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## The Practices of the Negative in Contemporary Society\*

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1. The element from which I would like to start, to begin this phenomenology of the negative, is the indispensability of the category of negation -whatever the meaning one wants to attribute to it. Whether it is assumed in the neutral tone of the judgment of attribution, in the destructive tone of annihilation, or the positive tone of symbolization, the centrality of the negative within human experience remains firm (1). This centrality - which ultimately relates to the inevitable presence of death, the fact that we are mortal,

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finite, divided from ourselves- can be found in every area. In life as in language, in thought as in action. A sort of parallel could almost be established: As death -but also pain, suffering, separation- is a stable element of our existence, so negation is unavoidable within logos.

As evidenced by linguists' research, the 'not' is one of those primary elements that are part of all languages, ancient and modern. It constitutes one of the "language chromosomes" which cannot be renounced (2). After all, just try to speak for about ten minutes without pronouncing the particle 'not' to realize its necessity. Indeed, it can be argued that the use of the negative, that is the ability to deny, is precisely what differentiates the language of the adult human being not only from that of an animal but also from that of an infant, who tends to always express itself in affirmative terms. For the great linguist Saussure, language is nothing more than an oppositional relationship between negative terms. None of them -of the different 'pieces' of which the language is made- refers to a substantial reality outside of the negative relationship with others. Each term of language, instead of designating something in itself, becomes meaningful only starting from the difference with the others. For example, the meaning of the term 'sun' is not recognized outside of a negative comparison with terms of the same family such as 'star', 'heavenly body', 'moon' (3). As for logic, it is unimaginable outside the category of negation. This is true for modern logic as well as for the classic one, based on the principle of non-contradiction. From this point of view, the negation constitutes an undeniable, not only because of its overflowing presence in our life but also from a logical point of view, from the moment of denying a negation means to confirm it (4). It is not possible to get out of the circle of negation within its lexicon because, contrary to what dialectic supposes, the negation is not an affirmation, but still a negation. People are inevitably linked to the language of the negative. As Benjamin well knew (5), a language that is made up exclusively of affirmative terms could only be spoken in heaven. And in fact, the definition of paradise is precisely that of a place that does not know negative terms. The same truth, which is often opposed to negation, is not conceivable outside the relationship with falsehood, that is to say with non-truth, just as every value can be defined as opposite of the corresponding negative value. Good is, in the first instance, what is not bad, as bad as what is not good. Even for the law, an action that is not

prohibited by law, which is not illegal, is legal. Just as at the source of law, namely, with Roman Law, the free man was defined by not being a slave.

Psychoanalysis is perhaps the discipline that is aware of the indispensability of the negative more than any other. From Freud to Lacan, to Bion, to Green, the negative is at the center of psychoanalytic theory, and also of praxis. The very constitution of the subject is from the beginning marked, if not produced, by negation. For Freud, the human subject as such is the subject of negation in the active and passive sense of the expression. It is above all that which denies and is denied. Or even, which is denied. All its main symptomatic formations -from psychosis to neurosis- have a direct or indirect relationship with negation. Freud can argue that the unconscious does not contain negative elements just because its own, in its very name, is a negative, non-conscious entity. Addressed directly in the extraordinary pages of *Die Verneinung*, it can be said that the category of 'negation' runs through and structures Freud's entire conceptual field (6). Although it is declined in the various forms of repression, denial, rejection, and destruction, it is nevertheless present. As for Lacan, it is hardly useless to recall the importance of negation in his work. He reads Freud's text on negation through a triangle with Jean Hyppolite who has at its center the interpretation of the negative- that negation that Hyppolite, almost doubling its value, defines as denegation (7). In his writings dedicated to negation (8), André Green reconstructs the entire range of meaning of this category -from the most vital and creative to the most deadly and destructive, up to the negative of negative, to the absolute negative. It may well be said that his entire work operates around the tension between these shades of the negative. Against the tendency of some analytic conceptions and practices that tend to sweeten their way of operating too much, he places the paradigm of negation at the center of psychoanalysis. On the other hand, if the negation were deniable, as Freud could have written in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, that the guards of life are the same sentinels of death, this statement could be understood in any way (9). Not only is the negative underlying all the concepts of psychoanalysis, but it is decisive for the psychotherapist's work. To penetrate the patient's unconscious, the analyst must disarticulate its subjectivity, exposing it to the test of negative.

