Concept & Artistic Direction: **Chto Delat** | *Performance and Installation:* **Chto Delat (Tsaplya Olga Egorova, Nina Gasteva, Nikolay Oleynikov, Dmitry Vilensky)** | *Curator of the project:* **Katia Arfara** | *Puppeteer:* **Stathis Markopoulos (Ayusaya! Puppet Company)** | *Narrator:* **Spyros Andreopoulos** | *Guided Tours:* **Maria Petinaki, Georgios Papadopoulos, Pafsanias Karathanasis** | *Dancers:* **Yannis Adoniou, Xenia Vlachou-Koghilaki, Katerina Gevetzi, Christine Zacharia, Konstantina Barkouli, Margarita Trikka, Dimitra Charalampidou, Antonis Primikyris, Adrian Kolarit** | *Radio Pedio:* **Anton Kats**

01→ *Post-Operaismo*
an English translation of the Italian movement that could be read as *post-workerism*

02→ *Subcomandante Marcos | Maestro Galeano*
—PALABRATORIO, PP. 244, 242;
—CHRONICLES, P. 40

03→ *EZLN*
—PALABRATORIO, PP. 240

04→ *ConCiencias*
—PALABRATORIO, PP. 237;
—CHRONICLES, P. 40

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THE ZAPATISMO OF THE OPERAISMO

ALTERMODERNITY'S NEW WEAPON IN THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Marco Baravalle

Understanding how post-Operaismo thought relates to Zapatismo adds a small but significant detail to our description of the impact that the revolution in Chiapas has had beyond the borders of Mexico, and helps us to frame its current status within the contemporary context of the struggle against climate change.

01→ But what exactly is *Post-Operaismo*? The term is problematic, though it has been in common use for decades. Toni Negri, the pre-eminent interpreter of this school of thought, states that it would be better to eliminate the prefix "post" and refer to this theoretical body of work simply as a revision of early *Operaismo* [workerism] namely that theory of class struggle emerging in Italy in the 1960s in journals such as *Quaderni Rossi* [Red Notebooks] and *Classe Operaia* [Working Class], which were both vehicles for a "heretical Marxism" that turned orthodox analysis on its head by suggesting that the action of the working class stimulated (rather than reacted against) capitalist development, constraining capitalism to operate as a response to the action of the proletariat. Mario Tronti (another founder of Operaismo whose path soon diverged from that of Negri) wrote,

We too saw capitalist development first and the workers second. This is a mistake. Now we have to turn the problem on its head, change orientation, and start again from first principles, which means focusing on the struggle of the working class. At the level of socially developed capital, capitalist development is subordinate to working class struggles; not only does it come after it, but it must make the political mechanisms of capitalist production respond to them.

Mario Tronti, *Workers and Capital*, 2019, p.72

The history of this movement (and theoretical analysis) initially intersects with the great worker struggles of 1968 and 1969, this being the era of *Potere Operaio* [Worker's Power] and of the autonomous factory assemblies (that is, of a worker's subjectivity in bitter dispute with official trade unions and with the Italian Communist Party), and then with the spread of so-called *Autonomia*, one of the important components of the '77 Movement—the movement of young precarious metropolitans, defeated on the cusp of the Eighties only at the cost of a very violent repression. And it is at this point, and here we are still following Negri's genealogy, that the story of post-workerism—or better, of a *revised workerism*—has its origin. It is from the jails, in which hundreds of militants and intellectuals were segregated, that a reflection inspired by the most rigorous historical materialism emerges on the causes of the defeat of the movements and on the ontology of living labour (that is, labour which is not fixed and objectified in the means of production but connected to the physical and intellectual faculties of the worker) in an era in which one began to glimpse the new primacy of non-material labour (intellectual, linguistic, affective, networked) over that which was traditionally connected with the model of the Fordist factory and of the assembly line.

Antonio Negri synthesizes (fully aware that he is taking a reductionist approach) the history of the evolution of this thought through the progressive individualization of two subjects, who are "bearers of politics" (another expression of Mario Tronti), and of a new revolutionary class in the making.

We can pinpoint the following three stages:

The 1960s are the years of the mass worker (typically, an immigrant from the South in the Northern metropolises, rather apolitical and working at an assembly belt).

