

On the Commons

This month, Harvard University Press unveils *Commonwealth*, the latest book by **Michael Hardt** and **Antonio Negri**, whose *Empire* (2000) and *Multitude* (2004) have, arguably, been the dominant works of political philosophy of the new century.

In the pages that follow, *Artforum* presents two extended excerpts from the much-anticipated final volume of the Empire trilogy in advance of its arrival in bookstores. Curator **Okwui Enwezor** sets the stage, with a discussion of Hardt and Negri's profound if diffuse impact on artistic practice and on the art world more broadly.

The Water Celebration on Boston Common, October 25, 1848.
Lithograph by P. Hyman and David Bigelow, United States National
Archives and Records Administration.

Thomas Hirschhorn, *Flugplatz Welt/World Airport*, 1999, mixed media. Installation view, Renaissance Society, Chicago, 2000.



Reckoning with Empire

OKWUI ENWEZOR

THE WORLD IS FULL OF ALL SORTS OF DICTATORSHIPS, sovereign entities accountable only to their own rules and united by extreme structures of political and social violence. The most formidable, however, is the one whose dimensions are no longer limited by the old boundaries of the nation-state, but which instead—since they are mainly organized by global capitalism, with globalization serving as their fountainhead—span and exceed such territorial limits in a way unparalleled in history. In 2000, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's book *Empire* offered the first thorough analysis of this novel type of deterritorialized rule and sovereign power; the authors' goal was nothing less than to unmask it and lay bare its prominent features for a new millennium. And yet, appearing at the beginning of the twenty-first century—long after the tumultuous twentieth century had effectively come to an end, with the collapse of the last global empire, the Soviet Union—*Empire* was nonetheless imbued with a sense and mood of taking stock, of reflecting on the aftermath.

According to Hardt and Negri, Empire—the name they gave to this Leviathan rising above every other economic and political form—was a relatively benign dictatorship that radically revised the idea of sovereignty. The tumbling of the Soviet empire, the authors said, might very well have been the end of old-style European imperialism, whose centralized power and awesome machineries of colonialism had regularly been unleashed against subject lands. And no sooner was this demise proclaimed than a “New World Order,” far-reaching in territorial ambition (and more encompassing), reared up in its place; this New World Order, by virtue of its linkage to globalization, opened a path to a gargantuan sovereignty whose formlessness was exactly in proportion to its capacity for totalization and mastery over vast domains of contemporary life. This sovereignty was a juridical abstraction based on the rule of law, democracy, and free-market capitalism; at its core was the authoritarian machinery of capital, and its features were omnipresent. Indeed, as delineated by Hardt and Negri—seeking as they were to quiet pervasive enthusiasm for globalization—this sovereignty was a grotesque colossus “in which the economic, the political,

and the cultural increasingly overlap and invest one another.”¹ In bursts of elegant, manifesto-like prose, the duo described the influence of such capricious systems on shifts in modern subjectivities and social formations:

In contrast to imperialism, Empire establishes no territorial center of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers. It is a *decentered* and *detrterritorializing* apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers. Empire manages hybrid identities, flexible hierarchies, and plural exchanges through modulating networks of command.²

The effect of such thinking on contemporary artistic practice is hard to quantify in terms of any direct correlation between the hypothesis Hardt and Negri elaborated and specific works of art. However, it was quite clear, given the sudden proliferation of artistic collectives early in this decade, that vestiges of the authors' theorizations were being absorbed into numerous counterpractices. In my view, following the endeavors of individuals such as Sam Durant, Thomas Hirschhorn, Alfredo Jaar, Multiplicity, and Raqs Media Collective—artists as different in their critical stances as in their conceptual political dispositions—one would have, in those days, immediately thought them sympathetic to the overarching critique of globalization offered in *Empire*. For example, Hirschhorn's projects during and since the late '90s—such as *Flugplatz Welt/ World Airport*, 1999; *Spinoza Monument* (Amsterdam), 1999; *Deleuze Monument* (Avignon, France), 2000; *Bataille Monument* (Kassel), 2002; and *24H Foucault* (Palais de Tokyo, Paris), 2004—have been exemplary of the rigorous critique put forward in Hardt and Negri's writing. *Flugplatz Welt*, a massive installation first shown at the Venice Biennale in 1999 and exhibited the following year at the Renaissance Society in Chicago, is classic Hirschhorn in this regard: an atomized field of images, books, and objects held together with packing tape in a deliberately disorganized, deaestheticized fashion, with the artist's method pointing toward what seems a veritable aesthetic of disaggregation. His monuments, on the other hand, offer a sober counterpoint to *Flugplatz*



Welt by framing the potential for analytic thought to imagine a way out of the morass of unchecked power and its systems of governance. As he has said: "I want my work not to make one think first about art, but rather about something related to other work or life experiences. Laboratory, storage, studio space, yes, I want to use these forms in my work to make spaces for the movement and endlessness of thinking and to provide time for the movement of reflection."³ That each of his monuments is devoted to the work of a philosopher whose trenchant analysis has informed the work of Hardt and Negri reveals the ambition of historical synthesis articulated by Hirschhorn above—and reveals the clear philosophical affinities between him and the authors of *Empire*.

Among the other artists, Raqs Media Collective also bears specific discussion, since its work engenders similarly reflective approaches through the figure of the artist-intellectual—whose preoccupations are here geared less toward any aesthetic regime than toward the initiation of a poesis of ethical engagement. The group's analytic architecture is built up through processes of research, writing, curating, editing, photographing, and documentary filmmaking, all examining the commonplace, its governing, and those devices with which it is invigilated by authority. Art in this way is geared toward the discursive, toward a convening of the commons. For instance, with Sarai, a media research/practice initiative based at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in North Delhi, Raqs has organized a series of urgent inquiries into the idea of open source, dealing with questions of free circulation and access, articulating modalities around the notion of a global commons, arguing for a regime of sharing that will circumvent the reduction (through the fences of copyright) of every thought

The effect of Hardt and Negri's thinking on contemporary artistic practice is hard to quantify in terms of any direct correlation between their hypotheses and specific works of art. However, it was quite clear, given the sudden proliferation of artistic collectives early in this decade, that vestiges of the authors' theorizations were being absorbed into numerous counterpractices.

to the status of commodity. (This argument is, in fact, also put forward by Hardt and Negri in their new book.)