As for philosophy, both metaphysics and ontology have always worked on the question of nothing -in the sense of non-being. Heidegger's question about its ultimate meaning -whether nothing derives from negation or negation from nothing (10)- returns,

formulated differently, throughout the history of philosophy, from Plato to Wittgenstein, even without having still a definitive answer. What Heidegger radically questions is the logical primacy of affirmation over its opposite. Translating the term “truth” with *Unverborgenheit*, which means “unveiling”, in accordance with the Greek term *a-letheia*, he overturns the traditional procedure that gave truth a completely affirmative meaning, deducing it from the negative with a procedure that extends to all its concepts (11). In this way, not only is no-thing no longer opposed to being. But it becomes the original ground from which every being, and finally Being itself, reveals itself, veiling itself again. It is a passage -Heidegger’s passage- that is decisive as regards the fate of negation, this transferred from the linguistic and logical to the ontological level. In this way, the judgment of attribution is brought back to the sphere of existence. But this shift from logic to ontology, operated by Heidegger, implies another possible shift -which is the one that goes from the descriptive level to the performative, effectual one. If the “not” can be translated into the concepts of nothing, this can be traced back to the practice of annihilation in turn.

2. When this happens, if this happens, it means that we have entered a political sphere. Before getting there, let’s take a side step that leads us to what Freud defines as ‘uneasiness of civilization’ (12). The reference to the process of civilization slides the speech from a logical plan to a historical-anthropological plan – I mean with this term, on which Freud works, the intertwining between historicity and human nature. As we know, there is—discontinuity and also the contrast between impulsive action and intellectual activity at the center of his essay. For Freud, the construction and development of society require a certain inhibition of the drives concerning the regime of the instinctual limitlessness of the primordial condition. The effects of this inhibition have long been questioned not only by analytic theory but also by philosophy, especially in the Frankfurt School, however, along with two divergent directions -the affirmative one of Marcuse and the negative one of Adorno. Without going into the merits of this gap, we shift the objective from the entire civilization process to the more restricted sphere of modernity. As known, I have been trying to interpret modernity in terms of ‘immunization.’ For the original community, immunization has the same function as the inhibition of the drives analyzed by Freud. Even if in the case of immunization, it is not the individual drives but the social ones that are inhibited, it is also a form of negative self-protection of society

from the risks it runs or presumes to run. But something more must be said about the negative character of the immunization paradigm, which can be deduced from its very etymology. The term *communitas*, like *immunitas*, derives from the Latin *munus*, which means ‘office’, ‘law’ or ‘gift’ – more precisely ‘law of the gift.’ Except that, while in the case of the *communitas* it is a positive relationship– those who are bound by mutual care or donation are part of the community– in the case of the *immunitas* a negative meaning prevails: the one who is exempted from the obligation of mutual care or donation towards others who instead share the members of *communitas* (13). But the negative tone of immunization is not limited to this. Not only is it the negative of the community, but it is aimed at protecting it through a further negation. As is known from the use of vaccines, to immunize a given subject from potential infection, a sustainable portion of it is introduced into his body. In this way, we protect ourselves from a major negative, infection, through a minor negative, the vaccine – exactly as happens in the uneasiness of civilization that Freud speaks of.

