

Surplus Common

A Preface

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Conversation as Language of the Common

The common speaks: a conversation unfolds . . . Unlike Folly—the garrulous, auto-encomiastic, first-person narrator of Desiderius Erasmus’s *In Praise of Folly*—the common abhors monologues. Arguably, the exuberant, joyful *Stimmung* and the dramatic, polyphonic structure of Erasmus’s monologue could be understood as belonging to the dialogic in their own right. A conversation, however, is no more a dialogue than it is a monologue. Neither monologic nor dialogic, the common converses. For the common is that which is always at stake in any conversation: there where a conversation takes place, there the common expresses itself; there where we are in common, there and only there is a conversation possible. Conversation is the language of the common.

Thus far, I have used the term “dialogic” in the Platonic rather than in the Bakhtinian sense. Mikhail Bakhtin writes: “Dialogic relations are . . . much broader than dialogic speech in the narrow sense of the word. And dialogic relations are always present, even among profoundly monologic speech works.”¹ For Bakhtin, the dialogic relation constitutes the matrix of the entire dialogue–monologue binary opposition: such a relation inheres in both dialogues and monologues alike—with the difference, presumably, that the former materialize it by acknowledging and affirming it, whereas the latter materialize it by foreclosing it. Importantly, in the same essay Bakhtin defines the dialogic relation in terms of response:

For the word (and, consequently for a human being) there is nothing more terrible than a *lack of response* . . . Being heard as such is already a dialogic relation. The word wants to be heard, understood, responded to, and again to respond to the response, and so forth *ad infinitum*.²

If the dialogic relation is understood in this way, then a conversation is indeed dialogic, for it involves *response* to and from—rather than *sublation* of—the other. Once sublated, the word and the body who speaks it are not heard, not understood, not corresponded. Sublation is the attempt to interiorize and to assimilate that which is different, which is why it can never constitute a real response. It is in this sense that conversation is the language of the common: it is that form of language that brings us together as different from rather than identical to one another.

I continue to prefer the term “conversation” rather than the term “dialogue,” even in the Bakhtinian sense, for two reasons. I find “dialogue” to be irrecoverable not only because of its Platonic determinations but also because of the more pernicious subsequent philosophical and political history of such determinations. This history has culminated in the now hegemonic liberal-democratic discourse of identity and in its suffocating invocations of “dialogue” as a means of negotiating and reconciling differences among various and sundry identities (as if there was actually any real difference rather than sheer equivalence among identities, even despite the incommensurable inequities that they always index and that they are meant to redress in the realm of representation alone, and as if, hence, anything like a real dialogic relation—that is, anything like dialogue at the level of the real—could even begin to take place among them). I find also that “conversation” takes us directly to the problematic of the common (the Latin noun *conversatio*, after all, derives from the medial verb *conversari*: to keep company with, to live together), and hence points to a set of concepts as well as to a history altogether different from dialogue’s Platonic and post-Platonic ones. To converse is to be in common, to produce the common.

This book wishes to be a conversation precisely in this sense. Despite the fact that at times—while working together on this book—Negri would refer teasingly to me as Socrates and to himself as the Sophist, there is nothing Platonic about our conversation. In his *Architecture as Metaphor: Language, Number, Money*, Kojin Karatani has argued that Platonic dialogues ought to be understood as monologues. While discussing Ludwig Wittgenstein, Karatani comments thus on Plato’s *Meno*:

A dialogue carried on within a common set of rules cannot be identified as a dialogue with the “other.” Such a dialogue, or internal dialectic, can be converted into or considered a monologue . . .

In the work of both Aristotle and Hegel, dialectics became a

monologue. And though Plato's dialogues were written in the form of conversations, finally they must be considered monologues. Western philosophy thus began as an introspective—that is, monologic—dialogue . . . Wittgenstein . . . questioned the Platonic dialogue because it is *not* inclusive of the other, and often becomes a monologue. In order to interiorize the other, that other must share a set of common rules. But doesn't the other by definition designate only those who do not share a set of rules? Is not the dialogue only with such an other? Wittgenstein attempted in his *Philosophical Investigations* to introduce this other that could no longer be interiorized, that is, the otherness of the other.³

The Bakhtinian echo here is unmistakable. On the relation between dialogue and dialectics, Bakhtin writes:

Take a dialogue and remove the voices (the partitioning of voices), remove the intonations (emotional and individualizing ones), carve out abstract concepts and judgments from living words and responses, cram everything into one abstract consciousness—and that's how you get dialectics.⁴

Our conversation is an attempt to think otherwise. Wary and weary of the introspective and dialectical dialogues with which the history of Western philosophy is replete, we tried to think together by making up rules as we went along rather than by appealing to a supposedly shared set of rules posited a priori, as well as by letting asymmetries and differences of all sorts come to light and be visible rather than by reconciling them, resolving them, and then shoving them under the carpet of sublation.

This conversation was born as an interview. The original idea was to reconstruct Negri's early intellectual and political formation—from the end of World War II to 1968—so as to give a sense to the Anglophone reader of the milieu from which his philosophical project emerged. It became clear soon, however, that neither of us would be satisfied with the limiting parameters of the interview as a genre, that neither of us would feel at home in the roles of interviewer and interviewee. On the one hand, Negri was more eager to think in the present and for the future rather than about the past. On the other hand, I was more eager to question his current projects, so as, possibly, to push them further. And both of us were eager to have exchanges

on a conceptual rather than solely biographical level. Before we even knew it, we were stepping beyond the confines of the interview, we were thinking together, we were having fun. The different parts of this book correspond to various shifts in our language game.

“A Class Struggle Propaedeutics, 1950s–1970s” remains faithful to the original idea: it consists of an interview focused on the three decades that were most crucial in defining Negri’s intellectual and political trajectories. What concerned me most here in my role of interviewer was to inquire into the complex relay of interactions among his early experiences as a student, as a teacher, as a thinker, as a writer, and as a political militant. It is here that Negri relates the beginnings of his philosophical research (ranging from Georg Lukács to Karl Marx, from G. W. F. Hegel to René Descartes, from Kantian philosophy of right to German historicism as articulated in Heinrich von Treitschke, Friedrich Meinecke, Wilhelm Dilthey, and Max Weber) as well as of his political commitments (ranging from brief involvements with militant Catholicism and with socialist political organizations to his visits to the Soviet bloc and his work in the petrochemical factories of the Italian Northeast). What transpires from this inquiry is that for Negri the realms of philosophy and of politics have been inseparable and mutually determining all along.

“Sounding the Present” marks a shift to some of Negri’s most recent writings, and primarily to his collaborative works with Michael Hardt, *Empire* and *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (as well as, to a lesser extent, *Labor of Dionysus: A Critique of the State-Form*). Here too, however, the original intention was modified in the process of conversing. We had meant to focus our attention on these works, and soon we realized that in order to attend to their complexities we had to expand the scope of the discussion by questioning those concepts that constitute their shared epistemological and ontological framework (such as the concepts of “the common,” “the singular,” “empire,” “multitude,” “democracy,” “communism,” “subjectivity,” “sovereignty,” “constitution,” “freedom,” “poverty,” “war,” and “void”). In questioning the conceptual framework of these works, it became necessary also to engage selectively with the past and present histories of these concepts (including their contemporary reformulations in thinkers ranging from Maurice Blanchot to Jacques Derrida, from Jean-Luc Nancy to Giorgio Agamben, from Paolo Virno to, above all, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari). In short, this part of the book attempts at once to explicate and to excavate the philosophical foundations of Negri’s understanding of our contemporary historical and political conjuncture.

“Vicissitudes of Constituent Thought” denotes another shift. As we engaged with the philosophical and political histories of the aforementioned concepts, it became clear that a more sustained engagement with the history of Western philosophy, and, in particular, with Negri’s past and present interlocutors, was needed. In short, here the primary question became first of all to situate Negri vis-à-vis the contemporary thinkers with whom he has most affinities as well as crucial disagreements (namely, Deleuze, Guattari, Agamben, and Michel Foucault), and second to ask Negri to engage—however briefly—with a variety of past and present thinkers with whom one might not usually associate his thought and about whom he has commented seldom, if ever, in writing (from Giordano Bruno to Pier Paolo Pasolini, from Giovanni Gentile to Antonio Gramsci, from Ernesto Laclau to Chantal Mouffe, from Walter Benjamin to Theodor Adorno, from Franz Rosenzweig to Jacques Lacan, from Bruno Latour to Paul Virilio, etc.). Ultimately, this series of exchanges culminates in a critique of philosophy—from antiquity to the present—as instrument of sovereign Power.