In the context of curatorial practice, *Empire* was also read avidly. If not necessarily for its conclusions, it was surely pored over for its vigorous defense of forms of counter-Empire. A remarkable articulation of such a curatorial position could be observed in the decision by Francesco Bonami, curator of the Fiftieth Venice Biennale in 2003, to convene a diverse group of exhibitions instead of a single grand show. And for my own work, I know, *Empire* had special

resonance: When, on October 25, 1998, I received the improbable but nonetheless exhilarating news of my appointment as the artistic director of Documenta 11, it seemed to me a sign that something in such grand exhibitions—as with the ossified structures of the nation-state—was dying in anticipation of the new. Documenta was then one of the epicenters of the imperial regimes of cultural control; it constituted (along with the old circuitry of the museum institution) a type of cultural sovereignty that brooked little tolerance of the hybrid identities, flexible hierarchies, and plural exchanges to which

Hardt and Negri would gravitate. It belonged to a system that delighted in exclusionary politics and the old claws of aesthetic judgments that had long tortured discrepant canons into dutiful obedience, à la international modernism. And yet the Documenta jury members were here embracing a proposal that revolved around the necessity I perceived for serious curatorial projects to account for the decentered, deterritorialized, diverging logics of contemporary artistic practices (beyond the organized uniformity of monetized production). This Documenta would operate in more than one sphere of cultural activity,

reaching beyond its conventional location in order to grapple with the elsewhere, the unfinished, the yet-to-emerge. As conceived later with my colleagues Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash, and Octavio Zaya, this Documenta would not only extend the temporality of the exhibition frame but also exceed its circumscribed spatial and cultural context by featuring symposia in Berlin, Lagos, New Delhi, Saint Lucia, and Vienna, in addition to Kassel. Of course, these ideas were taking shape before *Empire* was published, but the book's analysis was immediately resonant. In fact, Hardt and Negri would participate in the project's first discussion, "Democracy Unrealized," in Vienna. (Alas, only the former could make it there, since Negri was imprisoned by the Italian state—though he was permitted to take part by satellite linkup.)

Reflecting back now on the idea of a deterritorialized Documenta (which was finally completed in 2002), it becomes even clearer to me just how much the critical acuity of *Empire* pervaded our thinking. And in this regard it bears remarking that we should consider more closely the context in which that volume appeared. The multicultural battles of the 1980s had already made it evident enough that the old sovereignties would not go unchallenged. Resistance to the unilateral power of the United States (in view of unregulated globalization) was also already simmering in street battles from Seattle to Prague to Genoa; indigenous movements across former colonized territories were staking claims to denied rights as well, while, in art, counterpublics were emerging in the form of

deinstitutionalized exhibition models. In offering an attentive, synthetic view of globalization (which had hitherto meant different things in the West, Asia, Africa, and Latin America), the book unsentimentally reckoned with the scars of modernity as they were played out in decolonization movements and in the wars of liberation of the post-world-war world, and it provided a reasoned argument for the insurgencies of this new era.

If the global sphere as imagined by *Empire* almost a decade ago offered a critical ideal for resistance against a global imperium, since then the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the rampant abuse of power, torture, ecological disaster, social inequity, and economic catastrophe have all left their grim imprints on culture—and seem to call for a reassessment of the position of the multitude. The melancholic tone of *Commonwealth* regarding today's state of affairs therefore comes as something of a surprise. But in many ways, this tone seems strategic in its pragmatism, much like the politics of the current American president and his administration. Certainly, on the artistic front, there is a sense of malaise, partly born of shock, partly of disrecognition. My sense is that this moment of interregnum, of delayed response, may be harboring a hatchery from which forms of radical doubt in artistic practice may soon emerge. □

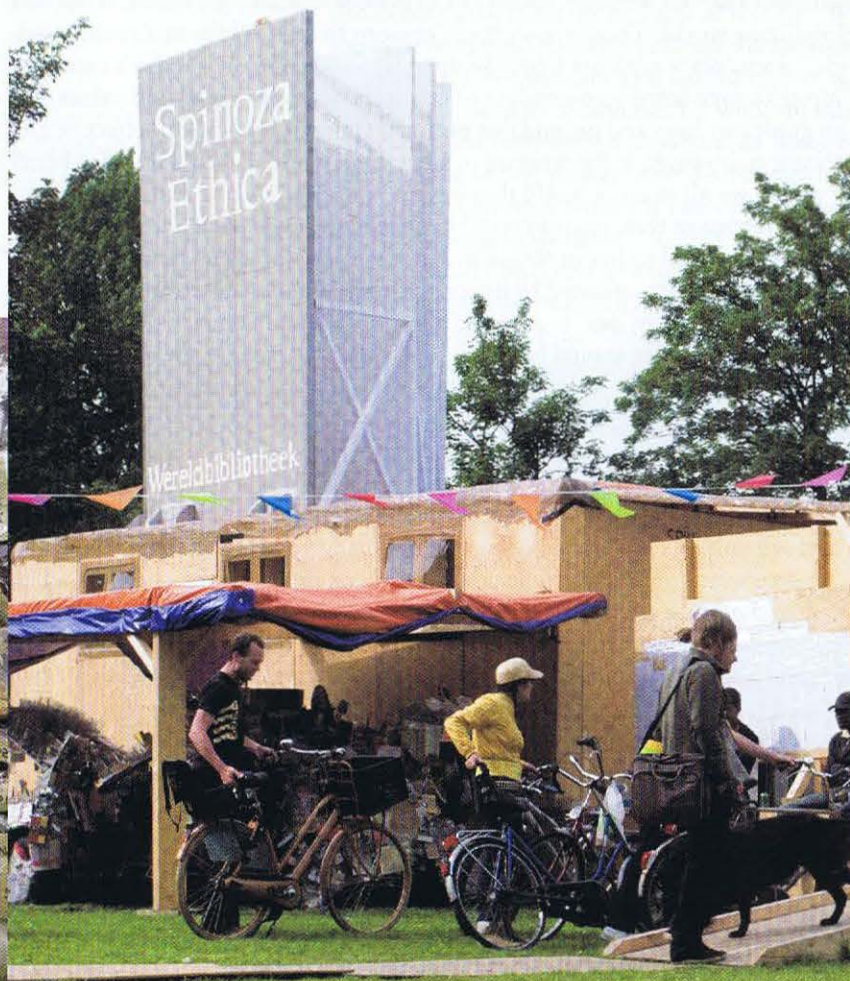
OKWUI ENWEZOR IS A CURATOR AND CRITIC BASED IN NEW YORK.

1. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), xiii.

2. Ibid., xii.

3. Okwui Enwezor and Thomas Hirschhorn, "Interview," in James Rondeau and Susanne Ghez, eds., *Thomas Hirschhorn*, exh. cat. (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2000), 34.

Opposite page, from left: Raqs Media Collective (with Atelier Bow-Wow), *TAS (Architecture for Temporary Autonomous Sarai)*, 2003, portable, multi-use structure made with packing crates, computers, projectors, paper, sound, people. Installation view, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Raqs Media Collective, *Brazen*, 2008, color photograph, 40 x 60". This page: Thomas Hirschhorn, *The Bijlmer Spinoza Festival*, 2009–, mixed media. Installation views, Bijlmer neighborhood, Amsterdam. Photos: De Verdieping.