The same is true of Arnold Gehlen’s theory of institution. Institutions -we will return to them in a different key at the end – are the negative shelter that exempts men from an excess of stimuli that would otherwise overwhelm them. The same is true for the theological-political figure of the *katechon*, already understood by the apostle Paul as what delays the apocalypse, introjecting evil. Of course, in this way, it also ends up delaying the *parousia*, the absolute advent of good. But in the meantime, the salvable is saved, coming to terms with the negative. In short, through immunization, society protects itself, neutralizing its most radical meaning, that is, the common passion, the tendency to go out of oneself for altering. Hence, it’s negative and indeed auto-negative closure. Here too, as in the case of Freud’s uneasiness, to survive, life is forced to inhibit, to limit, its natural tendency, connoting it in advance in negative terms. In this case, it is as if the negative doubled or rather split into two parts, one of which is necessary to contain the other -a minor negative is used to block a major negative, but within the same negative semantics, using the same substance. Of course, as Freud warns, although this protection is socially useful, it involves an unease, a nonnegligible price. That is to incorporate the same evil that you want to avoid, albeit in smaller doses. In this case, life is preserved by something that contradicts its free development. To safeguard the community, it is subjected to a practice of desocialization which neutralizes its affirmative power and

reverses its meaning. This occurs through the artificial construction of anthropological, if not ethical, thresholds, which are presented as natural.

In this way, however, by strengthening its immune devices more and more, society is exposed to a risk that is in some ways even greater than that from which it was intended to be protected -similar to that experienced in autoimmune diseases, when the immune defense mechanism is so strong that it turns against the body itself that it should defend, leading to implosion. We are faced with a device that we know well, today brought to its peak through an artificial amplification of the perception of risk, functional to build protection apparatuses, that is to say of desocialization, ever stronger and more extensive which, in addition to decreasing freedom, end up denying the very meaning of community, understood in its original meaning of circulation of the common munus. At this point, negation -and indeed the double negation, the real negation of an apparent negative- occupies the whole picture, overturning what Freud defines as a civilization, namely the integrated society, into a sort of preventive asociality. For, in this way, unlike in the uneasiness of civilization theorized by Freud, society is protected not by an excess of individualism, but by an excess of socialization, thus separating itself from its very meaning.

3. The interpretation of modernity as an immunization process, compared to other categories, with which it has also been interpreted, such as those of rationalization, secularization, or demythization, accentuates the negative element, making it the central element. Once thought of in terms of immunization, modernity can be traced back to a real negative machine, continually recharging itself through further denials (14). Modern philosophy is marked by it from the very beginning, starting with those who are perhaps its two most influential authors, namely Descartes and Hobbes- initiators, the first one is that of modern philosophy and the second one is that of modern political theory. After all, the entire modern thought -up to Kant, who will ask the critical question not on the affirmative power, but the limits of reason- is essentially negative thinking, with some exceptions, in particular, that represented by Spinoza. In fact, both Descartes and Hobbes, to introduce the new knowledge of which they are bearers, begin by denying the foundations of the previous one. Thus Descartes, to arrive at the certainty of clear and distinct knowledge, denies, as apparent or deceptive, any hypothesis that has not passed the scrutiny of the new method which is elaborated by himself. In this way, true

knowledge is made to spring from the denial of false, uncertain, deceptive. Similarly, to build the modern political order which is represented by the Leviathan state, Hobbes argues that it is necessary to deny the natural state in which humans previously lived, fighting each other in a sort of permanent civil war. To enter the political order, humans must surrender their natural rights, including the right to defend themselves, to the only person able to guarantee their survival, namely the sovereign. In a world ruled by fear, only the awe of the sovereign can guarantee by an even greater terror which is that of violent death at the hands of others. It is perhaps the first theory of the immunization device in which greater fear is controlled and inhibited by less fear, but the same negative kind. This means that to affirm something -an indubitable knowledge in the case of Descartes, life itself in the case of Hobbes-, it is necessary to pass through the negation of something else that seems to contradict it. The conservation of life presupposes the annihilation of its natural roots, just as science presupposes the elimination of the magical, mythical and alchemical languages that preceded it. This negative reasoning has a clear theological reference in the Christian dogma of creation. Just as God created the world from nothing, so humans create the political state from nothing, which, for the same reason, can slip back into nothingness, as even Hobbes explicitly admits by calling Leviathan 'mortal God.' This shows that modern secularization itself maintains a sliver of political theology within itself. In short, once this negative mechanism has been set in motion, what we infer from it is that to obtain a good -and, in this case, the greatest of political goods, namely, the preservation of life- it is necessary to pass through a double negation, that is, the destruction of the natural state and the renunciation of one's rights. We must deny the natural negation that threatens us.

