is not a question of theory but a practical question. It is in practice that man must prove the truth, the actuality and power, the subjective aspect and validity of his thinking. Argument about the actuality or non-actuality of thinking, where thinking is taken in isolation from practice, is a purely scholastic question.” In the eighth thesis: “All social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory in the direction of mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice.” And in the tenth: “The standpoint of the old materialism is bourgeois society; the standpoint of the new is human society or social humanity.”10

They are fighting words, and they break with the philosophical tradition, not just with its Hegelian avatar. The young Marx wants to change the world, because only practice is a measure of truth. There is nothing beyond practice; there is no truth but practical truth when one abandons the
bourgeois position and embraces the perspective of general human society or social humanity, which is, as the sixth thesis reminds us, the perspective of the essence of man himself, not dependent upon “isolated individuals” but rather upon “the ensemble of social relations.” The abandonment of the bourgeois position and the adoption of a new materialism, a materialism not of matter but of practice, is the inversion of Hegelian philosophy, the affirmation of a new metaphysical or postmetaphysical perspective, in philosophy and against philosophy. It may also be the site from where it becomes possible to say “all history up to now . . .” In other words, there is a before and an after. “Up to now” does not mean always up to now; that is, it is not up to now for us. Rather, Marx and Engels want to indicate the time of writing, which is the now of the political performativity of the “Manifesto.” The “Manifesto,” upon being published, had to open a “from now on” where history would no longer be measured by theoretical mysticisms. The hour of practice was upon us.

The contradiction referred to above—how is it possible to affirm the ontological priority of war, the condition of reality of war, and at the same time affirm the suspension of war in the time to come, as if the time to come could only be understood through the figure of the exception, of interruption, of an absolute **novum**?—could therefore be kept apart from the theses on the new practical materialism. If only practice is a condition of truth, then there is no ontological priority of war: there is only the historical knowledge that there has always been war up to now, and the imaginary projection of a new structure of the human, where the point of view of totality would impose a permanent end of the conflict. No more war, once the proletariat triumphs as the universal class; or the biopolitical multitude; or Alain Badiou’s philosophical Idea, since for Badiou “communism is the only Idea worthy of a philosopher.”

The “Manifesto” includes a formulation that would be almost literally repeated in the preface to “A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy,” which gives it somehow a special status. The “Manifesto” says, “At a certain level of development of these means of production and trade, the relations in which feudal society produced and exchanged, the feudal organization of agriculture and small-scale manufacture, in a word feudal property relations, no longer corresponded to the forces of production already developed. They impeded production instead of advancing it. They became just so many fetters. They had to be sprung open, and they were sprung open”; and the “Contribution,” “At a certain level of their development the material
productive forces of society come into contradiction with the already existing relations of production, or in what is merely a legal expression for this, with the property relations within which they had previously functioned. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then an epoch of social revolution commences.”

No doubt these paragraphs are at the basis of contemporary neocommunist theorizations, from Negri and Hardt to Slavoj Žižek and Badiou. They initiate a possible alternative to the postulation of the ontological priority of war. They do not say “there is war, and within it there is production” but rather “there is production, and therefore there is war.” War is a product of the development of productive forces at a point when the old relations of production have become fetters. There is war not because there can be war but because there must be war—because practice imposes a movement, and that movement imposes the revolutionary transformation of society and permanent change in the class structure. Marx repeatedly affirms the priority of production (see the Grundrisse, and of course Capital), but we have not yet properly understood the relation between production and war. Is class struggle a mere historical derivation from production and the relations of production? Or is it the case, as Foucault would seem to propose, that production is already the image and manifestation of war?

The preface to “A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy” continues with another famous passage:

Humanity only sets itself such problems as it can solve, for on careful consideration one always finds that the problems themselves only arise where the material conditions of their solution are known to be on hand or at least in the process of development. In broad outline Asiatic, ancient, feudal, and modern bourgeois modes of production can be designated as progressive epochs in the economic development of society. Bourgeois relations of production are the last antagonistic form of the social process of production, antagonistic not in the sense of individual antagonism, rather of an antagonism growing out of the conditions of life in society for individuals, but at the same time the productive forces developing in the womb of bourgeois society create the material conditions for the resolution of this antagonism. With that social formation the pre-history of human society draws to a close.