“Notes on a Politics of the Future Anterior” marks yet another shift, after which we continue our conversation by different means. It had become apparent that the rules of our game were such that, on the one hand, we would let asymmetries and differences emerge and stand unresolved, and, on the other hand, we would be unable at times to articulate them fully and adequately. (In particular, Negri noted that at times I was being too polite or inhibited in my disagreements, and that I ought to try to express them more explicitly and effectively.) This is why we decided to conclude the book with two essays—one by Negri and one by myself—that engage in more detail with some of the questions and thinkers we had been discussing. Negri’s essay—“The Political Monster: Power and Naked Life”—constitutes an attempt to produce a communist teratology. Starting with a critical genealogy of the philosophical discourses of eugenics from antiquity to modernity as well as from modernity to postmodernity, he traces the emergence and development of the necessary complement and inescapable nightmare of such discourses, namely, the figure of “the monster.” This—Negri argues—has always been a political figure, whose myriad metamorphoses have haunted sovereign Power by confronting it from within as an intractable and indomitable force of resistance. While following the monster in its various transformations and confrontations, Negri articulates the most sustained critique he has undertaken thus far of Agamben’s concept of “naked life”—which he denounces as a mystifying ideological apparatus that

supports rather than refutes the eugenic imperatives of sovereign Power and that, in the end, constitutes the very opposite of the concept of potentiality, that is, of the potential to be and to act. Ultimately, Negri understands the contemporary—now fully biopolitical—monster as the power of the multitude, as the production and constitution of the common. My essay—“Time Matters: Marx, Negri, Agamben, and the Corporeal”—constitutes an attempt to think a communist temporality, namely, a way to understand and to practice time as existing nowhere outside of, and as fully incorporated in, our singular and common body, a way to live time as incorporation of the common. To this purpose, I stage a confrontation between Agamben’s and Negri’s very different articulations of a theory of revolutionary time—the former in his essay “Time and History: Critique of the Instant and the Continuum,” and the latter in his *The Constitution of Time*—both of which I find at once very productive and yet inadequate. First of all, I argue that what is different in their theories of temporality is more usefully understood as complementary. Second, I argue that—differences notwithstanding—they both, on the one hand, sense the fundamental importance of the question of corporeality for any theorization of revolutionary time, and, on the other hand, are impeded by their own theorizations of time when it comes to attending to this crucial question in a convincing manner. This is why in the end I turn to Marx—and, in particular, to his discussions of the money form and of the temporality of capitalist circulation in the *Grundrisse*—in order to show that he had already not only encountered but also pointed in the direction of a possible solution to the problem into which both Agamben and Negri run. In short, this part of the book gives both of us the chance to offer the reader further clarifications and elaborations of our—at times convergent, at times divergent—positions.

Because the diachronic demands its share, it would be remiss of me not to spend a few words on the circumstances of our conversation. Our exchanges took place in Negri’s apartment in Rome, were recorded on tape, and subsequently were transcribed, edited, and translated from Italian into English. “A Class-Struggle Propaedeutics, 1950s–1970s,” “Sounding the Present,” and “Vicissitudes of Constituent Thought” were recorded in July 2001—during the days of the infamous G8 summit in Genoa—with the exception of the second section of “Sounding the Present” (“On *Multitude*”), which was recorded in July 2004. The first section of “Vicissitudes of Constituent Thought” appeared in 2004 under a different title in the journal *Cultural Critique*.⁵ Negri’s essay “The Political Monster” was originally published in

Italian in 2001 and appears here in English for the first time, in a translation by Maurizia Boscagli.⁶ My essay “Time Matters” is a slightly revised version of an essay by the same title that was published in 2003 in a special issue on Negri of the journal *Strategies*.⁷

As the title of this book indicates, the concept of the common constitutes the concatenation of all its sections: it is engaged explicitly in the sections of “Sounding the Present”—yet our conversation hovers like a swarm of thoughts around this concept throughout. In *What Is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari write that all “concepts are connected to problems without which they would have no meaning and which can themselves only be isolated or understood as their solution emerges.”⁸ The problem that is found here to constitute the condition of possibility as well as the *raison d’être* of the concept of the common can be formulated as a question: how can we be in common, how can we live together, today? I will let the reader decide what kind of solution—if any—emerges from our book. Deleuze and Guattari point out also that concepts are never given a priori, are not ready-made and ready-for-use; rather, they need to be produced anew each and every time.⁹ This is why I have felt it necessary to offer here further elaborations of the concept of the common. (In many respects, they complement my essay “Time Matters.”) These elaborations, on the one hand, owe an immense debt to Negri’s entire philosophical and political trajectory (including our conversing together), and, on the other hand, are ultimately my own and hence do not reflect necessarily Negri’s own thoughts on the common (which may well differ significantly from what I write here). In the following section of this preface, I engage selectively with some of the thinkers I have found to be most productive when thinking about the common—primarily, Dante Alighieri, Marx, Aristotle, Spinoza, as well as Hardt and Negri—so as, in the end, to try to sketch the contour of a concept of *surplus common*. In the final section of this preface, I reflect very briefly on the relation among friendship, thought, and the common by expressing my gratitude to the friends who produced thought in me while I was writing these pages.

On Surplus Common

The common is legion. Many are its manifestations and definitions. This is not the place to retrace the multifarious genealogies of the concept of the common, whose origins hark back at least to the dawn of the early-modern era. It might constitute an instructive exercise nonetheless to foreshorten the

distance separating us from that dawn, and to juxtapose one of the earliest and one of the latest attempts to produce such a concept, namely, on the one hand, Dante's writings on politics and on language, and, on the other hand, Hardt and Negri's *Multitude*.¹⁰

According to Agamben's compelling claim, modern political thought begins with Averroist philosophy—and, in particular, with Dante's 1313 treatise *De monarchia* (On world government). Agamben's claim is based on this philosophy's attempt to define the intellect as a potentiality for thought common to all human beings, as well as to define thought not at all as the solitary activity of separate individuals, or even as the activity of particular communities in isolation from one another, but as the collective, incessant, and incremental practice of a common humanity, that is, of humankind posited in its totality.¹¹ To Agamben's claim I will add that prior to elaborating explicitly such an argument with respect to thought, Dante had made implicitly a similar argument with respect to language approximately a decade earlier in his treatise *De vulgari eloquentia* (On the Eloquence of the Vernacular). On the first page of this treatise—when positing the superiority of *locutio prima* (namely, vernacular language as we all learn it first by hearing and imitating adults) over *locutio secundaria* (namely, grammar, or, scholarly language, as the few learn it later through formal instruction)—Dante writes:

Of these two types of language, the more noble is the vernacular:
because it was the first to be used habitually by humankind
[*humano generi*]; because the whole world employs it, even though
it is divided into different pronunciations and into different words;
and because it is natural to us, while the other appears artificial
instead.¹²

The three reasons adduced here for the superiority of the vernacular have the combined effect of revealing what Dante is after—or has stumbled upon—in grappling with the question of the vernacular in the first place. First of all, the second reason given here crucially modifies the first: the vernacular, in other words, was the first language “to be used habitually by humankind” not in the sense that it constituted a common or universal language (i.e., in the beginning, everybody spoke the same language) but in the sense that it constituted a common linguistic habitus (i.e., in the beginning everybody learned and used language in the same manner). Second, to assert, on the

one hand, that “the whole world employs it,” and, on the other hand, that it does not exist as such outside its myriad different forms and manifestations, is tantamount to saying that this “it” refers to the very fact that there is language rather than to a specific kind of language or even to language in and of itself intended as structure or system. Moreover, to insist that “it is natural to us, while the other appears artificial”—after having explained in the immediately preceding paragraph that *both* are learned—suggests that the predicates “natural” and “artificial” do not refer to two different types of language but to two different ways of learning, using, and conceptualizing language. In short, Dante’s protestations to the contrary notwithstanding, the vernacular is not a type of language at all and is not even language *per se*. The vernacular, rather, is at once a linguistic potential (that is, the capacity to learn language) and a linguistic practice (that is, the process by which such a capacity comes to its fruition through acquisition and usage) common to all human beings. Even though later in the treatise Dante will deploy the term and concept of vernacular in a different way—as he proceeds to produce a taxonomy of the fourteen different types of vernacular spoken across the Italian peninsula—in these opening pages the vernacular constitutes a common potential for language as well as a common practice of language.

When speculating on the emergence of the vernacular thus conceived, however, Dante specifies further what exactly the object of investigation is in this treatise:

Since, therefore, human beings are moved not by their natural instinct but by reason, and since that reason takes different forms in single individuals, according to their discrimination, judgment, or choice—to the point where it appears that almost everyone enjoys the existence of a unique species—I hold that we can never understand the actions or passions of others by reference to our own, as the baser animal can. Nor is it given to us to enter into each other’s minds by means of spiritual contemplation, as the angels do, because the human spirit is concealed by the opacity and weighed down by the heaviness of the mortal body. So it was necessary that humankind, in order for its members to communicate their conceptions among themselves, should have some rational and sensory [*sensuale*] sign. Since this sign was needed to take from reason as well as to give back to reason, it had to be rational; but since nothing can be conveyed from a reasoning mind to another

except by sensory means, it had to be also sensory. For, if it was purely rational, it could not transmit or travel [*pertransire*]; if purely sensory, it could neither take from nor deliver back to reason. This sign, then, is the noble subject that I am going to discuss; for it is sensory inasmuch as it is a sound; and it is also rational inasmuch as it is taken to signify, by common agreement.¹³

Much ought to be said about this remarkable proto-Saussurean investigation into the nature of the linguistic sign. For the moment, I would like simply to point out that the sign is posited here as a translating—and, indeed, transvaluating—apparatus. First of all, this passage reveals that the vernacular and the sign are, for all intents and purposes, equivalent to one another. It is the case not only that both are identified explicitly as the “subject” of this treatise (the latter in this passage and the former as early as in the title). It is the case also that the way in which the sign is articulated here constitutes in effect a way of considering *locutio prima* in itself rather than in relation to *locutio secundaria*. (Importantly, both the vernacular and the sign are qualified by the same adjective: the former at this point in the treatise has been referred to as “the more noble type of language” twice already, while the latter is referred to in the passage quoted above as “the noble subject” of the treatise.) Second, the power of the sign is such that it is able to translate and to transcend even those individual differences that are so radical that they turn each and every human being into a veritable species unto itself. Third, the sign is described here as taking and giving (i.e., as medium of exchange), as transporting and traveling back and forth (i.e., as medium of circulation). Fourth, and most important perhaps, the sign is at once sensory and rational, and hence is delicately poised between body and spirit—belonging fully to both as their interface and mediator, and yet already representing *in potentia* some sort of semiautonomous entity unto itself. I am suggesting, in other words, that for Dante the linguistic sign functions already like the modern sign of value par excellence, namely, *money*.