Now, this machine of negation, recognizable in Hobbes and Descartes, but which has its roots in Christian theology- think of Augustine's 'The City of God', in which each of two cities, the heavenly and the earthly, is defined by irremediable contrast with the other- characterizes all the political categories of modernity, all modern political concepts, in the sense that they are thought not in themselves, but as the opposite of their contrary. Thus, for example, freedom is thought of by Hobbes, and after him by the entire liberal tradition, not as a good in itself, not as something affirmative, expansive, productive, according to its original meaning, but as something that is not prohibited by law: Free is not one who actively participates in public life, as happened in the Greek city,

but one who is not subjugated to a constraint, who is not obliged to do something unwillingly. The same applies to the categories of 'sovereignty' and 'property' -deriving the former, sovereignty, from the negation of the plurality of feudal powers and the latter, property, from the proprietary subdivision of the world received in common by nature or by God. Even the category of 'people' is understood, in modernity, as the negative opposite of a scattered multitude. In each of these cases, a declared positive arises from the negation of the negative, previously defined as such to be denied. This means that the positive is always anticipated by a negative and thought with it. In the end, what we call 'nihilism' is nothing more than an extremization of this multitude. According to it, value, every value, is recognizable only as the opposite of a negative value, of a non-value.

This negative drift, which finds a recognized reference point in Nietzsche, has its most radical remark in the great and ambiguous German jurist Carl Schmitt. In his famous essay on the essence of politics, written in the early twenties (15), he places precisely the category of negation at the origin of his definition. And this, in a double sense. Meanwhile, what peculiarly characterizes political action is the contrast between friend and enemy. Just as morality is defined by the antithesis between good and bad and aesthetics by that between beautiful and ugly, so something is recognized as politics only when it presupposes the clash between friend and enemy. Not only that, but the primacy of negation in Schmitt is enhanced by the fact that the decisive term within the antithesis between friend and enemy is that of the enemy. It is not started from the friend to define the enemy, but always the opposite: a political alliance can be born only from identification, or from the construction, of a common enemy. It is as if the negative, the 'not', were embodied, took shape, in the figure of the Enemy. Being such, the enemy will try to annihilate me, so that I will not be able to do anything but try to annihilate him in my turn. In this case, we have a phenomenon of ontological 'incarnation': the adverb 'not' and the adjective 'negative' end up by transforming themselves into the noun 'nothing' and even into a practice of mutual 'annihilation.' Even the friend, the ally, is defined starting from the enemy. Only the presence of the enemy, only an enemy in common, will force us to ally, to become friends against him. This alliance, this friendship, is only the consequence of the previous enmity. The enemy always comes before the friend and determines it. Ultimately, if adversaries and allies are still defined by their being enemies of each other, it means that we are all enemies. The consequence

of the machine of negation -as used and brought to its peak by Schmitt- is the overlap between politics and war. If the figure of the enemy defines a political situation or makes it so, then there will no longer be a difference between politics and war. Politics will be a continuation of the war and the war will be the continuation of politics, as the Prussian military strategist Carl von Clausewitz had already claimed. What was rightly called the ‘self-destruction of Europe’, in the two world wars, arises precisely from this logic -from the idea that political confrontation can only have a war-like resolution.