Social antagonism, says Marx in 1859 but in a way that I would consider consistent with his position in 1848, belongs to the prehistory of that so-
cial humanity that constitutes the very essence of man according to “On Feuerbach.” But if war belongs to prehistory, then there is no ontological priority of war. The social antagonism that pervades the known history of the modes of production is not foundational. It rather belongs to the avatars of production itself, and it constitutes in the last instance something like a ruse of practical reason. From the perspective of the inversion of Hegelian philosophy, of the new materialism, of the new practice, it is possible to affirm that the dictatorship of the proletariat, insofar as it would make it impossible that “labor can . . . be turned into capital, money, rent, in short, into a monopolizable power in society, i.e. from the moment that personal property can no longer be turned into bourgeois property,” would accomplish the suppression of “power to subjugate the labour of others.” The history of production, in other words, will impose a political development whose final result will be the end of politics as war. If communism begins the history of social humanity or human society properly so called, that is so precisely to the extent that communism operates a break with society up to now in its character as class conflict, war. Communism is an exception to war, but not an exception that maintains the rule of war; rather an exception that liquidates its character as grounding and opens another history: “history.” For communism, war is no longer part of history, but production is. And it is also production that has always already organized the war economy in communist prehistory.

What then about Foucault’s thesis regarding the modern substitution of an ontology of war for the politico-juridical dispositif of sovereignty? Is Foucault simply wrong? Or does it remain possible to read Hegelian-Marxist dialectics in the light of an ontology of war after all? We can invoke a passage from a very late seminar (1973) taught by Martin Heidegger in Zähringen. Heidegger tells a few students that Marxian thought is part and parcel of the technological Ge-Stell precisely because it never leaves the horizon of production, or because it accepts production as the very horizon of the human. The transcribed notes say,

Heidegger opens the volume of Marx’s Early Writings and reads the following sentence, taken from the “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right”: “To be radical is to grasp the root of the matter. But for man man is the root himself.” Marxism as a whole rests upon this thesis, Heidegger explains. Indeed, Marxism thinks on the basis of production: social production of society (society produces itself) and
the self-production of the human being as a social being. Thinking in this manner, Marxism is indeed the thought of today, where the self-production of man and society plainly prevails.\textsuperscript{17}

Heidegger contra Foucault perhaps, regarding Marx and Marxism.

Foucault says: war. And Heidegger says: production. The self-production of the multitude is of course the only prevailing idea in the Negri-Hardt trilogy—a trilogy set against Heidegger, who obsessively appears as the real theoretical enemy or as the common denominator of all real theoretical enemies. This is perhaps so. In any case, Negri and Hardt, from the immanent productionism and self-productionism of the biopolitical forces of real and total subsumption, never stop making war, not so much on the empire, but certainly on Heidegger and the Heidegerian left. From the latter perspective, can self-productionism exist? Is production not essentially heteroproduction? This is the question I would like to rehearse by focusing on Jacques Rancière’s meditation on the work of Jacques Derrida. It is a question about the ground of political practice today. The two main answers we seem to have are: yes, politics is the celebration and administration of the forces of production, and everything depends on understanding production in the right way and anticipating its future; or, politics is precisely always already an interruption of production, a refusal to recognize the priority of production, and a restitution of the priority of conflict. It would seem that there is a choice to be made, although the choice may well be to undo the alternative.

The Demotic Principle

Rancière understands very well that the problem of total or absolute democracy is far from being a matter of allowing the forces of total or absolute democracy to triumph. For him politics is always a polemical field, without stability, where every accomplishment can be reversed and every defeat is temporal. Politics is always at the mercy of the police, although the police can indeed suffer political defeat.