The 1970s see the so-called social worker (young, precarious, educated, living through a first stage of deterritorialization in which the Fordist factory loses its central position in favour of the metropolitan fragmentation of the productive hubs emerging on the scene).

Finally, from the mid-1990s and beyond, workerism proposes the adoption of the concept of multitude as a category capable of explaining globalised living labour, mobile (for reasons of professionality or need), precarious, and cooperative. And it is this ensemble of singularities that should become a revolutionary political subject in the new world order that Michael Hardt and

Toni Negri depict at the turn of the millennium and which they call *Empire*. It is at this point in the history of workerism that Zapatismo makes its incursion.

Other authors in this volume focus on the decisive influence that Zapatismo had on the movement that in Italy has been erroneously labelled as "no global" and which found itself in the spotlight, first in the streets of Seattle and then defying the state violence of Genoa during the G8 meeting in 2001, when over 200,000 activists from all over the world were faced with a dreadfull repression hitherto unknown in Italy. The killing of the young militant Carlo Giuliani at the hands of an Italian *carabiniere* [cop], was the culmination of days during which the police, ordered by the politicians who barricaded themselves into the "red zone"—showed their most brutal side, torturing those detained in the barracks of Bolzaneto and leading an assault against the Diaz School, a building where defenceless activists were taking refuge at night.

→ **On police violence at the 2001 Genova G8 Summit, see: "Rights courts finds Italy guilty of torture at 2001 Genoa summit". European Court of Human Rights. 22 Jun 2017.**

The reaction of the neoliberal forces in Genoa demonstrated their dread of the movement, a movement which, without Zapatismo, would certainly not have spread as it did, embodying a season of struggle in which certain experiences of the global South, especially the Indigenous struggles in Latin America, were crucial.

In the conversation that this publication offers, other authors also address the intersection between aesthetics and politics set in motion by the revolution in Chiapas, the pedagogy of the *murales*, the pronounced performativity of the Zapatistas' politics, with its linguistic or symbolic fusion, embodied by the figure of ***Subcomandante Marcos***, who lately transcended his role through the ritualized death of Marcos, leaving the stage to transform himself into ***Galeano***, the Zapatista teacher killed by the paramilitaries. In this text, I offer some considerations of the workerist understanding of Zapatismo, in particular, connecting with Hardt and Negri, and then propose a further reflection that relates to the current political outlook.

02→

For post operaist researchers, the Zapatista revolution becomes one of the symbols of the power of the multitude. Negri affirms that with Zapatismo:

There was the possibility of imagining something that was other than the future of capital. In short, Zapatismo was the first recuperation of the future for the imagination of another modernity. By "another modernity" *I mean something other than that which was and is modernity, something other than the reduction to a continuous historical model, progressive and linear. Even if Zapatismo has its foundation in the traditional civilization of Mexican and Indigenous populations, it is another way of imagining the future.* **A. Negri, 2008, pp.75-76**

The possibility of imagining a future beyond capital emerges, as does the possibility of imagining it from beyond an Eurocentric conception of modernity with its sense of continuous and linear time. An imaginary that, mind you, does not evoke utopia but a successful revolution in arms that had no intention of seizing the state apparatus (nor of recreating it just as it was in the liberated zones), but opting instead for the autonomy and self-management of federated communities.

But what do Hardt and Negri mean by the term ***modernity***? It is not only a synonym for that political and cultural project imposed since the Enlightenment with its connected processes of secularization, its critique of tradition, and its aspiration towards the new (most clearly in the arts) or progress. In the case of the authors of *Commonwealth*, modernity is to be understood as *a power relation (between) domination and resistance, sovereignty and struggles for liberation.*

M. Hardt, A. Negri, 2009. P. 67

Starting from this semantic elucidation, the two philosophers set the scene for a dialectic between *modernity* and *anti-modernity*, a clash that is played out entirely within the field of the former. There are phenomena of modernity in the colonies just as there are expressions of anti-modernity in Europe; the former cannot be reduced to episodes of cultural assimilation, just as the latter cannot refer just to conservative and traditionalist tensions. Bearing in mind the definition of modernity contained above, anti-modernity refers to forces that struggle against domination and sovereignty, to which modernity must respond; these forces are at work in Indigenous

movements just as they are within the struggles of the Western proletariat. In this light then, it seems clear that it is not possible to geographically locate modernity in the "first world" in contrast to an anti-modernity, which supposedly characterizes the primitive and barbarous Global South. The antimodern is no synonym for the premodern.