4. But now, having genealogically reconstructed the ‘negative machine’, let’s try to go a step further. How to try to escape it? Which door can be opened inside? Where to start from? To try to do this, I believe that the question of the negative must be treated with a mixture of realism and hermeneutic openness. First of all, realism. What must be avoided is to cancel or remove the presence of the negative. After all, denying the machine of negation, without recognizing the problem it poses, would mean staying within it. As psychoanalysis also explains, removing a problem means leaving it unchanged, or even being confronted with it in front of high-level phantasmatic, spectral terms. In truth, there was a historical phase, at the end of the last century, and precisely after the fall of the Berlin Wall, in 1989, in which it was thought that the negative was now behind us and the world was moving towards a general pacification in the wake of growing globalization and bringing beneficial effects for all. It was thought, at that stage, that democracy was not only definitively established in the West but exportable to the rest of the world, as was the spread of well-being allowed by technological development. In that phase, which also saw the maximum enlargement of the European Union, it was imagined that even the borders between the states, at least in Europe, could disappear and war, hunger, disease could be progressively eradicated, thus losing Freud’s pessimistic, but indeed realistic, considerations on war (16).

All this, on the level of ideas, to put it briefly, translated into a tendential eclipse of the ‘negative’, replaced by an unlimited affirmation of drives -precisely those that Freud believed should be inhibited or at least controlled. In analytical terms, according to Lacanian language, it was imagined to cancel the symbolic threshold, what Massimo Recalcati, following Lacan, defined the name of Father (17), contrasting a wholly affirmative desire to a wholly negative law. The passage of hegemony, in the philosophical culture not only in Europe, from the Frankfurt School to that series of

theoretical practices that go under the name of 'postmodern' gives the overall meaning of this turning point. If we read in succession Adorno's *Negative Dialectic* (18) -in which the primacy of the negative touches the sharpest point- and books such as Lyotard's *Libidinal Economy* (19), *Symbolic Exchange and The Death of Baudrillard* (20), and *Anti-Oedipus* of Deleuze and Guattari (21), we have a measure of the difference. An equally resolutely affirmative philosophy takes over from an absolute, high, and tragic negation, such as Adorno's, which puts any figure of the negative into default in rejecting the Hegelian dialectic affectively. Indeed, the position of all three authors cited -Lyotard, Baudrillard, and Deleuze- is far from univocal and has also changed over time. But the basic orientation that it outlines does not change. A political theology of negation, of Heideggerian matrix, is replaced by the celebration of an affirmative power without limits. At its core, a theory of absolute immanence, entirely coinciding with itself, is capable of expelling the very idea of the negative as limit, finiteness, otherness. With the elision of the symbolic plane, all that is filled actually by a real coincides with the imaginary.

5. It is true that all continental philosophy -the analytic one, blinded by its self-referential procedures, has not even raised the problem- has not gone in this direction. Authors such as Derrida and Levinas, to give an example, escape this dry alternative between negation and affirmation, placing themselves in the line of tension between two opposite sides. The fact remains that even in the Italian philosophical quadrant, the two prevailing positions are those of a political theology of negation, tinged with strong Heideggerian accents, and of a political ontology of affirmation, built around Spinoza's ontology and in the direction of Deleuze. In this second case, once being and politics have been superimposed, the first ended up completely swallowing the second. If the plan of immanence mends every symbolic gap, if therefore the same space of conflict is lost, politics only has to wait for the power of becoming to unfold in all its unlimited extension. As long as affirmative and negative are confronted head-on, the philosophical-political debate will not emerge from the stalemate in which it finds itself. Instead, what must be done is to relate affirmation and negation, desire and Law, even if not in dialectical form. It is true that we need a new affirmative philosophy, to escape the political theology of negation -but not crushed on itself, closed in immanence without waste, unable to relate to the negative. How can we process it? By breaking down the different figures of the

negative, entering its internal faults, disrupting negative theology into a different affirmative thought of negation.