In his essay “Should Democracy Come? Ethics and Politics in Derrida,” Rancière points out that the very concept of democracy lives in radical instability, not because those who govern are scoundrels, although that too, but rather because there is a difference inherent to democracy itself that makes it constitutively incapable of self-accomplishment as a form of government. So, insofar as democracy must be understood as “an excess with respect
to any form of government,” the postulation of democracy as absolute, as *imperium absolutum* in the Spinozian formulation, would make no sense. But such nonsense of democracy should not take us toward its abandonment in the name of any kind of ethical purity. The ethicization of democracy is Rancière’s old warhorse, and the source of almost every one of his theoretical critiques. For Rancière democracy, as a political term, must come under a strictly political rationality, even if such a rationality is far from being simple. Giving up democratic politicality in the name of ethical reason, of any ethical reason, is not just philosophically objectionable but, more importantly, it is politically objectionable. And such a problem is what seems to be at stake, for Rancière himself, in his confrontation with the thought of Jacques Derrida. The fundamental question Rancière asks is whether deconstruction can define a political thought, understood as “a thinking of the specificity of politics.”

For Rancière, the very possibility of democracy implies giving up any principle of legitimation, that is, any form of *arche*. The citizen in an ostensibly democratic regime, to the extent that she can indifferently participate in governing or in being governed, cancels beforehand any governmental *arche*. *Demos* is fundamentally and primarily the a-principal principle of indifferention—an an-arabic principle that dis-joints, that is, joins disjunctively, the notions of power and *demos*. There is no political community without such a disjunction: there can be politics only if there is indifferention in the principle of power, which means that the only qualification to exercise power is not to have any qualification. And it goes without saying then that only democratic politics is politics as opposed to principial domination. The part of those who have no part, to use the famous formulation of *Disagreements*, is not the subaltern remainder, it is not the oppressed or the victim, and it is not, primarily, any identitarian position whatsoever, but it is rather the very indifferention regarding any principle of calculation or count. The problem is that, in virtue of its indifferention regarding calculation, the part of no part always tends to be left outside the count, to be discounted. The discounting agent is of course what Rancière calls the police. Against the police, in every case, there is the indifferenting affirmation, the negation of police negation—and such an affirmation in double negation is politics itself in its constituent character. It is always a source of dissensus, and it always therefore breaks apart and rends asunder the calculus of the police. Hence its always productively aesthetic character: it opens new sensoriums and it establishes new regimes of the visible.
For Rancière, however, there would be nothing in Derrida that might allow us to suppose he thinks of politics as power of the *demos*, as the power of the an-archic principle of indifferentionation. Rancière says, “[Derrida’s] democracy is a democracy without demos. What is absent in his perspective on politics is the idea of the political subject, of political capacity.” Rancière thinks that, if democracy in Derrida is a democracy minus the *demos*, it is because Derrida refuses or is incapable of thematizing the idea of a subject of the political. That there is no full subject of the political means that no one can, according to Rancière on Derrida, take the demotic role upon herself and say, “I speak and act as if I, qualified by my unqualifications, were the very name of the people, the very name of the constitutive principle of democratic action.” This hinders the process of counterhegemonic convergence. There is no subject of politics in Derrida, Rancière says, because there is a fundamental ethicization of the political in their work according to which the sovereign is always the other, the host that, upon unconditionally imposing the law of otherness, excludes the demand of reciprocity from the realm of the possible, the demand of substitutability, and thus destroys the perspective of indifferentionationation that is essential to a democratic politics. Derrida would substitute aporia for dissensus, where “aporia means that there can be no possibility of agreement in the practice of disagreement . . . that there can be no substitution of the whole by the part, that no subject can perform the equivalency between sameness and otherness.” Finally, for Rancière, it is not just that Derrida has no concept of the specificity of the political: it is rather that he is guilty of evacuating the very possibility of a political practice in democracy. Derrida may very well sustain the notion of a radical priority of war over production in politics, as Rancière himself does. But, for Rancière, Derrida would have made it impossible to win any political war on the side of democracy: the forces of democracy mire themselves, or are mired by deconstruction, in aporia, while the work of the police continues unperturbed. Such is the heart of Rancière’s argument against Derrida. From there he extracts consequences that I believe are contaminated by a basic misunderstanding regarding deconstruction—and one from which Derrida tried to take some distance every time he spoke about the thought of Emmanuel Levinas. But the ghost of Levinas persistently haunts Derrida’s work for Rancière, for Badiou, for Žižek, and for all contemporary neo- or post-Althusserianism. It does not allow Derrida’s work to speak in its own name. It is peculiar that for a certain segment of the contemporary theoretical left,
which accuses Derrida of opposing demotic or communist substitutability, Levinas and Derrida are perfectly substitutable. But there is a certain intention in this misunderstanding. Before going into it I will attempt to tell another story that will prepare a bridge between the two main parts of this essay. Spinoza’s dream, as we shall see, tells a story of production and war that might mediate a thought of political democracy beyond Rancière’s critique of Derrida, through the presentation of heteroproduction as the basis of political practice.