In most practical political discussions, and even in the realm of political theory, a kind of realism reigns supreme in which the range of possibilities open to us is remarkably narrow. Even in times of crisis, when the flaws of the existing system have been completely revealed, there is strong pressure to continue with more of the same. It should come as no surprise, then, that, in the depths of the economic and financial crisis that began in the fall of 2008, not only were the very people responsible for the collapse in the first place put in charge of fixing it, but the very set of ideas that caused the crisis was now deemed somehow the solution. Those who think outside these narrow bounds are typically dismissed as naive. But what is most necessary in politics today are precisely those powers of creation and imagination that can break through the barriers of this purported realism and discover real alternatives to the present order of things.

We are pleased to present an extract of our book to the readers of Artforum, in part because the art community is one context in which this impoverished notion of realism holds less sway. Indeed, even artistic experimentation and creation that is not explicitly political can do important political work, sometimes revealing the limits of our imagination and at other times fueling it. Not only can art expose the norms and hierarchies of the existing social order, but it can give us the conceptual means to invent another, making what had once seemed utterly impossible entirely realistic. We hope that our book might in some way contribute to this process. —Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, August 26, 2009

WAR, SUFFERING, MISERY, AND EXPLOITATION increasingly characterize our globalizing world. There are so many reasons to seek refuge in a realm “outside,” some place separate from the discipline and control of today’s emerging Empire or even some transcendent or transcendental principles and values that can guide our lives and ground our political action. One primary effect of globalization, however, is the creation of a common world, a world that, for better or worse, we all share, a world that has no “outside.” Along with nihilists, we have to recognize that, regardless of how brilliantly and trenchantly we critique it, we are destined to live in *this* world, not only subject to its powers of domination but also contaminated by its corruptions. Abandon all dreams of political purity and “higher values” that would allow us to remain outside! Such a nihilist recognition, however, should be only a tool, a point of passage toward constructing an alternative project. In this book we articulate an ethical project, an ethics of democratic political action within and against Empire. We investigate what the movements and practices of the multitude have been and what they can become in order to discover the social relations and institutional forms of a possible global democracy. “Becoming-Prince” is the process of the multitude learning the art of self-rule and inventing lasting democratic forms of social organization.

A democracy of the multitude is imaginable and possible only because we all share and participate in the common. By “the common” we mean, first of all, the common wealth of the material world—the air, the water, the fruits of the soil, and all nature’s bounty—which in classic European political texts is often claimed to be the inheritance of humanity as a whole, to be shared together. We consider the common also and more significantly those results of social production that are necessary for social interaction and further production, such as knowledges, languages, codes, information, affects, and so forth. This notion of the common does not position humanity separate from nature, as either its exploiter or its custodian, but focuses rather on the practices of interaction, care, and cohabitation in a common world, promoting the beneficial and limiting the detrimental forms of the common. In the era of globalization, issues of the maintenance, production, and distribution of the common in

both these senses and in both ecological and socioeconomic frameworks become increasingly central.¹

With the blinders of today’s dominant ideologies, however, it is difficult to see the common, even though it is all around us. Neoliberal government policies throughout the world have sought in recent decades to privatize the common, making cultural products—for example, information, ideas, and even species of animals and plants—into private property. We argue, in chorus with many others, that such privatization should be resisted. The standard view, however, assumes that the only alternative to the private is the public, that is, what is managed and regulated by states and other governmental authorities, as if the common were irrelevant or extinct. It is true, of course, that through a long process of enclosures the earth’s surface has been almost completely divided up between public and private property so that common land regimes, such as those of indigenous civilizations of the Americas or medieval Europe, have been destroyed. And yet so much of our world is common, open to access by all and developed through active participation. Language, for example, like affects and gestures, is for the most part common, and indeed if language were made either private or public—that is, if large portions of our words, phrases, or parts of speech were subject to private ownership or public authority—then language would lose its powers of expression, creativity, and communication. Such an example is meant not to calm readers, as if to say that the crises created by private and public controls are not as bad as they seem, but rather to help readers begin to retrain their vision, recognizing the common that exists and what it can do. That is the first step in a project to win back and expand the common and its powers.

The seemingly exclusive alternative between the private and the public corresponds to an equally pernicious political alternative between capitalism and socialism. It is often assumed that the only cure for the ills of capitalist society is public regulation and Keynesian and/or socialist economic management; and, conversely, socialist maladies are presumed to be treatable only by private property and capitalist control. Socialism and capitalism, however, even though they have at times been mingled together and at others occasioned bitter conflicts, are both regimes of property that exclude the common. The political project of instituting the common, which we develop in this book, cuts diagonally across these false alternatives—neither private nor public, neither capitalist nor socialist—and opens a new space for politics.

Contemporary forms of capitalist production and accumulation in fact, despite their continuing drive to privatize resources and wealth, paradoxically make possible and even require expansions of the common. Capital, of course, is not a pure form of command but a social relation, and it depends for its survival and development on productive subjectivities that are internal but antagonistic to it. Through processes of globalization, capital not only brings together all the earth under its command but also creates, invests, and exploits social life in its entirety, ordering life according to the hierarchies of economic value. In the newly dominant forms of production that involve information, codes, knowledge, images, and affects, for example, producers increasingly require a high degree of freedom as well as open access to the common, especially in its social forms, such as communications networks, information banks, and cultural circuits. Innovation in Internet technologies, for example, depends directly on access to common code and information resources as well as the ability to connect and interact with others in unrestricted networks. And more generally, all forms of production in decentralized networks, whether or not computer technologies are involved, demand freedom and access to the common. Furthermore the content of what is produced—including ideas, images, and affects—is easily reproduced and thus tends toward being common, strongly resisting all legal and economic efforts to privatize it or bring it under public control. The transition is already in process: Contemporary capitalist produc-

tion, by addressing its own needs, is opening up the possibility of and creating the bases for a social and economic order grounded in the common.

The ultimate core of biopolitical production, we can see stepping back to a higher level of abstraction, is not the production of objects for subjects, as commodity production is often understood, but the production of subjectivity itself. This is the terrain from which our ethical and political project must set out. But how can an ethical production be established on the shifting ground of the production of subjectivity, which constantly transforms fixed values and subjects? Gilles Deleuze, reflecting on Michel Foucault's notion of the *dispositif* (the material, social, affective, and cognitive mechanisms or apparatuses of the production of subjectivity), claims, "We belong to the *dispositifs* and act within them." If we are to act within them, however, the ethical horizon has to be reoriented from identity to becoming. At issue "is not what we are but rather what we are in the process of becoming—that is the Other, our becoming-other."² A key scene of political action today, seen from this vantage point, involves the struggle over the control or autonomy of the production of subjectivity. The multitude makes itself by composing in the common the singular subjectivities that result from this process.