5. But through which figures shall we face the absolute negative, the nihilistic tendency of the negative, bringing it back to the horizon of affirmation? In *Politics and Negation*, I tried to do this by putting into play a series of categories that cannot be traced back to either the positive or the negative, but located on the edge that connects them. The first of these figures is that of difference. Let's start with the first distinction. The different, the diverse, is not necessarily the enemy, just as difference, diversity, does not coincide with absolute negation. Already Plato, at the origin of our philosophical tradition, in particular in the dialogue *Sophist*, distinguished between the 'not' which indicates nothing, which cannot be of any use to us and which, strictly speaking, cannot be thought of, since 'not' indicates the diversity, the difference, instead of the necessary and unavoidable. To say that this table is not white, not black or yellow, does not mean that it does not exist, but only that it has a different color from those mentioned. Therefore, in this negation, relative and not absolute -which we could also define as affirmative, precisely because it affirms something other than the negated one- there is a positive element to be valued. But why positive? What do you mean? How can a negation ever be positive? That negation can be positive which, rather than destroying diversity, takes it as an enrichment of reality. On the other hand, if there was no difference, if we were all the same, identical to each other, homologated in a single language, in a single dress, in a single way of doing things, the world would be poorer and less interesting. In this sense, if understood in the form of difference, the negative can play a positive role in socio-political dynamics and, in general, in our life. Not only because, without a difference, things would be a copy of each other, but also because this type of negative serves to determine them, to define their contours, distinguishing them from the others. Things, as indeed people, are valid in so much as they are multiple, plural, heterogeneous. And, to be such, they must be identified, or identifiable, with respect to the others. This is the 'affirmative', productive sense of negation as a difference rather than as enmity. The negative, subtracted from the figure of the absolute and excluding negation of enmity, must be thought of in the positive figure of difference or determination, to come to the second category that must be put in place, already understood by Spinoza as the affirmative form of negation. Each thing determines others to the extent that it does not

coincide with them. With its very existence, a thing or a person defines alterity with respect to all the others. As Spinoza expresses himself in *Ethica*, developing in affirmative terms the thesis that *determinatio negatio est*, one thing is determined by the otherness of another, which is determined by another in turn. In this sense, the negative side of determination -namely, its difference in proportion to another thing- does not contrast with the affirmative side, it actually involves. Not the negation, but the affirmation of the other in its diversity -this is exactly the principle of determining difference or differential determination: the possibility of the coexistence of different things in a multiplicity made up of singularity. Negation as difference coincides with the singularity of a thing or person. That the thing, or the person, is different in themselves means that they exist individually as such. But, unlike the individual which rests on itself, being singular can always and only be said in relation to the other- in Latin, the term singularity was almost always used in the plural: not *singulus*, but *singuli*.

The third affirmative figure of negation is that of opposition. We are used to thinking of the term 'opposition' in the sense of absolute hostility. We tend to identify it with enmity. But this is not the case. 'Opposition' does not coincide with 'contraposition'. In the same etymology of the word 'opposition', you hear a positive heart beating, the *positum*. Opposition comes from the Latin *ob-ponere*, *ob-positum*. It arises from the union of *ponere* with the prefix 'ob', which, in its original meaning, does not mean 'against', but 'opposite.' Opposition, if it is thought in a positive, affirmative sense, does not refer to a deadly contrast, to enmity or an absolute contraposition, but to the relationship between two terms that face each other, that stand opposite each other, without having to destroy each other. Indeed, the opposition holds up, stands up, resists, only if neither of the two terms fails, only if both remain alive and active. If we think about it, this positive, productive, vital opposition -quite other than destructive- is typical of democratic politics, which is based precisely on the dialectic of majority and opposition. A democracy without opposition would implode, it would be doomed to extinction, it would be in no way different from totalitarianism. The opposition is the soul of democracy, politics, and ultimately, of life itself, as Heraclitus said when he argued that *polemos* is the father of everything. The opposition is shared. Division, in its symbolic meaning of differentiation, can be in common, a practice of the 'common.' Unlike one's own, which is not shared, sharing- what the French call *partage* in the sense

of partition- is the very place of *communitas*, in the original sense of mutual care, of the circulation of the *munus* among the *communes* that constitute the community, opening it to otherness. According to Greeks, the bonds of reciprocal donation between subjects in the community -the very fact that they exist- constitute a safeguard against the tendency to unleash the external enemy, to want to destroy it even before to invent it, as a projection of one's immune syndrome. If absolute immunization presupposes, together with the destruction of the other, also that of the symbolic order, only the presence of the negative, of the space that separates us from ourselves, allows us to reconstitute it, building together a possible form of coexistence.