In this respect, Dante seems to anticipate a host of structural homologies between language and capital at least by five centuries (if one understands Marx’s work to constitute implicitly one of the earliest such homologies).¹⁴ Let me emphasize, however, that Dante’s articulation of the sign is at once (largely) precapitalist and (marginally yet crucially) protocapitalist. On the one hand, the sign in this passage is characterized as medium of exchange and circulation, and, as Marx explains in detail in the *Grundrisse*, as long as

money is no more than medium of exchange and circulation—which is to say, as long as money has not yet become the independent and general form of wealth—we are still fully within precapitalist modes of production.¹⁵ On the other hand, there is one specific characteristic of the sign here that already hints at this future development in the money form: the sign fluctuates in a zone of indistinction between body and spirit. In order to clarify this last point, I will quote from Kiarina Kordela's succinct and powerful thesis regarding the advent of secular capitalist modernity:

Albeit in different ways, antiquity and all the subsequent presecular eras of Hellenistic and medieval theocracy were organized around one and the same persistent opposition: *matter* versus *spirit*. The secular era of capitalist modernity, by contrast, constitutes itself around a radically new opposition: *matter* versus *value*. The displacement of spirit by the secular function of value entails an unforeseen expansion of the realm of *representation*, insofar as value is an immaterial, abstract symbol that is determined through its differential relation to all other homogeneous symbols. While spirit could manifest itself only in the Word, value has two manifestations: a *semantic* one, as the word or the signifier representing the concept that refers to a thing; and an *economic* one, as the equivalent exchange-value representing the relevant value of a thing (commodity). The advent of secular capitalism amounts to the transformation of the economy into a representational system.¹⁶

Dante's sign is pivotal in at least two respects: it lives and mediates not only in between matter and spirit but also in between the two eras marked by the matter–spirit theocratic opposition and the matter–value secular opposition, respectively. In Dante's sign we can already catch a glimpse of a possible third term that might undo the binary opposition of matter and spirit from the inside by making its living contradiction manifest and—ultimately—untenable, unlivable. In the context of this paradigm, matter and spirit by definition do not share anything in common and do not communicate, and yet the sign partakes of both and enables their exchanges, that is, the circulation of meaning or differential semantic value. Incidentally, it bears witness to the difficulties posed by this contradiction that Dante, when running into the problem of having to explain how Adam learned language in the first place, corners himself into asserting, on the one hand, that

language was given to Adam by God, and, on the other hand, that the divine Word has nothing at all to do with anything that “we would call language.”¹⁷ In short, Dante’s sign constitutes one of the earliest harbingers and prototypical manifestations of that secular, capitalist, abstract, differential, and self-referential symbol of value that will eventually displace spirit altogether and usher forth a dispiriting modernity that is still very much with us.¹⁸

Let us return now to Dante’s intuitions regarding the vernacular as constituting a common potential for language as well as a common practice of language. We can already begin to draw three related and provisional conclusions from these early moments in the conceptualization of the common. First of all, *the common is defined according to two fundamental Aristotelian categories, namely, potentiality and actuality*. Steeped as it is from its very beginning in Averroist philosophy—whose powerful investments in reelaborating the Aristotelian problematic are well known and well documented—the common comprises two related elements or aspects: at once potential and actual, the common lives of a double life. It is crucial to stress, in other words, that for Dante that which brings human beings in common is at once a shared potentiality for thought and for language *as well as* the collective process of actualization of such a potentiality in the first place: the common precedes us as much as we precede it, it produces us as much as we produce it—at one and the same time. Second—because of its intimate relations to thought, to language, and to their modalities of transmission and circulation—*the common is defined in terms of communication rather than in terms of community*. Indeed, to the extent to which communication—in both its semantic and nonsemantic forms—is understood as a collective and cooperative process of actualization of common intellectual and linguistic potentials that entails necessarily the mobilization of humankind in its totality, to that extent it is also identified as that process that undermines the very condition of possibility for the emergence both of separate, discrete, unitary individualities, and of separate, particular, homogeneous communities.¹⁹ (It is worth noting that for Dante the first instances of linguistic communication are nonsemantic rather than semantic, performative rather than constative: according to his myth of linguistic origins, Adam’s first utterance was “God!”—intended specifically as “a cry of joy”—while the first utterance of each and every human being after the Fall is “woe!”—a cry of suffering and pain. This means that for Dante the expression of affect—including that which seems most solitary, personal, and intimate—not only is collective, impersonal, and extimate, but also needs to be understood as part

and parcel of communication and of the common.)²⁰ In short, the common (understood at once as the cause and as the effect of intellectual, linguistic, and affective communication) and community (understood as *Gemeinschaft*) are not only mutually exclusive with but also profoundly inimical to each other. Third, such a conceptualization of the common emerges from and is symptomatic of a certain type of heretical, protosecular, rationalist, medieval—Christian as well as Islamic—universalism. For better and for worse, *the common is defined from its very inception as a universalist concept.*²¹

It is hardly a coincidence that one of the latest and most comprehensive attempts to produce a concept of the common—namely, Hardt and Negri’s *Multitude*—bears a striking family resemblance to Dante’s initial intuitions; for in philosophy, much as in friendship, one is given the chance to create one’s own “family” according to the principle of elective affinities. Such affinities may be elected in a variety of ways. I have been always unsure about Walter Benjamin’s assertion that “[t]here is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one,” that “[o]ur coming was expected on earth,” and that “[l]ike every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim.”²² I am not sure that the past and its generations were waiting for our arrival, but I am sure that some of us still wait for *theirs*. I am sure that some of us wait and work for our own past to happen in the form of the future anterior. Some of us search for, stake a claim on, and elect as our own past that bygone moment when what we desire now was first anticipated and deferred, when what we now want as our future might have taken place but never did.

Elective, however, does not mean arbitrary. The historical condition of possibility for identifying nowadays in whatever way with certain thinkers of the late-medieval and early-modern eras consists of a specific, momentous event. What those thinkers had begun to sense as the driving force and operative principle of the common, namely, a common intellectual, linguistic, and affective capacity along with its appertaining forms of realization, circulation, and communication—or, in short, thought, language, and affect, in both their potential and actual aspects—has become the prime motor of the capitalist mode of production in its current, fully global, and tendentially universal phase. If those past eras and their heretics are at all intelligible as well as urgently relevant for us today, that is so because that which they had envisaged as the condition of possibility for a common humanity has become the increasingly dominant and determining form of labor in the era

of the real subsumption of all forms of life and of *bios* itself under capital, also known as postmodernity. What had been identified long ago as our best (and possibly our only) chance for being in common has been turned into communicative labor and has been put to work for postmodern capitalism instead: it is not only harnessed, expropriated, and exploited for the extraction of surplus value; it is also posited as the paradigmatic feature of a mode of production that brings us together precisely to the extent to which it tears us apart.²³

It is such an indentured and postmodern avatar of the common that concerns Hardt and Negri in *Multitude*. In this work, they attempt to rethink the common in the wake of the event of our time—namely, the capture of the common by capital.²⁴ What matters most is not merely that the three fundamental features of the common in its earliest definitions—namely, its exhibiting potential and actual aspects simultaneously, its being rooted in intellectual, linguistic, and affective communication rather than in homogeneous communities, as well as its being posited hence as a universalist concept—are to be found almost unaltered in *Multitude*.²⁵ Precisely because such echoes resound so clearly across the diachronic abysses separating our postmodern present from that protomodern past, it is necessary, rather, to tune in on the less audible refractions, on the more muted distortions. What matters most, in other words, is to identify the difference in Hardt and Negri’s repetition of the common. In one of the most valuable sections of *Multitude*, “Method: In Marx’s Footsteps,” Hardt and Negri at once recapitulate and reformulate an argument they had made already in *Empire*, namely, that the capitalist mode of production in its current phase—driven as it is by intellectual, linguistic, and affective communication—is to be understood as having its proper “foundation in the common”:²⁶

A theory of the relation between labor and value today must be based on the common. The common appears at both ends of immaterial production, as presupposition and as result . . . The common, in fact, appears not only at the beginning and end of production but also in the middle, since the production processes themselves are common, collaborative, and communicative. Labor and value have become biopolitical in the sense that living and producing tend to be indistinguishable. Insofar as life tends to be completely invested by acts of production and reproduction, social life itself becomes a productive machine.²⁷

We begin to see here already a subtle modification of the early conceptualization of the common as articulated by Dante. (Arguably, such a modification amounts to a full explication of an insight regarding the thought—language—affect assemblage as common praxis that was already implicit in Dante’s formulations.) No longer only potential (i.e., “presupposition”) and actual (i.e., “result”), the common here is identified as the process by which the former is turned actively and continuously into the latter. Situated as it is “not only at the beginning and end of production but also in the middle,” *the common is now (its own self-producing, self-positing, and self-referential) production*. This reformulation of the common has two crucial consequences.