We often find that our political vocabulary is insufficient for grasping the new conditions and possibilities of the contemporary world. Sometimes we invent new terms to face this challenge, but more often we seek to resurrect and reanimate old political concepts that have fallen out of use, both because they carry powerful histories and because they disrupt the conventional understandings of our present world and pose it in a new light. Two such concepts that play particularly significant roles in this book are poverty and love. "The poor" was a widespread political concept in Europe, at least from the Middle Ages to the seventeenth century, but although we will do our best to learn from some of those histories, we are more interested in what the poor has become today. Thinking in terms of poverty has the healthy effect, first of all, of questioning traditional class designations and forcing us to investigate with fresh eyes how class composition has changed and to look at people's wide range of productive activities inside and outside wage relations. Seen in this way, second, the poor is defined by not lack but possibility. The poor, migrants, and "precarious" workers (that is, those without stable employment) are often conceived as excluded, but really, though subordinated, they are completely within the global rhythms of biopolitical production. Economic statistics can grasp the condition of poverty in negative terms but not the forms of life, languages, movements, or capacities for innovation they generate. Our challenge will be to find ways to translate the productivity and possibility of the poor into power.

Walter Benjamin, with his typical elegance and intelligence, grasps the changing concept of poverty already in the 1930s. He locates the shift, in a nihilistic key, in the experience of those who have witnessed destruction, specifically the destruction wrought by the First World War, which casts us in a common condition. Benjamin sees, born out of the ruins of the past, the potential for a new, positive form of barbarism. "For what does poverty of experience do for the barbarian? It forces him to start from scratch; to make a new start; to make a little go a long way; to begin with a little and build up further."³ The "barbaric" productivity of the poor sets out to make a common world.

Love provides another path for investigating the power and productivity of the common. Love is a means to escape the solitude of individualism but not, as

contemporary ideology tells us, only to be isolated again in the private life of the couple or the family. To arrive at a political concept of love that recognizes it as centered on the production of the common and the production of social life, we have to break away from most of the contemporary meanings of the term by bringing back and working with some older notions. Socrates, for example, reports in the *Symposium* that, according to Diotima, his "instructor in love," love is born of poverty and invention. As he tries to elaborate what she taught him, he claims that love tends naturally toward the ideal realm to achieve beauty and wealth, thus fulfilling desire. French and Italian feminists argue, however, that Plato has Diotima all wrong. She guides us not toward the "sublimation" of poverty and desire in the "fullness" of beauty and wealth, but toward the power of becoming defined by differences.⁴ Diotima's notion of love gives us a new definition of wealth that extends our notion of the common and points toward a process of liberation.⁵

Since poverty and love might appear too weak to overthrow the current ruling powers and develop a project of the common, we will need to emphasize the element of force that animates them. This is in part an intellectual force. Immanuel Kant, for example, conceives of Enlightenment in terms of a force that can banish the "fanatical visions" that result in the death of philosophy and, moreover, can win out over every policing of thought. Jacques Derrida, following this "enlightened" Kant, brings reason back to the force of doubt and recognizes the revolutionary passion of reason as emerging from the margins of history.⁶ We too believe that such intellectual force is required to overcome dogmatism and nihilism, but we insist on the need to complement it with physical force and political action. Love needs force to conquer the ruling powers and dismantle their corrupt institutions before it can create a new world of common wealth.

The ethical project we develop in this book sets out on the path of the political construction of the multitude with Empire. The multitude is a set of singularities that poverty and love compose in the reproduction of the common, but more is required to describe the dynamics and *dispositifs* of the becoming-Prince of the multitude. We will not pull out of our bats new transcendentals or new definitions of the will to power to impose on the multitude. The becoming-Prince of the multitude is a project that relies entirely on the immanence of decision making within the multitude. We will have to discover the passage from revolt to revolutionary institution that the multitude can set in motion.

With the title of this book, *Commonwealth*, we mean to indicate a return to some of the themes of classic treatises of government, exploring the institutional structure and political constitution of society. We also want to emphasize, once we recognize the relation between the two terms that compose this concept, the need to institute and manage a world of common wealth, focusing on and expanding our capacities for collective production and self-government. [. . .]

Jean-Luc Nancy, setting out from premises analogous to ours, wonders if "one can suggest a 'Spinozian' reading, or rewriting, of [Heidegger's] *Being and Time*."⁷ We hope that our work points in that direction, overturning the phenomenology of nihilism and opening up the multitude's processes of productivity and creativity that can revolutionize our world and institute a shared common wealth. We want not only to define an event but also to grasp the spark that will set the prairie ablaze.

For notes, see page 264.