We are not in the presence, among other things, of a power relationship that only affects the capitalist space; the same power relationship is indeed identifiable as well in the space where real socialism was established—having it also embraced the modern project, that is, having linked the destiny of the working class to technological and industrial progress (thus depriving itself of an idea of the limit to growth and of a corresponding political ecology), a vector that teleologically was supposed to spur history towards *il sol dell'avvenir* [the sun of the hereafter].

→ Literally *sun of the future*, an expression common among Italian Socialist and Communist *milieu*, referring to the rosy future radiating once the socialist world is realized; also found in many songs of Resistance.

After clarifying the significance of anti-modernity, Hardt and Negri suggest taking a further step. However essential it may be, there exists a limit to anti-modernity; that of not being able to overcome the moment of resistance, finding itself unmoving from the negation (of being *against*) without fully embracing a proposal of affirmation (of becoming a project *for*), and in this not fully being capable of freeing itself from the perspective of the modern. To express this passage, the two authors invoke Frantz Fanon and his reflection on the different responses of the colonized intellectual towards the colonizing culture. Fanon certainly criticizes the state of assimilation due to which the colonized ends up taking a European perspective, but he also warns against those anti-modern positions which, in the name of the sacred struggle against colonialism, fall back on the defence of popular traditions, on recovering a static and pre-modern identity. On the contrary, Fanon insists that it is in the very process of the anticolonial struggle that a people necessarily transforms itself, and this transformation should be welcomed. Such a mutation is an integral part of the revolutionary project, its effect being the rupture of the *modernity* versus *anti-modernity* binary. Starting with Fanon then, Negri and Hardt propose to focus on a third term, that of *altermodernity*, anchoring it to the Zapatista revolution. It should be noted that this aspiration towards another modernity reveals all the debt incurred by operaismo to postcolonial studies with their predicament to reject every process of exoticisation and primitivisation and its subsequent censure of a presumed original purity.

Moreover, returning for a moment to the aesthetic realm, the affirmation of a postcolonial perspective in a historical and artistic context is taken as a fundamental rejection of designation such as "magicians" attributed to non-Western artists, as in the case of the famous controversy around the exhibition *Magiciens de La Terre* by French curator Jean-Hubert Martin. An emblematic refusal to be excluded from modernism, until then an entirely Eurocentric system, and the consequent insistence on the reevaluation of the modernisms of the Global South. Expressions of a poetics that it wouldn't be rash to define as altermodernism.

Hardt and Negri claim that Zapatismo has moved beyond identity politics:

The Zapatista campaigns for Indigenous rights in Mexico provide a clear political example of this altermodernity.

The Zapatistas do not pursue either of the conventional strategies that link rights to identity: they neither demand the legal recognition of the Indigenous identities equal to other identities (in line with a positive law tradition), nor do they claim the sovereignty of traditional Indigenous power structures and authorities with respect to the state (according to natural law). For most Zapatistas, in fact, the process of becoming politicized already involves both a conflict with the Mexican state and a refusal of the traditional authority structures of Indigenous communities. [...] They demand the right not "to be who we are", but rather "to become what we want".

Such principles of movement and self-transformation allow the Zapatistas to avoid getting stuck in anti-modernity and move on to the terrain of altermodernity.

M. Hardt, A.Negri, 2009, p. 106

The passage is very clear: from the struggle of being to the struggle for becoming, from the struggle to assert an identity (however subaltern and colonized) to that of transforming this identity in a revolutionary sense through the revolutionary process. Here there is resonance with Maurizio Lazzarato, another militant thinker of post-Operaismo, not invoking the Zapatistas directly but the entirety of the altermondist movement which defines itself by the slogan "another world is possible." From Seattle onwards, Lazzarato states, a season is open in which the movements seem to distance themselves from the politics of the subject that evoke closed worlds within binary options (man/woman, capitalist/worker, nature/society and so on) to embrace instead that which is defined as the politics of the event, or else the conception of the revolutionary process as an opening of possibilities, as the realization of encounters and worlds beyond the rigidity of pre-constituted subjects. Hardt and Negri, it is worth emphasizing, do not deny the Indigenous component in Zapatismo; they are aware of the role that a reaction to the age-old colonial and racial violence is a strong element in the context of the revolution of the *EZLN*, but they mostly underline the power of the nexus between the politics of the subject and of the event within the Zapatista system.