6. A final point concerns the theme of the institution. It is a question of declining it by opening a further space to that chiasm between affirmation and negation that has been said so far. In a recently published book entitled 'Institutional Thought' (22), I have identified three influential paradigms in contemporary political philosophy -the first which we can call "destituent", the second 'constituent' and the third, which I am trying to develop, precisely 'instituent'. Let's start by saying that all three have an ontological horizon. All political philosophies of rank, classical such as those of Aristotle, Machiavelli, Rousseau or Hegel and twentieth-century such as those of Schmitt, Arendt, Foucault are political ontologies, in the sense that they call into question not only the relationship between politics and existence but the very being of politics. Of course not in the same way. While classical political ontologies are ontologies of identity, in the sense that they place a substantial foundation at the base of politics and the values that emanate from it, contemporary political ontologies are ontologies of difference. They are thought of within the mobile relationship between being, politics and difference. But what separates them from each other is precisely how this triangle -between politics, being, and difference- is interpreted. While the paradigm that refers to Heidegger is connoted in negative and therefore destituent terms, what belongs to Deleuze is characterized by a statement that excludes any negativity from the plane of immanence. Finally, a third paradigm, which we can define as neo-Machiavellian, is marked by a productive difference between oppositional polarities. Second, far from contrary to conflict, the order arises precisely from it and is kept alive by it.

For the first paradigm, the Heideggerian one -taken up in recent years by very different authors such as Reiner Schirmann, Jean-Luc Nancy, Giorgio Agamben -the only

way to escape the nihilistic drift of a politics crushed on technical machination is to withdraw from it- to undo its doing, to deactivate its action, to dismiss its institution. The task of future politics, for these authors, different but connected by the common reference to the second Heidegger, coincides with that of their self-destitution. Once each politics has been captured by the technical device, all that remains is its deactivation -dismantling its epochal principles, exposing it to the absence of work, resulting in the dissolution of any relationship. The second influential, unlimited affirmative paradigm is that of constituent power, infinitely creative like the infinite production of being. At its core there is a philosophy that refers to Deleuze, rereads along with the affirmative ontology that goes from Spinoza to Bergson, passing through Nietzsche, in turn, freed from its contradictions. Politics, for this second paradigm -I am thinking, for example, of Toni's Negri's perspective- is the one that adheres without waste to the creative movement of being, accelerating it through a constituent power that goes beyond all constituted power and any institution. As in the first paradigm, albeit in the specularly reversed manner in a hyperpolitical mode, the outcome of this second theoretical device is also a form of depoliticization. If being, understood as infinite power, is already political in itself, if the fabric of affirmation has always been in place, politics, understood as a specific language will no longer be needed.

The third paradigm can be said to be instituent -neither negatively destructing nor affirmatively establishing. But what does it mean? What meaning does the instituting act assume here and how does it relate to the traditional theory of institutions? In the meantime, starting from the verb -to 'institute'- rather than from the noun 'institution' implies a dynamic element that mobilizes the concept. This dialectic between institution and institute, therefore between past and present, presupposes a political ontology that is very different from both the negative, post-Heideggerian and the affirmative Deleuzian one. In it, affirmative and negative intertwine without one eliminating the other, forming, as Merleau-Ponty would have said, a sort of chiasma. The institution is negative -that is, the limit constituted by the past, by what already exists- which continually intersects with the present and future-oriented act of instituting. The act of instituting is not the theological-political one of *creatio ex nihilo*, of creation from nothing, but the modification, even radical, of something that already exists and which therefore resists, limits, channels it. In psychoanalytic terms, one could say that the institution is the law

that contains the instituting desire without blocking it, but making it possible and productive. To say that the political does not dismiss, nor does it constitute, but institutes social being means this does not have the form of the One or even of an infinite differential multiplicity, but the Two. Or also that immanence is cut by an otherness that does not transcend it, but precisely crosses it, vitalizing it. In this way, the affirmation is confronted with the negative, the obstacle, the limit, the determination, without eliminating or subjecting it.