The Becoming-Prince of the Multitude

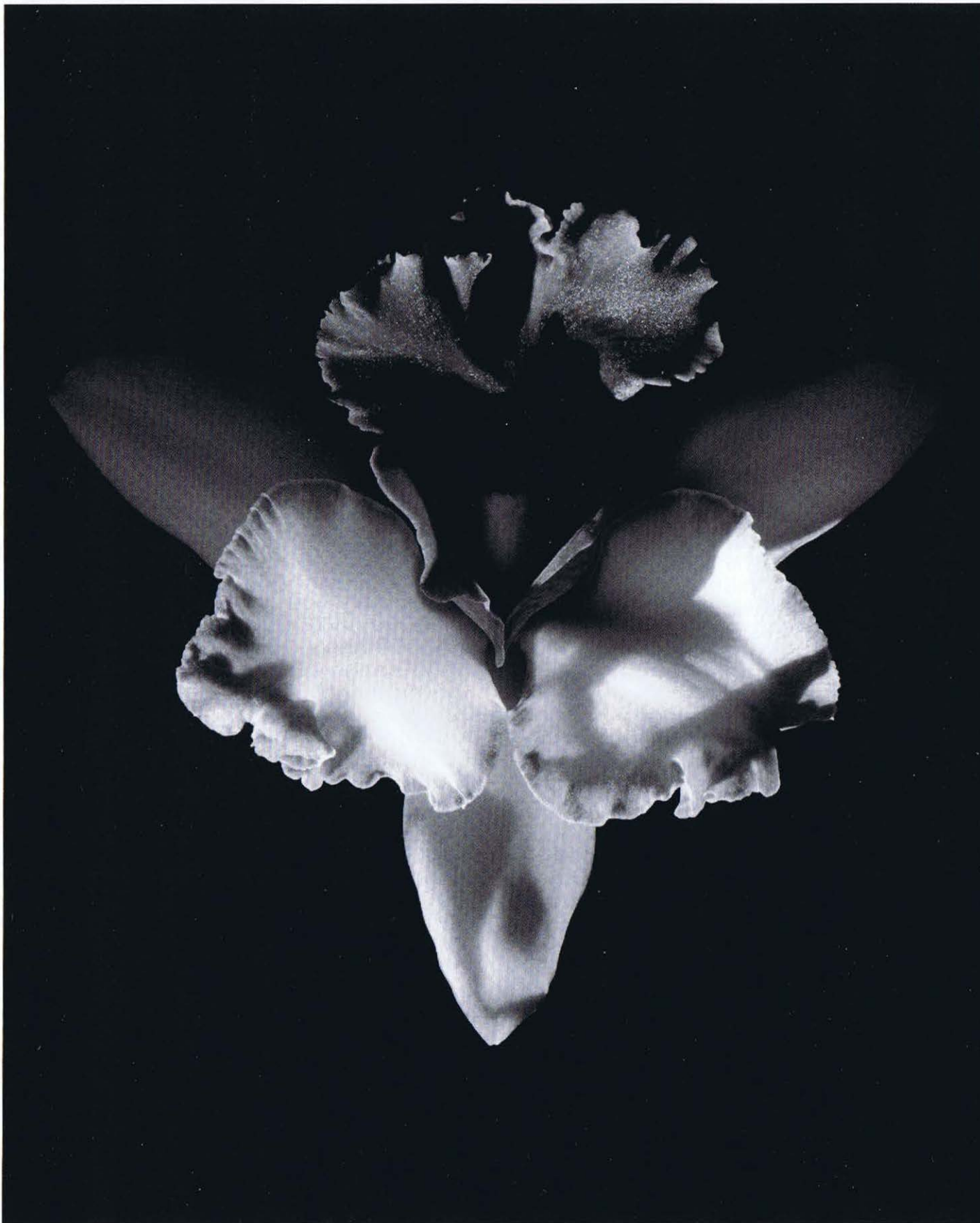
MICHAEL HARDT & ANTONIO NEGRI

*People only ever have the degree of freedom
that their audacity wins from fear.*

—Stendhal, *Vie de Napoléon*

Power to the peaceful.

—Michael Franti, "Bomb the World"



Robert Mapplethorpe, *Orchid*, 1985, black-and-white photograph, 50 3/4 x 40 1/2". © The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation. Used with permission/Art + Commerce.

ALL THE THEORETICAL ELEMENTS WE HAVE ACCUMULATED thus far in our discussion—from the multitude of the poor to the project of altermodernity and from the social productivity of biopolitical labor to the exodus from capitalist command—despite all their power, risk lying inert beside one another without one more element that pulls them together and animates them in a coherent project. What is missing is love. Yes, we know that term makes many readers uncomfortable. Some squirm in their seats with embarrassment and others smirk with superiority.¹ Love has been so charged with sentimentality that it seems hardly fit for philosophical, much less political, discourse. Leave it to the poets to speak of love, many will say, and wrap themselves in its warm embrace. We think instead that love is an essential concept for philosophy and politics, and the failure to interrogate and develop it is one central cause of the weakness of contemporary thought. It is unwise to leave love to the priests, poets, and psychoanalysts. It is necessary for us, then, to do some conceptual housecleaning, clearing away some of the misconceptions that disqualify love for philosophical and political discourse and redefining the concept in such a way as to demonstrate its utility. We will find in the process that philosophers, political scientists, and even economists, despite the imagined cold precision of their thinking, are really often speaking about love. And if they were not so shy they would tell us as much. This will help us demonstrate how love is really the living heart of the project we have been developing, without which the rest would remain a lifeless heap.

To understand love as a philosophical and political concept, it is useful to begin from the perspective of the poor and the innumerable forms of social solidarity and social production that one recognizes everywhere among those who live in poverty. Solidarity, care for others, creating community, and cooperating in common projects is for them an essential survival mechanism. That brings us back to the elements of poverty we emphasized earlier. Although the poor are defined by material lack, people are never reduced to bare life but are always endowed with powers of invention and production. The real essence of the poor, in fact, is not their lack but their power. When we band together, when we form a social body that is more powerful than any of our individual bodies alone, we are constructing a new and common subjectivity. Our point of departure, then, which the perspective of the poor helps reveal, is that love is a process of the production of the common and the production of subjectivity. This process is not merely a *means* to producing material goods and other necessities but also in itself an *end*.

If such a statement sounds too sentimental, one can arrive at the same point through the analysis of political economy. In the context of biopolitical production, as we have demonstrated elsewhere in this volume, the production of the common is not separate from or external to economic production, sequestered neither in the private realm nor in the sphere of reproduction, but is instead integral to and inseparable from the production of capital. Love—in the production of affective networks, schemes of cooperation, and social subjectivities—is an economic power. Conceived in this way, love is not, as it is often

characterized, spontaneous or passive. It does not simply happen to us, as if it were an event that mystically arrives from elsewhere. Instead it is an action, a biopolitical event, planned and realized in common.

Love is productive in a philosophical sense too—productive of being. When we engage in the production of subjectivity that is love, we are not merely creating new objects or even new subjects in the world. Instead we are producing a new world, a new social life. Being, in other words, is not some immutable background against which life takes place but is rather a living relation in which we constantly have the power to intervene. Love is an ontological event in that it marks a rupture with what exists and the creation of the new. Being is constituted by love. This ontologically constitutive capacity has been a battlefield for numerous conflicts among philosophers. Heidegger, for instance, strenuously counters this notion of ontological constitution in his lecture on poverty that we read earlier. Humanity becomes poor to become rich, he argues, when it lacks the nonnecessary, revealing what is necessary, that is, its relation to Being. The

poor as Heidegger imagines them in this relation, however, have no constitutive capacity, and humanity as a whole, in fact, is powerless in the face of Being. On this point Spinoza stands at the opposite end from Heidegger. Like Heidegger, he might say that humanity becomes rich when it recognizes its relation to being, but that relation for Spinoza is entirely different. Especially in the mysterious fifth book of Spinoza's *Ethics*, we constitute being actively through love. Love, Spinoza explains with his usual geometrical precision, is joy, that is, the increase of our power to act and think, together with the recognition of an external cause. Through love we form a relation to that cause and seek to repeat and expand our joy, forming new, more powerful bodies and minds. For Spinoza, in other words, love is a production of the common that constantly aims upward, seeking to create more with ever more power, up to the point of engaging in the love of God, that is, the love of nature as a whole, the common in its most expansive

figure. Every act of love, one might say, is an ontological event in that it marks a rupture with existing being and creates new being, from poverty through love to being. "Being," after all, is just another way of saying what is ineluctably common, what refuses to be privatized or enclosed and remains constantly open to all. (There is no such thing as a private ontology.) To say love is ontologically constitutive, then, simply means that it produces the common.