The Black and Scabby Brazilian

In a letter dated July 20, 1664, Baruch Spinoza replies to his friend Peter Balling—a man traumatized by the recent death of his young son. Spinoza lives in Rhynsburg at the time, and Balling is one of his contacts with the quasi-communist community of mutual friends in Amsterdam. Balling has apparently told Spinoza in some previous letter or conversation that he heard or thought he heard strange lamentations and wailing before the death of his son, coming from nowhere visible, and that they seemed to portend the death of his son, which occurred shortly thereafter. Spinoza tries to offer some consolation, but he does it in an awkward and apparently illogical manner. Spinoza says that it is perfectly possible that some dreams caused by the imagination can be portents of some proximate event, particularly if there is some previous intimate relation between the two subjects of the dream, in this case father and son. They were of course close, since “the soul of the father must . . . participate in the ideal essence of his son, and in its affections and in what it follows therefrom.” Spinoza also tells Balling, and this is what might be a little grating vis-à-vis the rest, that he himself had a disturbing dream where a “black and scabby Brazilian whom I had never seen before” showed up. Spinoza says that such a dream might have had purely physical causes, but that it represented just a kind of un consequential delirium, with no foretelling power: “Your case was an omen while mine was not.” Spinoza’s was merely caused by his indisposition: “We find by experience that . . . those whose blood is thick imagine nothing but quarrels, troubles, murders and things of that sort.” But there is no prediction there—only, we understand Spinoza to say, although he does not say it, more of the same; I am that way, always dealing with those things.

Spinoza does not interpret his own dream; he merely tells of it. He gives it to his friend, to my mind carried away by the generous desire to com-
fort, to compensate with his own acknowledgment of private trauma for his friend’s trauma. In 1957 Lewis Feuer published an interesting essay where he attempted to psychoanalyze Spinoza’s dream. For Feuer, I summarize, the “black and scabby Brazilian” was no other than Henrique Diaz, a slave of the Dutch in Pernambuco who successfully led an insurrection of the Portuguese and Brazilian population of the colony that ended in the departure of the Dutch in 1654. One of those forced to leave Pernambuco was Rabbi Isaac de Fonseca Aboab, who would soon become rabbi in the Amsterdam synagogue and who, as such, would have direct responsibility for the process and then the decree of excommunication against the young Spinoza issued on July 25, 1656. For Feuer we should not fool ourselves: in spite of Spinoza’s lifelong dissimulation, the event of excommunication was traumatic and provoked a long-lasting political passion having to do with hatred and resentment, perhaps involuntary but nevertheless no less real. One of the examples Feuer quotes: Johannes Colerus, Spinoza’s early biographer, recounts how Spinoza took pleasure in drawing portraits, and among them, insistently, the portrait of the anti-Spanish Neapolitan revolutionary leader Massaniello. But Colerus adds that, in the drawing, Massaniello’s face was really Spinoza’s. Spinoza fantasized through his portraits about becoming the leader of a popular insurrection, about being the courageous avenger.