The role of politics, in this third paradigm, does not lie in deactivation, as in the Heideggerian paradigm, nor the creation of the new absolute, as in the Deleuzian paradigm, but in the symbolic inscription of the difference that cuts the social -in the conflict which, as Machiavelli had argued, opposes one side to the other within the order, creating new orders each time. The social is not one with itself. It is always crossed, cut, pierced by an otherness- which is symbolic -from which it is organized in the form of a confrontation between parties representing divergent interests. But this is possible because, at least in democracy, as Claude Lefort argues, the place of power is empty. No longer identified with the body of the sovereign, but continuously contestable according to the relations of force that are determined from time to time between the parties. I believe that this institutional model -this paradigm of political ontology is today the one on which it is convenient to work, certainly in different ways and languages.

### Notes

1. Cf. L. R. Horn, *A Natural History of Negation*, Chicago University Press, Chicago 1989; D. M. Gabbay e H. Wansing (edd.), *What is Negation?*, Kluwer, Dordrecht-Boston-London 1999.
2. Cf. A. Wierzbicka, *Semantic Primitives*, Athenäum, Frankfurt am Main 1972; Id., *Semantics. Primes and Universals*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1996.
3. Cf. F. De Saussure, *Écrits de linguistique générale*, ed. S. Bouquet and R. Engler, Gallimard, Paris 2002.
4. Also see L. V. Tarca, *Verità e negazione. Variazioni di pensiero*, ed. Th. Masini, Cafoscarina, Venezia 2016. 5. W. Benjamin, *Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen*, in Id., *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. II, 1, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1991.
5. Of S. Freud, cf. particularly *Die Verneinung*, in Id., *Gesammelte Werke*, Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, Bd. XIV.

6. Cf. J. Hyppolite, Commentaire parlé sur la 'Verneinung' de Freud, in J. Lacan, *Écits*, Seuil, Paris 1966.
7. Cf. A. Green, *Le Travail du Négatif*, Minuit, Paris 2011.
8. S. Freud, Jenseits des Lustprinzips, in Id., *Gesammelte Werke*, cit., Bd. XIII.
9. Cf. M. Heidegger, Einführung in die Metaphysik, in Id., *Gesamtausgabe, Klostermann*, Frankfurt am Main 1993, Bd XV.
10. Cf. M. Heidegger, Vom Wesen der Wahrheit, in Id., *Gesamtausgabe*, cit., 1978, Bd. XXXIV.
11. Cf. S. Freud, Das Unbehagen in der Kultur, in *Gesammelte Werke*, cit., Bd. XIV.
12. Cf. R. Esposito, *Communitas. Origine e destino della comunità*, Einaudi, Torino 1998; Id., *Immunitas. Protezione e negazione della vita*, Einaudi, Torino 2002.
13. Cf. R. Esposito, *Politica e negazione. Per una filosofia affermativa*, Torino, Einaudi 2018.
14. Cf. C. Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen*, Dunker & Humblot, Berlin 1932.
- 15 Cf. S. Freud, *Zeitgemässes über Krieg und Tod*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, cit., Bd. X.
16. Cf. M. Recalcati, *Cosa resta del padre? La paternità nell'epoca ipermoderna*, Cortina, Milano 2011.
- 17 Cf. Th. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1979, Bd. VI.
18. Cf. J.-F. Lyotard, *Économie libidinale*, Minuit, Paris 1976.
19. J. Baudrillard, *Le change symbolique et la mort*, Gallimard, Paris 1976.
20. G. Deleuze-F. Guattari, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie 1. L'Anti-Œdipe*, Minuit, Paris 1972.
21. R. Esposito, *Pensiero istituyente. Tre paradigmi di ontologia politica*, Einaudi, Torino 2020. Cf. also the first two chapter of "Almanacco di filosofia e politica", ed. M. Di Pierro, F. Marchesi, E. Zaru, Quodlibet, Macerata 2019 and 2020, both are dedicated to the theme of istitutio.