First of all, to reconceptualize the common also as production in its entirety is tantamount to saying that nowadays the common no longer has any outside. This is another way of saying that nowadays the common is virtually indistinguishable from that which continually captures it, namely, capital understood as a fully—that is, intensively and extensively—global network of social relations. In short, the common has no outside and is virtually indistinguishable from capital to the extent to which “living and producing tend to be indistinguishable.” Hardt and Negri proceed to argue that to reformulate the relation between labor and value in such a manner means also to conceive of “exploitation as *the expropriation of the common*.” “The common,” they write, “has become the locus of surplus value,” and hence exploitation is to be understood as the privatization “of the value that has been produced as common.”²⁸ If, therefore, a necessary component of any anticapitalist political project today is the reappropriation of the common—whose precondition consists in resisting capital’s current and rampant privatization of the common in all of its forms—I would argue that such a precondition itself rests on another more fundamental precondition. The condition of possibility for any such resistance and reappropriation consists in being willing and able paradoxically to distinguish capital from its own “foundation in the common” *precisely because it is capital rather than the common that posits and needs to posit itself and the common as indistinguishable from one another*. On the one hand, this would be a purely analytic distinction—given that there is no longer any outside, either to the common or to capital. On the other hand, such a distinction would be no less significant and effective for being analytic or even merely heuristic. For example, at the very least such a distinction might have important performative functions: the very fact of being willing and able to posit it might very well transfigure the way in which I look at and live in the world—which is no

small matter, if it is the case that today “life tends to be completely invested by acts of production and reproduction,” and “social life itself” is “a productive machine.” Put differently, the act of positing such a distinction might constitute at once the cause and the effect of a radical transformation in the form of subjectivity I inhabit such that I would *want* to reappropriate the common in the first place: this desire, after all, cannot be taken for granted as being there a priori. In short, I am arguing that any project of reappropriation of the common from capital needs to begin from an attempt to distinguish—that is, to articulate the difference—between the two.

Second, the emergence of this “middle” term in the passage just quoted—namely, the common as production—raises a host of other questions. Is this “middle” the common-in-itself as opposed both to the common-for-itself (the common as “presupposition”) and to the common-for-others (the common as “result”)? Is the common as production the condition of possibility of both the common as “presupposition” and the common as “result”? Is this middle term in effect the matrix of both potentiality and actuality? My provisional answer to these questions is yes. I am suggesting that Hardt and Negri articulate the common here as a triadic structure (and, as we shall see, this structure is to be understood more precisely as tetradic rather than triadic). Within such a structure, the term of production—precisely to the extent to which it is now fully self-producing, self-positing, self-referential, and hence without any outside—constitutes the only truly potential term that, on the one hand, is immanent in all forms of actualization, and, on the other hand, is never actualized in and of itself. Contrary to what I stated at first, the common as “presupposition” is not to be understood as a potential term; or, more precisely, it is to be understood as a potential term *only relatively*, that is, only as relative to its successive “result.” Put differently, both “presupposition” and “result” constitute different types of actualization because they function within strictly relative and diachronic parameters: far from constituting potentiality as such, the former is a *past* actualization of the common, while the latter is a *present* actualization that is based on the former and that will provide in turn the basis for a number of possible *future* actualizations. Potentiality, however, functions according to strictly absolute rather than relative, synchronic rather than diachronic parameters. In short, the common in its tetradic reformulation consists of (a) an element of potentiality—that is, production—that constitutes the condition of possibility of (b) past, (c) present, and (d) future actualizations, all of which partake of and determine (a) potentiality. The latter (actualizations) provide

one another with elements of relative potential within a diachronic succession, thereby constituting building blocks in the edifice of the history of the common. The former (potentiality) is that absolute, synchronic, trans-historical, ontological structure of the common-in-itself which functions as absent cause immanent in its own effects.²⁹

And, one might ask, so what? Why does any of this matter? The point is that any project of reappropriation of the common is bound to fail if it is directed solely to its past, present, or future actualizations. We may well be successful in resisting the privatization of this or that specific element of the common, and even in claiming back for the common one or more of its elements that already had been expropriated and privatized successfully by capital. There is nothing in such a success, however, that in principle will impede capital from proceeding to expropriate some other element—or even those very same elements—of the common once again. Any project of reappropriation of the common, in other words, needs always to address itself also to the common understood as indiscernible yet distinct from its myriad actualizations. To reappropriate the common means to claim back and seize not only its products but also its means of production, that is, the common as (its own self-producing, self-positing, and self-referential) production.

And yet, one might insist, doesn't this entail, in effect, seizing potentiality qua potentiality, that is, potentiality in its absolute, synchronic, trans-historical, nonrepresentable, nonactualizable state? Isn't such a seizure by definition not only impossible but also nonsensical? When recast in terms of potentiality, however, the seizure of the means of production is no Leninist project. To claim back and seize the common as production entails a drastic reorientation of subjectivity such that one might begin to distinguish between, on the one hand, the common as its own foundation, and, on the other hand, the common as the foundation of its own negation in capital. It entails the production of a form of subjectivity constitutionally unable any longer to be interpellated by and to identify with the capitalist desire to posit itself as indistinguishable from the common. It entails the production of a form of subjectivity constituted by a counterdesire. Such a counterdesire is *the desire to be in common*—as opposed to the desire to be for the common-as-captured-by-capital, the desire to be for the common-as-negated-by-capital, the desire to be captive of one's own negation—in short, as opposed to *the desire not to be*. (Incidentally, the desire not to be is not to be confused with the desire to die. On the contrary, the desire not to be is the desire to

foreclose and transcend death altogether: it is the desire to live forever as always already dead. This is the desire to live as pure dead labor in perennial exchange, as pure commodity in perpetual circulation: under capital, *the desire not to be is the desire to be money.*)

Arguably, the form of subjectivity I am envisioning here exists already in many of us (albeit in various degrees of intensity and in various modalities of expression, according to radically different geopolitical and socio-economic determinations). It is the case, for example, that the vast global network of so-called antiglobalization movements—which have emerged during the last two decades, and which are well documented and discussed in *Multitude*—bear witness to a form of subjectivity constituted precisely by the desire to be in common.³⁰ I am in full agreement with Hardt and Negri when they assert—in light of such political movements—that “a common political project is *possible*,” that “it is important to remember that another world, a better, more democratic world, is possible,” that it is important “to foster our desire for such a world” (even though “democratic” is not the term I would use to describe a better world).³¹ Leaving aside the question of how exactly such a desire is to be fostered, what is to be done when the desire to be in common is not there, when what is there instead is what I have been calling the desire not to be? Isn’t it also the case that vast portions of the world’s population are driven by the desire not to be, and that they constitute the actual limit and concrete walls up against which any desire to be in common repeatedly shatters? What is to be done about the fact that many are those who not only are enslaved but also actually desire their own enslavement—thereby, willy-nilly, supporting the imposition of a global system of enslavement on all those who do not desire their own enslavement in the least? (The fact that these two different types of desire and their corresponding forms of subjectivity often coexist in the same body does not simplify matters.) Obviously, if everybody everywhere were driven already, however minimally, by the desire at once to disidentify with the capitalist imperative to posit itself as indistinguishable from the common and to identify instead with the common as qualitatively different from capital, then we would already be in a different world—a world beyond the desire not to be and beyond capital altogether.

If the desire not to be is to change in any way, it needs first to be taken seriously and confronted as an actual, real, true desire in its own right: it needs to be understood as actually existing, as really produced, as truly desired just like any other desire—including the desire to be in common. Put

differently, just like any other desire, the desire to be in common has no ontological primacy: it does not correspond to an ontological dynamic intrinsic to the common as production; it is not inscribed a priori in the order of being; it is not the logic of potentiality as such. If that were to be the case, the reappropriation of the common in all of its aspects would be not only a foregone conclusion in terms of historical development but also an ontological necessity *tout court*—and, on the contrary, it is neither. The reason why other worlds (including better and worse ones) are possible—which is also to say the reason why none of them is inevitable—is that potentiality is nothing necessarily: namely, it is necessarily nothing outside its actualizations or effects. Being is being-together only to the extent to which we (as desiring effects) strive to make it so. The reappropriation of the common—including the seizure of the common-in-itself, of the common as production, of potentiality—entails not only fostering our desire to be in common whenever and wherever it is already there in whatever degree and in whatever form. It entails also producing such a desire there where it is not, namely, transforming its own negation, transfiguring the desire not to be. And because the desire not to be feeds on the capitalist fantasy of identity with the common, the transfiguration—at once metamorphosis and radicalization—of such a desire demands that that fantasy be neutralized, deactivated, and substituted by the qualitative difference between capital and the common instead. Undoubtedly, such a qualitative difference is a fantasy too, but at least it is not a murderous one. There is something to be said for a fantasy that does not support and materialize the necessary double gesture of capital: at once to exploit and to foreclose the common as production, thereby not only separating potentiality from its effects but also commanding us to live as if potentiality were sheer nothing rather than nothing outside its effects. There is something to be said for a fantasy that, on the contrary, embodies a life-affirming gesture—a fantasy congruent with a body willing and able to affirm and to incorporate the common as production in all of its gestures, thereby rejecting any separation whatsoever. This is all to say that the seizure of the common as production entails nothing less than a revolution in desire and subjectivity—which is to say, an ideological revolution.³² In short, my point is that it is first of all by taking the risk of acknowledging, knowing, affirming, engaging, and, indeed, living potentiality as absent cause immanent in its effects and as nothing outside its effects that such a qualitative difference and its attendant and constitutive desire may be produced in the first place.

We might begin to articulate the qualitative difference between capital and its own “foundation in the common” by pointing to a fissure in Hardt and Negri’s formulations—a fissure that may prove to be productive for further elaborations of the concept of the common. On the one hand, they argue that capital and the common have become virtually indistinguishable from each other to the extent to which nowadays “living and producing tend to be indistinguishable.” On the other hand, they also argue that there is a remainder, a gap, between the two. When characterizing the common as “the locus of surplus value” and hence “exploitation as *the expropriation of the common*,” in fact, they add that production and its products “are by their very nature common, and yet capital manages to appropriate privately *some* of their wealth.”³³ This last sentence introduces an important qualification: namely, *there is a common wealth that is not appropriated by capital*. It turns out that capital and the common are not identical, and hence that they might be distinguishable after all. This qualification begs several crucial questions. What exactly is the nature of this common wealth that is not appropriated by capital? Is it something that capital has not been able to appropriate yet, or is it something that capital cannot appropriate by structural necessity and by definition? In short, are we faced here by a difference of degree or by a difference of nature, by a quantitative and relative difference or by a qualitative and absolute difference?