In my opinion Feuer destroys his own fascinating story when he finally interprets the presence of the black and scabby Brazilian in the following manner: “The figure of the Negro terrorist, the spectre which Rabbi Aboab had described to the Amsterdam Jews, came to menace Spinoza in his dream. He was the symbol of all the hostile forces that await a Jew in the external world, all the forces of hatred, and Spinoza, excommunicate, would have to deal with them alone. The Negro Terrorist was the embodiment of all the curses of the world’s powers which Rabbi Aboab had summoned up against him.”26 In my opinion—there is some personal experience here as well—if Henrique Diaz was truly the historical figure conjured up by Spinoza’s oneiric delirium, it was not because Diaz embodied the evils of the world. Rather, Diaz came up because he could have been the exterminator of Aboab, the excommunicating and sovereign rabbi—sovereign because excommunicating—that harmed Spinoza’s life. That black and scabby fellow, a Brazilian, came through as an exterminating angel, alas only potential, an explosion of desire, not the devil that frightens.

Hence Spinoza’s letter, in its short phenomenology of trauma, tells a story of production and war. His friend Balling’s trauma was a trauma of produc-
tion, compensated or symptomatized by the productive effort of an imagi-
nation that was captured by the love of a father for his son, as a father always
already involved in the essence of his son, in helping him continue on his
conatus essendi, all too prematurely interrupted. But Spinoza’s own trauma
is an improdutive trauma, a trauma involving “quarrels, troubles, murder,”
which is the retrospective expression of a proleptic desire for revenge and
extermination that must have a lot to do with the death of the sovereign,
with the destruction of the figure of the sovereign, thus with the separation
of the sovereign from the subordinate. Both are plausible traumas; both are
figures of the human. The political problem has to do with the arbitrary,
perhaps always already hypocritical denial of the massive facticity of the sec-
ond. If Spinoza’s thought and personality are fully oriented toward gaining
the right to joy, it is because they fight a previous melancholy injury, not a
natural one, but rather one caused by an act of war between men. From this
perspective, Spinoza’s philosophy is not self-production, but fundamentally
heteroproduction. Not even the subject of the conatus self-constitutes—
perseverance is always compensatory and retrospective.

This is why Negri and Hardt are much mistaken when, in the same pages
of Commonwealth quoted earlier, they bring up Spinoza’s Brazilian as a mon-
der of modern racism, a Caliban that can in his representational inversion
be offered as the emblem of the joyful body of a liberated humanity—fully
nondialectical, fully productive. But if Spinoza’s Brazilian is a true mon-
der of imagination, his liberating benevolence is at the service of Spinoza’s
posttraumatic hatred, and in no way can it be read in the pious key that
Negri and Hardt systematically privilege throughout their book. Spinoza’s
Brazilian is not a Caliban whose ugliness must be tolerated in virtue of the
many benefits he procures for his master, and still less the figure of a self-
liberating exodus: it is simply the embodiment of the desired promise of a
will to take revenge, hence the heteroprodutive dimension of political prac-
tice as a struggle for freedom. But revenge will bring no resolution: nothing
political will have been gained at the end of it.

Radical Atheism

In the last instance that is what is at stake, in my opinion, in the post-
Althusserian or neocommunist conspiracy against Derrida. Derrida destroys
the pious key for a reading of history, not from the side of ethics; rather from
a radical atheism, in Martin Hägglund’s expression, that will allow for no
resolution. But that does not amount to a negation of politics. It is rather the denial of the negation of politics that occurs through the pretension that, once the subject of democracy—whether demotic or despotic, democratic or communist, subaltern or hegemonic—speaks or performs her Idea, her word is good once and for all and must be unconditionally respected, as if the new regime of the visible, the new aesthetic sensorium were written in stone as a net gain and an uncontrovertible improvement for all future. It is not like that. One could say that it never is, but then one can’t be certain. The demotic subject irrupts, and she can be good or not, for a time or for no time, but not eternally. Keeping that knowledge in permanent reserve is the atheist and undecidable force (atheist because undecidable, against all false fidelities and hypocritical infinities) that destabilizes the very possibility of a permanent state of democratic redemption and forces democracy to subsist and to insist always at the mercy of its heteroaffection. If the object of demotic irruption is always unstable, even suspect, certainly unreliable for Derrida, politics is therefore not foreclosed: that is where politics effectively begins, pace Rancière, for whom self-production is still the primary enabler of class war.