As soon as we identify love with the production of the common, we need to recognize that, just like the common itself, love is deeply ambivalent and susceptible to corruption. In fact, what passes for love today in ordinary discourse and popular culture is predominantly its corrupt forms. The primary locus of this corruption is the shift in love from the common to the same, that is, from the production of the common to a repetition of the same or a process of unification. What distinguishes the beneficial forms of love instead is the constant interplay between the common and singularities.

One corrupt form of love is identitarian love, that is, love of the same, which can be based, for example, on a narrow interpretation of the mandate to love

Of Love Possessed

Let your loves be like the wasp and the orchid.
—Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari

thy neighbor, understanding it as a call to love those most proximate, those most like you. Family love—the pressure to love first and most those within the family to the exclusion or subordination of those outside—is one form of identitarian love. Race love and nation love, or patriotism, are similar examples of the pressure to love most those most like you and hence less those who are different. Family, race, and nation, then, which are corrupt forms of the common, are unsurprisingly the bases of corrupt forms of love. From this perspective we might say that populisms, nationalisms, fascisms, and various religious fundamentalisms are based not so much on hatred as on love—but a horribly corrupted form of identitarian love.

An initial strategy to combat this corruption is to employ a more expansive, more generous interpretation of the mandate to love thy neighbor, reading the neighbor not as the one nearest and most like you but, to the contrary, as the other. “The neighbor is therefore . . . only a place-keeper,” says Franz Rosenzweig. “Love is really oriented toward the embodiment of all those—men and things—that could at any moment take this place of its neighbor, in the last resort it applies to everything, it applies to the world.”² The mandate to love thy neighbor, then, the embodiment of each and every commandment for the monotheistic religions, requires us to love the other or, really, to love alterity. And if you are not comfortable with scriptural exegesis as explanation, think of Walt Whitman’s poetry, in which the love of the stranger continually reappears as an encounter characterized by wonder, growth, and discovery. Nietzsche’s Zarathustra echoes Whitman when he preaches that higher than love of neighbor is “love of the farthest.”³ Love of the stranger, love of the farthest, and love of alterity can function as an antidote against the poison of identitarian love, which hinders and distorts love’s productivity by forcing it constantly to repeat the same. Here then is another meaning of love as a biopolitical event: Not only does it mark rupture with the existent and creation of the new, but also it is the production of singularities and the composition of singularities in a common relationship.

A second form of corrupt love poses love as a process of unification, of becoming the same. The contemporary dominant notion of romantic love in our cultures, which Hollywood sells every day, its stock-in-trade, requires that the couple merge in unity. The mandatory sequence of this corrupted romantic love—couple-marriage-family—imagines people finding their match, like lost puzzle pieces that now together make (or restore) a whole. Marriage and family close the couple in a unit that subsequently, as we said earlier, corrupts the common. This same process of love as unification is also expressed in many different religious traditions, especially in their mystical registers: Love of God means merging in the divine unity. And it is not so surprising that such notions of mystical union often use the conventional language of romantic love, invoking the betrothed, divine marriage, and so forth, because they are aimed at the same goal: making the many into one, making the different into the same. Similarly, various forms of patriotism share this notion of setting (or pushing) aside differences and alterity in order to form a united national people, a national identity. This second corruption of

love as unification is intimately related, in fact, to the first identitarian corruption of love: love of the same, love making the same.

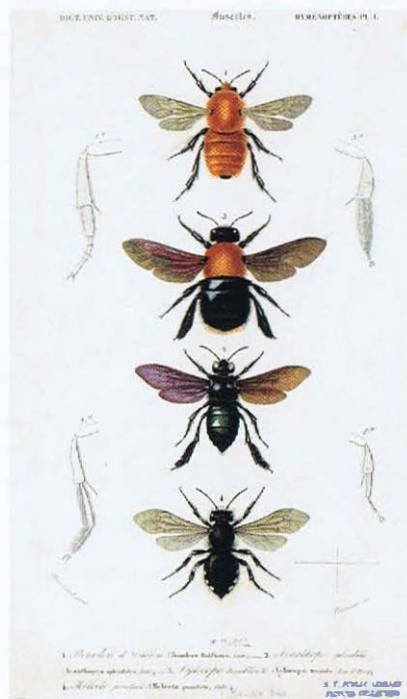
One philosophical key to our argument here, which should be clear already, is that the dynamic of multiple singularities in the common has nothing to do with the old dialectic between the many and the one. Whereas the one stands opposed to the many, the common is compatible with and even internally composed of multiplicities. This compatibility between the common and multiplicity can be understood in simple terms (perhaps too simple) when posed in the field of political action: If we did not share a common world, then we would not be able to communicate with one another or engage one another’s needs and desires; and if we were not multiple singularities, then we would have no need to communicate and interact. We agree in this regard with Hannah Arendt’s conception of politics as the interaction and composition of singularities in a common world.⁴

Promoting the encounters of singularities in the common, then, is the primary strategy to combat love corrupted through identity and unification, which brings the production of subjectivity to a halt and abrogates the common. Sameness and unity involve no creation but mere repetition without difference. Love should be defined, instead, by the encounters and experimentation of singularities in the common, which in turn produce a new common and new singularities. Whereas in the ontological context we characterized the process of love as *constitution*, here in a political context we should emphasize its power of *composition*. Love composes singularities, like themes in a musical score, not in unity but as a network of social relations. Bringing together these two faces of love—the constitution of the common and the composition of singularities—is a central challenge for understanding love as a material, political act.

We began this discussion by claiming that economic production is really a matter of love, but we are perfectly aware that economists do not see it that way. Economists, in

fact, have long celebrated Bernard Mandeville’s early-eighteenth-century satire *The Fable of the Bees* as an anti-love anthem, proof that there is no possible connection between economics and love. Mandeville tells of a beehive that is wealthy and powerful but ridden with all order of private vices, including deceit, greed, laziness, and cowardice. The hive moralists constantly rail against vice to no avail. Finally the god of the hive, weary of the constant harping, makes all the bees virtuous and eliminates vice, but as soon as he does so, the work of the hive comes to a halt and the society of the hive falls apart. The fable is aimed, obviously, at social moralists and rationalist utopians. Mandeville, like Machiavelli and Spinoza before him, insists that, instead of preaching how people *should be*, social theorists must study how people *are* and analyze the passions that actually animate them.