In order to try to answer these questions, let us turn to another section of *Multitude*—titled “Mobilization of the Common”—in which Hardt and Negri discuss the relations among exploitation, antagonism, revolt, and struggle:

We have already noted how antagonism results from every relationship of exploitation, every hierarchical division of the global system, and every effort to control and command the common. We have also focused on the fact that the production of the common always involves a surplus that cannot be expropriated by capital or captured in the regimentation of the global political body. This surplus, at the most abstract philosophical level, is the basis on which antagonism is transformed into revolt. Deprivation, in other words, may breed anger, indignation, and antagonism, but revolt arises only on the basis of wealth, that is, a surplus of intelligence, experience, knowledges, and desire. When we propose the poor as the paradigmatic subjective figure of labor today, it is not because

the poor are empty and excluded from wealth but because they are included in the circuits of production and full of potential, which always exceeds what capital and the global political body can expropriate and control. This common surplus is the first pillar on which are built struggles against the global political body and for the multitude.³⁴

The common had been identified earlier as “the locus of surplus value” and hence of exploitation. Here, however, Hardt and Negri explain that the common is also the locus of a different kind of surplus altogether. But what exactly is the difference? If surplus value is the specific difference of capitalism as a mode of production, this other surplus may well hold the key to the specific difference of the common as other than capital—and hence it is crucial to explain Hardt and Negri’s explanation in turn.³⁵

Aside from the first sentence, the other five following sentences in the paragraph just quoted function like so many tesserae in a possible and as yet incomplete mosaic of another surplus, like so many complementary parts toward a general architectonics of its specific difference. About such a surplus, we read sequentially: (1) it is that which in “the production of the common always” is unexploitable; (2) it is the condition of possibility for the transformation of “antagonism” into “revolt”; (3) it is a common “wealth” of “intelligence, experience, knowledges, and desire”; (4) it is that “potential, which always exceeds what capital” can exploit; (5) it is that “common surplus” which serves as the foundation of “struggles . . . for the multitude” and hence for the reappropriation of the common.³⁶ I will rearrange the pieces of this philosophical-political jigsaw puzzle by drawing attention to the fact that this other surplus is posited here as the cause of (what Deleuze and Guattari would call) a revolutionary becoming; it may lead us from exploitation to struggle, from expropriation to reappropriation, by effecting a shift from a form of subjectivity capable only of “anger, indignation, and antagonism” to a form of subjectivity in “revolt.” How does this surplus effect such a subtle yet vertiginous, momentous shift? Whence does it derive such a transfiguring power? The power of this surplus lies in the fact that, as we have seen, it can *never* be exploited by capital, that is, it cannot be exploited by structural necessity and by definition: it is precisely because this surplus is other than capital, thus, that it may enable revolutionary forms of subjectivity. But how does this surplus escape the increasingly ubiquitous, penetrating reach of capital? In what sense does it exceed capital’s indefatigable

capacity to extract surplus value, to exploit, to expropriate, to capture? I believe the passage just quoted answers this question in the following way: the surplus of the common can never be exploited by capital in the sense that it is “potential.”³⁷ I believe also that this answer is accurate and yet incomplete: the surplus of the common exceeds capital not only insofar as it is potential but also insofar as it is an absolute rather than a relative potential. (This means that such a surplus can be defined as common “wealth” of “intelligence, experience, knowledges,” “desire,” and much else besides, only if the term “wealth” is disengaged completely from its capitalist determination. This common wealth is not relative wealth that is measurable or even comprehensible in terms of value; it is, rather, absolute wealth, or, as Marx would put it, labor power as “*not-value*,” that is, at once as “absolute poverty” and as “the *general possibility* of wealth.”)³⁸ In short, if “the production of the common always involves a surplus that cannot be expropriated by capital,” that is so because this surplus is the common-in-itself, the common as (its own self-producing, self-positing, self-referential) production, the common as potentiality as such. This surplus not only is not measurable or quantifiable but also is not a thing or collection of things at all. The qualitative difference between the common and capital understood as the regime of surplus value consists of this other surplus, which, for lack of a better term, I would like to call *surplus common*. Revolutionary becoming is living the common as surplus.

Surplus is potentiality qua potentiality.³⁹ Thus far, I have characterized surplus value and surplus common as two different surpluses altogether, which are irreducible to one another. Such a characterization needs to be qualified. The point is that *there is only one surplus*, which may effect and be effected in different ways. On the one hand, surplus is that which capital strives to subsume absolutely under surplus value and yet manages to do so only relatively because it is structurally unable to subsume without at the same time negating and foreclosing that which it subsumes—thereby enabling the emergence of surplus common. On the other hand, surplus is also that which envelops and subsists in the common as surplus common, that is, as the common’s distinct yet indiscernible element of potentiality, and hence also as the condition of possibility of all the common’s fully exploitable and subsumable actual elements—thereby enabling the emergence of surplus value. This may sound like a suffocating, unbreakable, vicious circle—but it is not necessarily one at all. Being is not a serpent swallowing its own tail. The solution to this apparent stalemate is not to shy away from

actualizations altogether: it lies, rather, in actualizing without foreclosing that which enables us to actualize in the first place. This is tantamount to saying that surplus value and surplus common name two radically different ways of materializing the one and only surplus. *The qualitative difference between capital and the common consists in positing surplus in different ways, in engaging surplus to different ends. Surplus value is living surplus as separation (in the form of value par excellence, namely, money). Surplus common is living surplus as incorporation (in the forms of the common, including and especially our bodies).* Wasn't this already one of Marx's most revolutionary intuitions? It may be instructive here to turn to (arguably) the most important thinker of surplus, namely, Marx. If indeed the *differentia specifica* of capitalism as a mode of production is the extraction of surplus value, that is, the self-contradictory process of subsuming surplus under value, let us inquire into the ontological status of "value" and "surplus value" in Marx.

In the *Grundrisse*, Marx asks: "In and for itself, is value as such the general form, in opposition to use value and exchange value as *particular* forms of it?"—and, as he proceeds to show, this is, in effect, a rhetorical question.⁴⁰ There is no such a thing as value, which nonetheless inheres in its particular manifestations. But what exactly is the mode of existence of that which inheres in its manifestations? What is the materiality "of value . . . as general form"? When analyzing the double life of the commodity in *Capital*, Marx qualifies such a materiality in no unclear terms:

Not an atom of matter enters into the objectivity of commodities as values; in this it is the direct opposite of the coarsely sensuous objectivity of commodities as physical objects. We may twist and turn a single commodity as we wish; it remains impossible to grasp it as a thing possessing value.⁴¹

Value does not have "an atom of matter" in the specific sense that it constitutes "the direct opposite" of matter. In this stunning turn of phrase, Marx identifies the difference between precapitalist antiquity and capitalist modernity. The invocation of the "atom" in this context could hardly be more laden with significance for someone who had written his doctoral dissertation on ancient Greek atomism.⁴² Unlike the ancient conception of matter as composed of atoms, modern matter is not only made of atoms but also haunted by something other than atoms, by something other than itself, by its uncanny mirror image, by its photographic negative, by its inverse, by

antimatter, namely, value. To the extent to which it is commodified, matter has its doppelgänger in value.

This crucial insight—namely, that value constitutes the difference between ancient and modern materiality—is made explicit shortly thereafter, in those luminous pages in which Marx discusses Aristotle’s pathbreaking yet incomplete analysis of the form of value in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Marx argues that “Aristotle . . . himself tells us what prevented” him from proceeding “any further” in his analysis: namely, “the lack of a concept of value” understood as the equalizing representation of that “common substance” which is “human labour.”⁴³ Marx argues in effect that Aristotle discovers “value” by not discovering it. I will return to this epistemological paradox. It is essential first to relate Marx’s explanation of Aristotle’s impasse: “Aristotle . . . was unable” to discern in “the form of value” the fact that in commodities “all labour is expressed as equal human labour and therefore as labour of equal equality . . . because Greek society was founded on the labour of slaves, hence had as its natural basis the inequality of men and of their labour-powers.”⁴⁴ Marx reaches the conclusion, therefore, that only under capital—that is, “in a society” in which “the commodity-form is the universal form of the product of labour” and hence in which “the dominant social relation” is the exchange relation—it becomes possible to decipher exactly what value represents: “namely the equality and equivalence of all kinds of labour.”⁴⁵ In short, value is the representation of a social relation of exchange that presupposes the commensurability of all things on the basis of that which is equal in them and which produces them. The emergence of value as representation enables a posteriori the visibility of its inverse, that is, of labor as common substance, of production as substance of the common.