They misunderstand the meaning of unconditional hospitality, and they misunderstand the notion that the other or otherness must arrive and cannot not arrive. If there is unconditional hospitality it is because it cannot be helped, given our mortal opening to time and the world, which impose their own laws. The otherness of the other is not received through unconditional hospitality with open arms; rather it is received with fear and trembling, with doubt and reticence, if also with curiosity and anticipation. The otherness of the other very much includes the possibility that the other may be a scoundrel—but we can’t close ourselves off beforehand to that danger and that risk any more than we can afford to ignore it. Indeed, that the other is a scoundrel is the very condition of political action as well as of political counteraction.

That hospitality is unconditional reflects that double difficulty, which is also an awareness of unpredictability, hence a call to political prudence. We cannot but be unconditionally open to the word or the presence of the other, because it is a condition of life even though it is also a condition of death. In other words, there is no truth of the political, there is nothing assured beforehand, there is only a decision in every case, and that decision is always necessarily a partially passive decision. Its conditions of possibility—temporality, mortal desire, affect—are of course also conditions of impos-
sibility, because if the decision seeks justice, the guarantees that justice can happen are merely aleatory, always uncertain, and are not given beforehand, or even after the fact, since posteriority is endless. Nobody ever knows anything (except perhaps for the neocommunists). But, on the other hand, the decision may seek justice, even though it can be mistaken in and through its very will to justice. Some decisions in the name of uncertain justice open up the space of politics. Their ground is an excess regarding any form of government, as Rancière suggests, and that excess, also for Derrida, is, not the name, rather the effective confirmation that there is a power of anyone, an option for an-archic irruption, groundless and without guarantees, which is the very heart of democracy.

That is why democracy is always to come: because it can never be captured into presence. The subject, or whatever may represent it, is not responsible out of itself, does not self-produce, which of course does not exempt it from responsibility, and the other, or otherness, does not come from any responsible position (it is not itself exempted from responsibility, but saying so is ethics not politics). Any visitation can always turn into an undesirable one: any visit can be a bad visit—hence Spinoza not knowing what to do with his Brazilian exterminating angel and preferring to distract him away from his delirium. And this is also why it is absurd to posit a political horizon beyond conflict if not war, as if the total subsumption of life into production, that is, the identification of life and productive capacity, could itself liberate us from the unconditional: this is an anthropotechnic dream. In self-production, the human produces the finally human like a carpenter produces a table, liberating it from its unproductive imperfections. But that idea is pure productionism—in the beginning was production, says Marx, and that perhaps authorizes us to think that production is also at the end. Positing that production, radicalized into a self-constituting self-production, without heteronomic residue, saves and liberates is messianic theology, not democracy. Granted, it is not Rancière who does that: for him production is simply another life context, and it opens, here and there, and given certain conditions, a new sensorial regime, and it widens the quality of the visible.

Why, then, does Rancière accuse Derrida of proposing a messianic theology? He ends his essay with a rhetorical question: “Would it thus not be the case that Derrida, in order to oppose an alleged dependency of politics on theology, has to make it dependent on another theology?” The analysis that precedes the question has tried to show that, for Derrida, democracy “cannot be presented, even in the dissensual figure of the demos,” because the
supplement to democracy that Derrida calls for condemns it to a heteronomy without relief or respite.\textsuperscript{29} Justice in Derrida would be purely heteronomous. As in Levinas. It is here that Rancière establishes a differentiation between a first “ethical turn” that would be proper to Levinas and the later Jean-François Lyotard, whose essential gesture would be, according to Rancière, to subordinate democracy to divinity and thus destroy it, and a “second turn in the conceptualization of otherness,” the properly Derridean one, derived from a Levinasian tropology but able to resend the thought of God to a heterogeneous whatever, and to go from the otherness of God to the otherness of whatever other.\textsuperscript{30}