Mandeville’s fable scandalized eighteenth-century English society, as it was meant to, but some, including Adam Smith, read it as a confirmation of capitalist ideology. Smith takes Mandeville’s polemic that vice, not virtue, is the source of public benefit—people work out of greed, obey the law out of cowardice, and so forth—to support the notion that self-interest is the basis of market exchanges



Émile Théophile Blanchard, *Insectes: Hyménoptères*, Plate 1, ca. 1845, ink on paper, 9 x 5 1/2".
Photo: New York Public Library.

and the capitalist economy. If each acts out of self-interest, then the public good will result from market activity as if guided by an invisible hand. Smith, of course, a stalwart advocate of sympathy and other moral sentiments, is not advocating vice but simply wants to keep misplaced moral imperatives and well-intentioned public control out of the economy. What Smith bans most adamantly from the marketplace is the common: Only from private interests will the public good result. "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner," Smith famously writes, "but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages."⁵ Our love for one another has no place in the realm of economic exchanges.

We get a rather different, updated fable of economic life when we focus on not the society within the hive but bee pollination activity outside it. For honeybees, flowers located within flying distance of the hive constitute a positive externality. Bees fly from one apple blossom to another, one cherry blossom to another, gathering nectar to transport back to the hive. As a bee collects nectar, its legs rub pollen off the anther of the flower, and when it proceeds to another, some of the pollen from its legs rubs off on the stigma of the next flower. For the flowers, then, bee activity is a positive externality, completing the cross-pollination necessary to produce fruit. The economic fable of these bees and flowers suggests a society of mutual aid based on positive externalities and virtuous exchanges in which the bee provides for the needs of the flower and, in turn, the flower fulfills the bee's needs.⁶ We can imagine Mandeville and Smith frowning at this fable because of its suggestion of virtue and purposeful mutual aid as the basis of social production. We are hesitant about the bee pollination fable too, but for a different reason: the kind of love it promotes. Bees and flowers do indeed suggest a kind of love, but a static, corrupt form. (We know, we're anthropomorphizing the bees and flowers, projecting human traits and desires onto them, but isn't that what all fables do?) The marriage between bee and flower is a match made in heaven; they are the two halves that "complete" each other and form a whole, closing the common down in sameness and unity. But isn't this union a model of the productivity of the common, you might ask? Doesn't it produce honey and fruit? Yes, you might call this a kind of production, but it is really just the repetition of the same. What we are looking for—and what counts in love—is the production of subjectivity and the encounter of singularities, which compose new assemblages and constitute new forms of the common.

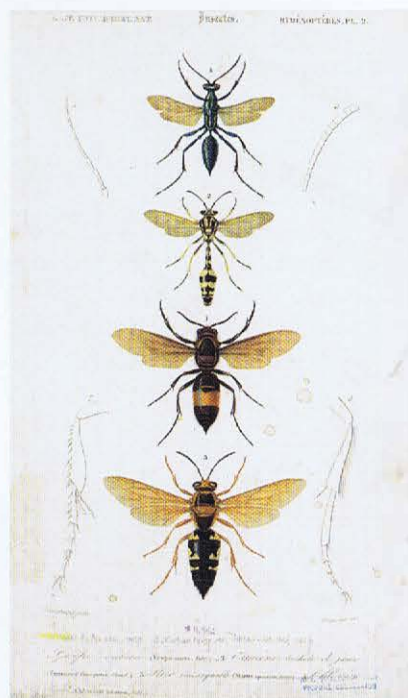
Let's switch species, then, to write a new fable. Certain orchids give off the odor of the sex pheromone of female wasps, and their flowers are shaped like the female wasp's sex organs. Pollination is thus achieved by "pseudocopulation" as male wasps move from one orchid to the next, sinking their genital members into each flower and rubbing off pollen on their bodies in the process. "So wasps fuck flowers!" Félix Guattari exclaims with rather juvenile glee in a letter to Gilles Deleuze. "Wasps do this work just like that, for nothing, just for fun!"⁷ Guattari's delight at this example is due in part to the fact that it undercuts the

industriousness and "productivism" usually attributed to nature. These wasps aren't your dutiful worker bees; they aren't driven to produce anything. They just want to have fun. A second point of interest for Guattari is undoubtedly the way this pollination story reinforces his lifelong diatribe against the corruptions of love in the couple and the family. Wasps and orchids do not suggest any morality tale of marriage and stable union, as bees and flowers do, but rather evoke scenarios of cruising and serial sex common to some gay-male communities, especially before the onslaught of the AIDS pandemic, like passages from the writings of Jean Genet, David Wojnarowicz, and Samuel Delany. This is not to say that cruising and anonymous sex serve as a model of love to emulate for Guattari (or Genet, Wojnarowicz, or Delany), but rather that they provide an antidote to the corruptions of love in the couple and the family, opening love up to the encounter of singularities.

When the wasp-and-orchid story appears in print in Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, several years after Guattari's initial letter, the fable has been refined and cast in the context of evolutionary discourse. Deleuze and Guattari insist, first of all, that the orchid is not imitating the wasp or trying to deceive it, as botanists often say. The orchid is a becoming-wasp (becoming the wasp's sexual organ) and the wasp is a becoming-orchid (becoming part of the orchid's system of reproduction). What is central is the encounter and interaction between these two becomings, which together form a new assemblage, a wasp-orchid machine. The fable is devoid of intentions and interests: The wasps and orchids are not paragons of virtue in their mutual aid, nor are they models of egotistic self-love. Deleuze and Guattari's machinic language allows them to avoid asking "What does it mean?" and focus instead on "How does it work?" The fable thus tells the story of wasp-orchid love, a love based on the encounter of alterity but also on a process of becoming different.⁸

Mandeville's bees (at least according to Smith's reading) are the model for a capitalist

dream of individual free agents trading labor and goods in the marketplace, intent on their own self-interest and deaf to the common good. The dutiful worker bees, in contrast, joined with their flowers in a virtuous union of mutual aid, are the stuff of socialist utopia. All of these bees, however, belong to the bygone era of the hegemony of industrial production. Wasps who love orchids, instead, point toward the conditions of the biopolitical economy. How could these wasps be a model for economic production, you might ask, when they don't produce anything? The bees and flowers produce honey and fruit, but the wasps and orchids are just hedonists and aesthetes, merely creating pleasure and beauty! It is true that the interaction of wasps and orchids does not result primarily in material goods, but one should not discount their immaterial production. In the encounter of singularities of their love, a new assemblage is created, marked by the continual metamorphosis of each singularity in the common. Wasp-orchid love, in other words, is a model of the production of subjectivity that animates the biopolitical economy. Let's have done with worker bees, then, and focus on the singularities and becomings of wasp-orchid love! □



Émile Théophile Blanchard, *Insectes: Hyménoptères*, Plate 2, ca. 1845, ink on paper, 9 1/4 x 5 1/8".
Photo: New York Public Library.