What concerns me here, however, is also what Marx does not say rather than only what he does say. On the one hand, Marx identifies accurately the—at once historical and structural—reasons why Aristotle lacks “a concept of value.” On the other hand, Marx does not tell us what the condition of possibility, as well as the significance, might be of the fact that “Aristotle . . . himself tells us” that he lacks “a concept of value.” Marx explains why Aristotle did not and could not discover value, without, however, explaining why Aristotle paradoxically did discover it nonetheless by not discovering it.⁴⁶ Let us look at the text more closely. Marx comments thus on the fact that for Aristotle the equation “5 beds = 1 house . . . is indistinguishable from” the equation “5 beds = a certain amount of money”:

[Aristotle] sees that the value-relation which provides the framework for this expression of value itself requires that the house should be qualitatively equated with the bed, and that these things, being distinct to the senses, could not be compared with each other as commensurable magnitudes if they lacked this essential identity. “There can be no exchange,” he says, “without equality, and no equality without commensurability” . . . Here, however, he falters, and abandons the further analysis of the form of value. “It is, however, in reality, impossible [*adynaton*] . . . that such unlike things can be commensurable,” i.e. qualitatively equal . . . Aristotle’s genius is displayed precisely by his discovery of a relation of equality in the value-expression of commodities. Only the historical limitations inherent in the society in which he lived prevented him from finding out what “in reality” this relation of equality consisted of.⁴⁷

On the threshold of that which is equal in the bed and in the house and which is represented by money, Aristotle “falters.” But one does not stumble without stumbling upon *something*: Aristotle here stumbles upon something that he declares to be “impossible.” Put differently, Aristotle would not have faltered had he not sensed something rather than nothing at all, however impossible that something might have seemed to him. As described by Marx, the trajectory of Aristotle’s thought is one of advance toward, arrest in the face of, and then retreat from *not nothing, but something whose mode of existence is the direct opposite of the possible, of the potential*. Matters become more complicated, in fact, when we note that the adjective used by Aristotle to describe this something that exists in the modality of the “impossible” is *adynaton*, namely, without *dynamis*, without potentiality: in the passage quoted by Marx, Aristotle has encountered something that is *adynaton*, something that has no potential. My point here is not that Marx mistranslates the adjective in question: although literally *adynaton* means “without potential,” it could be used to mean either “impossible” or “weak,” “impotent,” “impotential”—much as *dynaton* could be used to mean either “possible” or “mighty,” “potent,” “potential.” My point is (a) that what Aristotle declares to be “impossible” happens to be—from a conceptual standpoint—precisely something that has no potential, and hence (b) that *adynaton* here is at once more appropriate and more significant of an adjective than it may seem at first.

This crucial adjective, in fact, takes us directly to the heart of the matter of Book Theta of the *Metaphysics*, in which Aristotle elaborates the relation between potentiality and actuality. In Part I of Book Theta, Aristotle defines potentiality (*dynamis*) as an “originative source” of change, as a transformative principle, that inheres in matter.⁴⁸ Moreover, he differentiates between two types of potentiality, namely, the potentiality to act, to change—which he defines as primary—and the potentiality to be acted on, to be changed.⁴⁹ It is in reference to potentiality thus defined that Aristotle raises the possibility of the impossible, namely, impotentiality (*adynamia*): “Impotentiality [*adynamia*] is a privation contrary to potentiality. Thus all potentiality is impotentiality of the same and with respect to the same.”⁵⁰ Because, for Aristotle, potentiality can be only potentially, the statement “all potentiality is impotentiality” cannot but imply that all potentiality is impotentiality *potentially*. This is tantamount to saying that all potentiality involves the possibility of its own privation, that all potentiality has the potential to be deprived of itself. Neither actuality nor potentiality, *adynamia* adheres nonetheless to both and hence constitutes a third term in the shadow of the relation between the two.⁵¹ Neither actuality nor potentiality, *adynamia* designates the subtraction from (both potential and actual) matter of its double property of acting or changing and being acted on or being changed: it subtracts from matter its power to transform, its power to produce. Neither actuality nor potentiality, *adynamia* does not have one atom of matter and indeed constitutes the very undoing of matter: *adynamia* is privation or nonbeing par excellence.

For Aristotle, thus, *adynamia* is, strictly speaking, nonexistent, impossible. Or is it? Such impossibility, somehow, is important enough for Aristotle to define it as well as to devote to it the entire conclusion of Part 1 of Book Theta. In that conclusion, in fact, he proceeds to define the various meanings of the term “privation”—and he defines it strictly in terms of the absence of a quality: that is, privation “means (1) that which has not a certain quality and (2) that which might naturally have it but has not it,” etc.⁵² After having completed this definition, however, Aristotle adds one last sentence—almost as an afterthought, almost as if he feels that there is something amiss or lacking in his definition after all, almost as if there continues to persist something in privation that does not cease to trouble him: “And in certain cases if things which naturally have a quality lose it by violence, we say they have suffered privation.”⁵³ This sentence constitutes an implicit commentary on the preceding definition: for Aristotle it is not sufficient to define privation as the

absence of a quality without also inquiring into the condition of possibility or the coming into being of such an absence in the first place. Moreover, the sudden appearance of “violence” in this sentence recasts the definition of privation also in terms of relations of Power, thereby adding to the definition proper a crucial corollary: privation designates not only the absence of a quality but also the violent process by which that absence may be actively produced, by which a quality may come to not be. In short, privation names also the subtraction of a quality by force. And such is the case also for that privation par excellence which is *adynamia*: it is not only always a real possibility but also “in certain cases” a real actuality. The possibility of the impossible is identified here in no unclear terms: it is potentially and actually possible to be deprived of the capacity for production, to be deprived of labor power.

Marx’s definition of labor power, after all, is strictly Aristotelian: labor power “is the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in the physical form, the living personality, of a human being, capabilities that he sets in motion whenever he produces a use-value of any kind.”⁵⁴ Labor power is precisely what Aristotle would define as primary and rational potentiality: the potentiality of human beings to act on and change something other than themselves. “Aristotle’s genius” lies not only—as Marx puts it—in “his discovery of a relation of equality in the value-expression of commodities” but also in his discovery of the fact that labor power always involves the potential to be subtracted from itself, that labor power always may be wrested away by force. If Aristotle did discover value by not discovering it in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, that is precisely because that which he declares to be impossible in that work is posited as a concrete possibility in the *Metaphysics*. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he states, on the one hand, that commensurability does exist in the realm of exchange, and, on the other hand, that it is “impossible [*adynaton*] . . . that such unlike things can be commensurable”—namely, as Marx puts it, “qualitatively equal”—because to be commensurable would mean for these things to suffer the privation of those qualities that make them unlike one another, and indeed unlike any other. In the *Metaphysics*, however, *adynamia* names precisely such a privation, which is posited implicitly as the third term inherent to potentiality and actuality designating the privation of all their qualities, including and especially the power to produce: *adynamia* names already the potential for a general equalizer, the possibility of a universal nullifier. In short, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle discovers *the concept* (in the exchange relation) without being willing and able to name it, whereas in the *Metaphysics* he

discovers *the name* without being willing and able to conceptualize it (in terms of exchange). These two moments in Aristotle's thought are at once separated and related by *adynamia* as an unthinkable aporia: they constitute the open circuit that Marx closes and completes by positing the equalizing and expropriating relation between labor power and value, between potentiality and impotentiality. What remains truly unthinkable in Aristotle—namely, what he did not discover at all—is that the realm of the metaphysical and the realm of the economic could be related in any way, that the exchange relation could involve privation as violent expropriation, that *adynamia* could force its way into the realm of exchange in and as the general form of value.⁵⁵

After this Aristotelian excursus, the materiality of value as such can be defined in a more precise manner. In Marx, value has the materiality of an absent cause immanent in its potential and actual effects, that is, in all particular use values and exchange values. For Marx, however, the concept of value does not suffice to understand the exchange relation under capital: a complementary concept of surplus value, of course, is also needed. In the *Grundrisse*, he writes:

Surplus value in general is value in excess of the equivalent. The equivalent, by definition, is only the identity of value with itself. Hence surplus value can never sprout out of the equivalent.⁵⁶

Obviously, as Marx points out immediately after these sentences, both value and surplus value “arise from the production process of capital itself.”⁵⁷ This, however, does not explain the nature of the relation between the two. In other words, what does it mean to say that excess is not born out of that which it exceeds? In what sense, then, is surplus value “in excess” with respect to value? (And in this problem too the Aristotelian echo is unmistakable, as the question of excess plays a crucial role in Aristotle's theorization of the realm of the economic in the *Politics*.)⁵⁸

In order to answer the question of the relation between value and surplus value, it is important to note first of all that for Marx the relation between surplus value as such and its particular forms is the same type of relation that binds value as such to its particular forms. In the *Grundrisse*, for example, he writes:

The surplus value which capital has at the end of the production process [is] a surplus value which, as a higher price of the product, is

realized only in circulation, but, like all prices, is realized in it by already being *presupposed* to it, determined before they enter into it.⁵⁹

Surplus value is found here to constitute at once the presupposition and the result of one of its particular forms, namely, profit. And again:

If capital increases from 100 to 1,000, then 1,000 is now the point of departure, from which the increase has to begin; the tenfold multiplication, by 1,000%, counts for nothing; profit and interest themselves become capital in turn. *What appeared as surplus value now appears as simple presupposition etc., as included in its simple composition.*⁶⁰

In short, the quantifiable result (i.e., a specific surplus value) “counts for nothing” and yet reappears as presupposition (i.e., surplus value as such), that is, *it reappears as that nothing which counts as presupposition, it reappears as determinate absence*. Indeed, Marx felt that the distinction between surplus value in general and its quantifiable modes of realization constituted one of his most important discoveries. Commenting on the first volume of *Capital* in an 1867 letter to Engels, Marx writes that one of the “best points” of that work is “the treatment of surplus value independently of its particular forms as profit, interest, ground rent, etc.”⁶¹ If one compares this statement to the aforementioned rhetorical question that Marx asks in the *Grundrisse*—namely, “is value as such the general form, in opposition to use value and exchange value as *particular* forms of it?”—one sees clearly that for Marx value and surplus value function in exactly the same way. Or—to rephrase Althusser in *Reading Capital*—for Marx, neither value nor surplus value is “a measurable reality” as such because neither of them is “a thing, but the concept of a relationship . . . visible and measurable *only in its ‘effects,’*” in which it is “present” “as a structure, in its *determinate absence.*”⁶² In Marx, both value and surplus value have the same structure and function according to immanent causality. Thus, the relation between the two—in which one is “in excess” of the other—can be described in the following manner: surplus value as such is the absent cause immanent in the general effect (value) that is itself absent cause immanent in its potential and actual effects (use value and exchange value), which, in turn, make it possible to turn value and surplus value into measurable, quantifiable, exchangeable, visible, and tangible magnitudes of violent expropriation of labor power in

the form of money. In short—just as Aristotle had foreseen already, not without a shudder of horror—excess or surplus governs the entire machinic assemblage of capital from start to finish, in the first place and in the last instance. This is why Marx can write in the *Grundrisse* that “the creation of surplus value is the presupposition of capital” itself.⁶³ This is also how Negri—when reading the *Grundrisse* in *Marx beyond Marx*—can reach the conclusion that the “theory of value . . . can exist only as a partial and abstract subordinate of the theory of surplus value.”⁶⁴