Rancière’s question about Derrida’s theology must be answered negatively. No, Derrida does not make politics dependent on theology any more than he makes politics dependent on any law of mortal otherness. The fundamental problem of deconstruction is the impossibility of setting stable horizons for the grounding of life, beyond all ethics and beyond all politics. But deconstruction does not create such a problem: it only sees that it exists, and thinks from it. Politics is generated, in its constitutive specificity, in the conflict between a hospitality of invitation and a hospitality of visitation, which Derrida discusses in several texts.\textsuperscript{31} The visitor, the friend or the stranger, does not impose his law, only his presence, but one never knows where trouble will appear. The guest, stranger or friend, simply enters. Without an invitation or a visit nothing would ever happen—there would be no contact among human monads. Because there is contact there is conflict and there is the inevitability of conflict. Unconditional hospitality is what Hägglund calls the “nonethical opening of ethics,”\textsuperscript{32} and I would like to call the indifferentiated condition of political conflict, that is, of politics, of democratic politics, not only demotic irruption, as in Rancière, but rather also the conflictive and conflicting reception of demotic irruption.\textsuperscript{32} There is no prescriptive normativity to know how to deal with bad visits, or with good ones. For Hägglund, “the law of unconditional hospitality does not provide a rule or a norm for how one should act in relation to the other, but requires one to make precarious decisions from time to time.”\textsuperscript{33}

No doubt Rancière’s conception of the political is not limited to understanding demotic irruption. The demotic subject that wants to be counted can also be understood as a good or a bad visit, in the same way that the police may always come into the home, for good and for evil. When suddenly the uncounted one counts, a new guest, or when one declares, since it is the time, that one will come to visit, it is then that we must decide, and when
others decide for us without permission, like Spinoza did with his uncanny guest, *cujusdam nigri atque brasiliani*, to erase him or us from the visible or to demand or offer shelter in negotiation. That is the class struggle, even today, and the mortal opening of politics. We can understand it ethically or religiously if we so choose; we can call it biopolitics or communism; we can relate in any of those manners with the passive need for action, but it is not necessary. The decision to do it is itself an ethical or merely opportunistic decision, and even so it carries certain risks, but not to do it carries risks as well. Nothing is necessary except for the facticity of a situation that equalizes every one and by so doing makes democracy precarious but inevitable. At the end Rancière is not as distant from Derrida as he would ostensibly want to be.

**Notes**

12. Douzinas and Žižek, *The Idea of Communism*, ix. Badiou has developed a strong notion of Idea as central to political practice in his *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*.
14. On neocommunism, see Douzinas and Žižek, *The Idea of Communism*; see in particular Badiou’s contribution to Agamben’s volume *Democracy*, where communism is explicitly set up against democracy (Badiou, “The Democratic Emblem”); the most succinct version of Žižek’s neocommunism is to be found in his *First as Tragedy*.
20. The notion of an-archic principle is given a particularly fascinating treatment
in Schürmann, *Heidegger on Being and Acting*, in ways whose connection with the Rancièrian use remain to be determined. Compare also Schürmann’s *Broken Hegemonies*; and Gerard Granel’s commentary on Schürmann, “Untameable Singularities.”

23 The two most significant engagements are Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics,” and *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, but there are others.
30 Rancière, “Should Democracy Come?,” 284–85. It is even doubtful that Levinas’s politics can be derived from a theology. See in particular Levinas, “Au-delà de l’état dans l’état,” for a radical defense of democracy as hatred of tyranny quite independent of any theological connotations.
31 On this see Hägglund, *Radical Atheism*, 222n26. Hägglund’s book is an essential reference for these topics, and I have borrowed extensively from his reading.
33 Hägglund, *Radical Atheism*, 105.