NOTES

1. For some recent arguments for the common in various fields, see Nick Dyer-Witherford, *Cyber-Marx* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Augusto Illuminati, *Del comune* (Rome: Manifestolibri, 2003); Massimo De Angelis, *The Beginning of History* (London: Pluto, 2007); Peter Linbaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Naomi Klein, "Reclaiming the Commons," *New Left Review*, no. 9 (May-June 2001), 81-89; Donald Nonini, ed., *The Global Idea of "the Commons"* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007); and Michael Blecher, "Reclaiming the Common or the Beginning of the End of the (Legal) System," in *Entgrenzungen und Vernetzungen im Recht: Liber Amicorum Gunther Teubner*, eds. G.-P. Callies, Andreas Fischer-Lescano, Dan Wielsch, and Peer Zumbansen (New York: De Gruyter, forthcoming).

2. Gilles Deleuze, "What Is a Dispositif?" in Michel Foucault, *Philosopher*, ed. Timothy Armstrong (New York: Routledge, 1992), 159-168.

3. Walter Benjamin, "Experience and Poverty," in *Selected Writings*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 732. See Patrick Greaney's excellent analysis of the concept of poverty in Benjamin and other modern European poets and philosophers, *Untimely Beggars* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

4. See Luce Irigaray, *Éthique de la différence sexuelle* (Paris: Minuit, 1984), 27-39; Diodora, *Il pensiero della differenza sessuale* (Milan: La Tartaruga, 1987); and Adriana Cavarero, *Nonostante Platone* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1990).

5. Reading Marx and Spinoza, Franck Fischbach identifies a very similar notion of joy and happiness based in productivity and differences grounded in the common. See *La Production des hommes* (Paris: PUF, 2005), 145.

6. See Jacques Derrida, *D'un ton apocalyptique adopté naguère en philosophie* (Paris: Galilée, 1983).

7. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Birth to Presence*, trans. Brian Holmes et al. (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 407, n. 56.

NOTES

1. Daniel Bensaïd seems particularly uncomfortable with our use of the

concept of love. See *Un Monde à changer* (Paris: Textuel, 2003), 69-89; and "Antonio Negri et le pouvoir constituant," in *Résistances* (Paris: Fayard, 2001), 193-212.

2. See Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. Barbara Galli (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 234.

3. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 44-45.

4. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), in particular pp. 50-57.

5. Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, ed. Edwin Cannan (New York: Modern Library, 1994), 15.

6. On pollination as an example of a positive externality, see Yann Moulier Boutang, *Le Capitalisme cognitif* (Paris: Amsterdam, 2007).

7. Félix Guattari, *The Anti-Oedipus Papers*, ed. Stéphane Nadaud, trans. Kéline Gorman (New York: Semiotext[e], 2006), 179.

8. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 10.

NOTES

1. From an interview with the filmmaker, in Scott MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 2* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 180.

2. *Ibid.*, 199.

3. *Ibid.*, 177.

4. *Ibid.*, 201.

5. Andrew Noren, letter to the author, June 29, 2009.

Page 190: Clockwise from top left: "Cleopatra's Needle" being prepared for transport to New York, Alexandria, Egypt, ca. 1879. Photo: Science and Society. Fritz Koenig, *The Sphere*, 1971, bronze on granite base, approx. 25 x 25 x 25". Battery Park, New York. Photo: Joseph Logan and Aimée Scala, 2009. "Cleopatra's Needle," in Central Park, New York, 2006. Photo: Eric

Hoefler. Reconstruction of Ramses II temple statues after relocation. Abu Simbel, Egypt, January 26, 1966. Photo: Getty Images. Page 191: Dismantling of Ramses II temple statues, Abu Simbel, Egypt, November 1963. Photo: HOCHTIEF. Page 192: Robert Morris, *Grand Rapids Project*, 1974, earth, asphalt, grass. Grand Rapids, MI. Photo: Craig VanderLende. © 2009 Robert Morris/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Page 193, clockwise from top left: Victor Pasmore, *Apollo Pavilion*, 1970, concrete, 20 x 82 x 29'. Peterlee, UK. Photo: John Pasmore. Pablo Picasso, *Tête de Femme (Woman's Head)*, 1957/1991, acrylic on polymer-treated composite panel with metal, 39' 6" x 17' x 13'. Flaine, France. Produced posthumously, from a model. Photo: Patrick Boonstra. © 2009 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Constantin Brancusi, *Poarta Sărutului (Gate of the Kiss)*, 1938, stone, 16' 10" x 17' 10½" x 5' 6½". Târgu Jiu, Romania. Page 194, from top: Robert Indiana, *Avana (Love)*, 1977, Cor-Ten steel, 11' 6" x 11' 3½" x 6". Billy Rose Art Garden, Israel Museum, Jerusalem. Photo: Hanne Therkildsen. James Wines and Emilio Sousa, *Ghost Parking Lot*, 1978, cars, tar, asphalt. Hamden, CT. Photo: SITE. Page 195: Richard Serra, *Afangar (Stallions. Stops on the Road, To Stop and Look Forward and Back, To Take It All In)*, 1990, nine pairs of basalt stones, each pair 10 x 2 x 2' and 13 x 2 x 2'. Vdey Island, Iceland. Photo: Dirk Reinartz. Page 196: Kordak Ziolkowski, *Crazy Horse Memorial*, 1948-, carved mountain. Crazy Horse, SD. Photo: © Crazy Horse Memorial. 1999. Page 197, from top: Robert Graham, *Monument to Joe Louis*, 1986, cast bronze, 11' 6" x 24' x 24". Detroit. Views of monument in transit and installed in Detroit. Photos: Robert Graham Studio. Otto Herbert Hajek, *City Sign*, 1973-77, Adelaide, Australia. Page 198, from top: Anilore Banon, *Les Braves (The Brave)*, 2004, stainless steel, concrete, approx. 30 x 50 x 25'. Photo: Tara Bradford. Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. Photo: Tara Bradford, 2006. Michael Heizer, *Adjacent. Against. Upon*, 1976, concrete and granite, 9 x 25 x 130'. Myrtle Edwards Park, Seattle. Photo: Charles Adler. Page 199, clockwise from top left: Dušan Džamonja, *Monument to the Revolution in Moslavina*, 1967, concrete, aluminum. Podgarić, Croatia. Photo: Jan Kempeaers. *Spomenik #1 (Monument #1)*, 2006, color photograph mounted on aluminum, 40 x 50". World War II monument dedicated to the American Second Ranger Battalion, Pointe du Hoc, Normandy, France. Artist unknown, ca. 1960. Photo: Cyprien Gaillard. Simon Rodia, *Watts Towers*, 1921-55, mixed media, seventeen parts, overall, approx. 98' 5" x 140' x 70'. Los Angeles. Photo: Ferdinando Scianna/Magnum, 1985.