I have undertaken this brief passage through Marx not to demonstrate that his “immense theoretical revolution” was to produce the concept of capital in terms of immanent causality: such a demonstration, after all, was articulated already, elegantly and incontrovertibly, by Althusser in *Reading Capital*.⁶⁵ My point has been more specifically to show that capital consists of a tetradic structure, whose four elements—namely, surplus value, value, use value, and exchange value—indeed relate to one another according to the logic of immanent causality. My point has been to show, in other words, that *both* capital and the common are tetradic structures governed by the logic of immanent causality, that they *both* determine a posteriori and are determined a priori by the one and only surplus, and that they constitute nonetheless two radically different modalities of surplus (neither despite nor because of the fact that they share in the same structure and in the same logic, for all other possible modalities of surplus likewise would share in such structure and logic). The singular difference that makes all the difference on this plane of immanence is the impossible nexus between its two sides, namely, the nonrelation between surplus value as locus of exploitation of the common and surplus common as unexploitable surplus, the nonrelation between impotentiality as violent separation of labor power from all its products—including “the physical form” and “living personality” of human beings—and potentiality qua potentiality as lived and incorporated in our bodies.

Arguably, it is such a difference, such a nonrelation, that drives Marx’s philosophical and political project, and that he strives to identify and to articulate throughout his works. I will invoke here only one such articulation (and I will return to Marx’s engagement with this difference at the end of this book).⁶⁶ In the *Grundrisse*, he writes:

Capital as such creates a specific surplus value because it cannot create an infinite one all at once; but it is the constant movement

to create more of the same. The quantitative boundary of the surplus value appears to it as a mere natural barrier, as a necessity which it constantly tries to violate and beyond which it constantly seeks to go.⁶⁷

When Marx writes in *Capital* that the movement of capital is limitless and infinite, he means this in the specific sense that capital is the constant movement to create more of the same.⁶⁸ Marx's point here is that the "quantitative boundary"—far from being "a mere natural barrier," or, as he calls it in a footnote to this passage, "an accident"—constitutes rather the insurmountable structural limit of capital. In capital, Marx discovers repetition without difference: capital is infinite repetition of the same whose structural limit is precisely qualitative difference. Capital "creates a specific surplus value because it cannot create an infinite one all at once." What would such "an infinite" surplus value be? And what would it mean to "create" it "all at once"? Such "an infinite" surplus value would not be surplus value in any sense whatsoever: being infinite, it would be immeasurable; being immeasurable, it would be unaccountable in terms of value—in short, *it would be surplus without value*. Moreover, to "create" it "all at once" would mean to produce it synchronically, to produce it in no time and without time, *to produce it without having to pay for necessary labor time*. This is to say that the production of such surplus would no longer belong to the capitalist mode of production. Capital strives for surplus—namely, for the infinite, for the synchronic—yet can construe it only in finite, diachronic, quantifiable terms. Capital attempts to posit itself as the plane of immanence yet cannot do so because absolute immanence is synchronic and infinite movement beyond any separation, division, or measure.⁶⁹ Capital reaches for that which is beyond measure yet can grasp it only in terms of measure, of equivalence, of value.⁷⁰ In this passage, Marx is envisaging a way to think surplus outside the form of value and within relations of synchronicity, a way to live surplus beyond capital altogether.

This intuition of a surplus beyond value constitutes one of the most important, and as yet not adequately explored, links between Marx and the thinker of immanence and of the common *par excellence*, namely, Spinoza.⁷¹ To "create" infinite surplus "all at once" would be an act of love, in the sense that Spinoza gives to this term in Part V of the *Ethics*. I am suggesting, in other words, that Marx's formulation describes accurately the operation of Spinoza's third kind of knowledge, from which "there necessarily arises the

intellectual love of God”—a love *sub quadam aeternitatis specie*, a love that “is eternal.”⁷² To substantiate this claim fully would take me well beyond the scope of this preface. Let me nonetheless point in the direction I would take were I to proceed further on this path. Before doing so, however, it may be useful to summarize Spinoza’s theory of knowledge. In brief, Spinoza conceives of three different kinds of knowledge (which ought to be understood not only epistemologically but also ontologically, in the sense that each of them instantiates different modes of subjectivity).⁷³ The first—which Spinoza calls “imagination”—includes all forms of sensory and representational knowledge (i.e., knowledge based on corporeal perceptions, on images, on signs). The second—which he calls “reason”—is knowledge of the common: it proceeds from “common notions,” namely, from the ideas of that which is common in two or more modes, including those “ideas . . . which are common to all human beings.” The third—which he calls “intuitive knowledge”—I will discuss shortly.⁷⁴ Genevieve Lloyd has encapsulated succinctly the differences among these kinds of knowledge:

The first way of knowing is focused on singular things, but is inherently inadequate. The second is inherently adequate, but unable to grasp the essences of singular things. The third and highest kind of knowledge is inherently adequate and able to understand singular things.⁷⁵

It is important to note that Spinoza’s concept of “essence” is a strictly non-essentialist and immanentist one, insofar as essences are not in common by definition: a singular essence appertains to each mode as well as to substance, whose essence is existence itself.⁷⁶ (This has important implications for the concept of the common.)⁷⁷ Even though essences cannot be shared, they can be known. They cannot be known adequately either through the first kind of knowledge (which conceives of them in an incomplete or distorted manner) or through the second kind of knowledge (because this kind of knowledge is not concerned with essences but with that which is common to all modes). Essences can be known adequately only through the third kind of knowledge.⁷⁸ Indeed, it is because both the first and the second kinds of knowledge fail to grasp the essence of things that the third kind—which builds nonetheless on the previous two—is needed. In short, even though there is a clear hierarchy among these different kinds of knowledge, all three are necessary and strictly complementary.⁷⁹

Let us return now to the third kind of knowledge and to the love it produces. Spinoza writes:

Although this love of God does not have a beginning . . . yet it has all the perfections of love, just as if it had come into being . . . Nor is there any difference here, except that the mind will have had eternally these same perfections that we have just supposed to be added to it, with the accompaniment of the idea of God as an eternal cause. So if happiness consists in a transition to a greater perfection, beatitude must assuredly consist in the fact that the mind is endowed with perfection itself.⁸⁰

This love comes into being in the same way in which Marx conceives of the production of infinite surplus, namely, “all at once.” Or—which is to say the same thing—we experience this love “as if it had come into being” in such a way, because, strictly speaking, it has neither beginning nor end, given that it belongs to the realm of the eternal. In short, to achieve this love is to produce an experience of synchronicity from within and through the diachronic. Furthermore, this love involves surplus at least in two ways. First of all, it involves all the “perfections” appertaining to love, in the sense that, as soon as we achieve it, not only do we experience such perfections as an addition to our mode of being but also we experience them retroactively as having been there always already in us. In other words, to be in love here means to determine a posteriori and to be determined a priori by “the perfections of love” as forms of surplus.⁸¹ Second, such an experience of love is accompanied by “the idea of God as an eternal cause”—namely, by the idea of substance as immanent cause of itself as well as of modes. But, as I have been implying all along, surplus is itself immanent cause, or, more precisely, immanence as such. I will return to this matter. For the moment, I wish to point out that as soon as Spinoza reconceptualizes substance as absent cause immanent in its effects, the world (i.e., substance and modes) is no longer *either* the theocratic world whose transitive cause used to lie outside of this world and used to mediate all relations among modes from afar *or* the world as sheer mass of unrelated modes without any cause, rhyme, or reason whatsoever. Spinoza’s world, rather, is the self-positing and self-producing plane of immanence consisting of modes *and* their cause (which they determine and through which they relate). In Spinoza, the world includes and determines its own cause as surplus. *It is in this sense that the third kind of*

knowledge produces surplus as love, that the intellectual love of God is love of surplus.

And yet—one might object—doesn't one often experience love precisely as excess? Isn't love always a modality of being in excess of one's own otherwise identical, equivalent self? Isn't love always that difference which breaks with and goes beyond all identity and all equivalence? In short, isn't love always an experience of surplus? What exactly differentiates the intellectual love of God from all other experiences of love? Spinoza explains this difference thus:

Then it is to be noted that the sicknesses and misfortunes of the mind derive their origin chiefly from an excessive love for a thing that is subject to many changes, and which we can never possess [e.g., a thing such as money, as Marx might say!]. For no one is concerned or anxious about any thing except one that he loves, nor do injuries, suspicions, enmities, etc. arise except from love for things which no one can truly possess.⁸²

This is love based solely on the first kind of knowledge, on the imagination—which Spinoza also calls “knowledge from inconstant experience.”⁸³ This is love subjected to the tyranny of contingency, limited by the anxiety of loss. Indeed, for Spinoza what we experience as love is most often an experience of love as possession, which is haunted by the (past, present, or future) loss of that which we love. This is love as an experience of privation, as an experience of lack. This is love minus X (where X is the cause of love). By contrast, when we experience love without the concomitant loss of that which causes it, we experience love plus X, that is, we experience love and its own surplus. In short, *love of surplus occurs when the subject no longer suffers privation of potentiality, no longer experiences lack in being.* This is why Spinoza calls this love “perfection itself.”⁸⁴ It goes without saying that this is no longer love as possession (of that which we love as other than oneself) because its cause is now immanent.⁸⁵ Indeed, this is also love beyond exchange and beyond measure altogether. Or, as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer put it: “In the world of commercial exchange, he who gives over the measure is in the wrong; whereas the lover is always he who loves beyond measure.”⁸⁶

Nowhere does Spinoza imply that we cannot go from love as the experience of lack to love as the experience of surplus—hence his reference to

“transition to a greater perfection.”⁸⁷ Neither does he imply that the path from the former to the latter is a necessary, inevitable one: this path does not constitute a teleological trajectory.⁸⁸ The point, in any case, is that these two types of love are related, in the sense that it is possible to build on one in order to achieve the other, to turn one into the other: were this not to be the case, the love of surplus would be sheer mystical epiphany. The third kind of knowledge and the love that arises from it do not involve a flight into transcendence because one cannot achieve them directly and immediately, because they build on the previous two kinds of knowledge without ever leaving them behind. Spinoza, after all, insists that both body and mind are involved equally in the third kind of knowledge and in its love (which is why, despite Spinoza’s own characterization of the intellectual love of God precisely as intellectual, Althusser argues that this “is in no way an ‘intellectual’ love”).⁸⁹ Moreover, as Deleuze as shown, the second type of knowledge—the knowledge of the common—on the one hand, involves the first, and, on the other hand, constitutes the immanent cause of the third.⁹⁰ The knowledge of the common thus perfects the imperfections of the first kind of knowledge by finding its fullest realization in the third kind of knowledge and in the experience of love that arises from it. This is what I have been arguing all along: the common finds its highest degree of perfection—namely, its own determination beyond capital—in surplus common, that is, in producing its own surplus beyond value, in living its own surplus as love, in the love of surplus. It is from such a singular and common experience of love that any reconceptualization of love as a political concept within and against capital ought to start.⁹¹

It is in this common intuition of another way of living surplus that Spinoza and Marx are at their most revolutionary. The condition of possibility of such an intuition lies in an understanding of surplus as immanence itself. If both capital and the common share in a tetradic structure governed by immanent causality, that is because immanence itself consists of a tetradic structure that may be determined in different ways. Such is the structure of immanence in Spinoza, who was the first to think it in and for philosophy. In *What Is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari define philosophy as the practice of “forming, inventing, fabricating concepts”—in short, as the production of concepts.⁹² In this context, they write:

[Spinoza] fulfilled philosophy because he satisfied its prephilosophical presupposition. Immanence does not refer back to the Spinozist

substance and modes but, on the contrary, the Spinozist concepts of substance and modes refer back to the plane of immanence as their presupposition. This plane presents two sides to us, extension and thought, or rather its two powers, power of being [or power of acting] and power of thinking [or power of knowing].⁹³

Plane of immanence, substance, modes of extension, modes of thought: such are the four components of immanence, where the plane of immanence is posited as the presupposition of the entire structure, as its surplus. Not only is surplus not a thing; it is, philosophically speaking, not even a concept, because it is prephilosophical. Deleuze and Guattari write:

Prephilosophical does not mean something preexistent but rather something *that does not exist outside philosophy*, although philosophy presupposes it . . . Precisely because the plane of immanence is prephilosophical and does not immediately take effect with concepts, it implies a sort of groping experimentation and its layout resorts to measures that are not very respectable, rational, or reasonable. These measures belong to the order of dreams, of pathological processes, esoteric experiences, drunkenness, and excess. We head for the horizon, on the plane of immanence, and we return with bloodshot eyes, yet they are the eyes of the mind . . . THE plane of immanence is, at the same time, that which must be thought and that which cannot be thought. It is the nought within thought . . . Perhaps this is the supreme act of philosophy: not so much to think THE plane of immanence as to show that it is there, unthought in every plane, and to think it in this way as the outside and inside of thought, as the not-external outside and the not-internal inside—that which cannot be thought and yet must be thought.⁹⁴

What Deleuze and Guattari argue for philosophy is true of any practice and above all, perhaps, of the practice of politics, namely, of the practice of the desire to be in common: “not so much to think” surplus “as to show that it is there” as the extimate unthought in each and every one of our singular, common gestures. Elsewhere, Deleuze credits Spinoza with the “discovery of the unconscious, of an *unconscious of thought* just as profound as *the unknown of the body*.”⁹⁵ Crucially, he adds: “The entire *Ethics* is a voyage in

immanence; but immanence is the unconscious itself, and the conquest of the unconscious.”⁹⁶ Immanence is the unconscious *and* its own conquest just as immanence is substance *and* modes. Far from being a Cartesian “conquest”—namely, a transcendent triumph of the mind and of its reason over the body and its nonreason—such a conquest names the act by which we incorporate our immanent cause in a supreme gesture of self-determination; such a conquest names love of surplus. Surplus, potentiality, production, unconscious, plane of immanence: these are all names for immanence degree zero; these are all names for what Negri in the pages of this book refers to as “the void,” as “the nonontological absolute.”⁹⁷ It is up to us to decide what to build on this void. It is up to us to turn this zero into a minus or a plus.

Acknowledging the Friend

La pensée de l’amitié: je crois qu’on sait quand l’amitié prend fin (même si elle dure encore), par un désaccord qu’un phénoménologue nommerait existentiel, un drame, un acte malheureux. Mais sait-on quand elle commence? Il n’y a pas de coup de foudre de l’amitié, plutôt un peu à peu, un lent travail du temps. On était amis et on ne le savait pas.

—Maurice Blanchot, *Pour l’amitié*

The thought of friendship: I believe that one knows when friendship comes to an end (even if it still continues). One knows as much because of a disagreement that a phenomenologist might call existential, because of a tragic event, because of an unfortunate act. But does one know when friendship begins? There is no thunderbolt of friendship; there is, rather, a little by little, a slow labor of time. We are friends—and we did not even know it. (My translation)

Erasmus opens *In Praise of Folly* with a letter of dedication to his dear friend Sir Thomas More:

Coming out of Italy a while ago, on my way to England, I did not want to waste in idle talk and popular stories all the hours I had to sit on horseback, but chose at times to think over some topics of the studies we share in common, or to enjoy my memories of friends—and I had left some here in England who were wholly learned and wholly gracious. Among them you, More, came first to mind.⁹⁸

The friend comes first. Indeed, the friend precedes the dedication itself, given that the Latin title of this work, *Moriae Encomium*, means also “In Praise of More.” More important, the friend precedes and enables thought itself: “the studies” Erasmus and More “share in common” are the source of thought. That one never thinks alone, that one always thinks in common, is an ancient truth of thought—as Agamben has shown elegantly.⁹⁹ And the friend is the other with whom one is in common when thinking. Or (as Deleuze and Guattari put it in *What Is Philosophy?*) the friend is “a presence that is intrinsic to thought, a condition of possibility of thought itself.”¹⁰⁰ The friend precedes and enables thought much as the plane of immanence is the prephilosophical condition of possibility of philosophy itself: “Prephilosophical does not mean something preexistent but rather something *that does not exist outside philosophy*, although philosophy presupposes it.”¹⁰¹ The friend comes first in the sense that it is a synchronic rather than diachronic, intrinsic rather than extrinsic, immanent rather than transcendent presence of thought. My friend is my surplus thought: it is with my friend that I may come to think anew and differently, it is in my friend that I may become different from what I thought I was in the first place. Indeed, it is in friendship that this I ceases to be an I and turns into one who is many. Deleuze and Guattari begin *A Thousand Plateaus* by writing: “The two of us wrote *Anti-Oedipus* together. Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd.”¹⁰² One can think only as many, one can think only among friends, one can think only in the common.

The friends who made me think while writing on the common are—much like the common itself—legion. Among them, there are friends who not only made me think anew and differently but also were subjected to my often feverish, inchoate words, either in writing or in speech or in both, while I was working on this preface: Murat Aydemir, Kristin Brown, Richard Dienst, Bishnupriya Ghosh, Vinay Gidwani, Ron Greene, Michael Hardt, Qadri Ismail, Eleanor Kaufman, Saree Makdisi, Tim Malkovich, John Mowitt, Bhaskar Sarkar, Hans Skott-Myhre, Nick Thoburn, Kathi Weeks. And then there are two friends whose presence is so immanent here as to have become undetectable to me: it is not a hyperbole to say that I have experienced writing this preface as a common project involving, in different ways, Kiarina Kordela and Brynnar Swenson—with the crucial proviso that the limits of this project are only my own. Each in their various ways, all these friends helped me give these pages and the thoughts they try to express whatever substance or value they may have. Each in their various ways, all these friends

are part and parcel of an infinite conversation of which this book is only one effect, only one form. To this common legion of friends—named and unnamed—I offer my gratitude.

My thanks also go to Jon Hoofwijk, who not only came up with the title for this book but also helped me write this preface in ways that he will never know; to Richard Morrison, my editor at the University of Minnesota Press, whose patience and tact in dealing with the countless hiccups and delays of this project were always impeccable and always enabling; to the two anonymous readers whose comments and suggestions were invaluable; and to an institution, namely, the College of Liberal Arts of the University of Minnesota, which provided time—which is money—by granting me a research leave in the fall of 2006, during which most of this book was completed.

There is always the friend who comes first and last: it is with everlasting, immeasurable gratitude that I dedicate this preface to Toni, who has shown me his life in the common and who has taught me how to learn from it.

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