03 →

Thus, if Zapatismo has had for Hardt and Negri the undoubted merit of providing us with an exceptional example of altermodernity, if in it the revolt of an Indigenous collective subjectivity putting into practice a process of self-determination is successfully revealed, open to the event and to the creation of new potential—how is it possible to further revise their discourse?

Today, in light of the urgency posed by the ecological catastrophe and faced with the growth of a transnational movement for climate justice, the Operaismo perspective seems not to have given sufficient importance to another fundamental aspect of altermodernity, attributed to Zapatismo and other Indigenous movements: the extreme significance of Indigenous cosmogonies, nowadays

essential to show us a way out and beyond the Capitalocene, to use the term coined by Jason W. Moore. A resistance and, above all, an alternative project to global extractive capitalism—the one that threatens the very conditions for the reproduction of the biosphere—cannot today forego the guarantee of an epistemological equality between Western and Indigenous ways of knowing. To avoid any risk of paternalism and generalization, it must be clarified that I'm borrowing the term Indigenous Knowledge from a definition of Aoki Inoue and Moreira (2016), in reference to the cosmological vision of the Xerente and Tukano people, respectively living in the Tocantis State in the Brazilian Amazons and in the transboundary portion of land between Brazil and Colombia. Here, as well as in other cultures including that of the Zapatista peoples, the Indigenous cosmology radically differs from the anthropocentric Western vision, articulated through a dualism between society and nature (or human and nature), that has created a sense of separation, relegating nature in an estranged position, a subservient relation to the human, entitled to master and use it as their own 'resources'. It is this understanding of the world that has determined the ecological crisis we are living in.

On the contrary, Indigenous interpretations of the cosmos, as found among native cultures and their various creation myths, refer not only to a different conception of nature, giving it agency and spirit, but also harbor a different conception of the relationship between humans and nature. In these visions, all elements are always connected and interdependent, in a relation of mutual survival, collaboration and reciprocity. This means that the relation between human nature and non-human (or more-than-human) nature is never disruptive, unidirectional or extractive.

It is worth making two points of clarification at this stage. First, it would not be incorrect to try to include the Indigenous cosmogony within this definition of environmentalism, or within a Western taxonomy. Even if there exists an eco-Indigenous discourse, and while with no doubts Indigenous people are interpreters of a culture and ways of living infinitely more compatible with the reproduction of the biosphere than the

capitalist ones, what needs to be emphasized today is the need for a political chain of events between the contemporary struggles for climate justice and the Indigenous vision of the cosmos, which is simultaneously ancestral and hyper-modern.

The second clarification is that, as though to confirm the theses of Hardt and Negri, the Zapatistas do not see their traditional knowledge as a fetish, nor do they await their "rediscovery" by Europeans, knowing full well the suffering that the so-called discovery and domination have inflicted on Indigenous nations. One expects instead a concatenation between their popular knowledge (subaltern) and the other (subaltern) knowledge of a different matrix. This was the position expressed by the Zapatistas in the course of *ConCiencias*, a festival of the sciences for humanity held at San Cristòbal de Las Casas in December, 2017.

04 →

Cristina Yumie Aoki Inoue and Paula Franco Moreira, two researchers who, for the record, have nothing to do with Operaismo, in an article entitled *Many Worlds, Many Nature(s), One Planet: Indigenous Knowledge in the Anthropocene* correctly maintain that epistemological equality between systems of knowledge represents an essential role in the struggles of Indigenous people.

It is important to stress out that the attainment of such epistemological equality is much more than an objective for Indigenous people only. In the construction of a global movement for climate justice, a transformation within typical environmentalism is necessary and is already partially underway. Let's examine some of its main features: a Marxist position works to emphasise the role of capitalism in the destruction of the biosphere and to bring to light the class asymmetries according to which one distributes the costs of climate change. A queer and feminist position sheds light on the structurally patriarchal dimension of the Anthropocene; within this perspective, the anti-speciesist discourse also operates, criticizing anthropocentrism in favour of an equal relationship between the human and the other species. In all of these positions then, the environmentalism whose legacy has now been inherited by the movement for climate justice, assumes with ever greater conviction an anticapitalist position against extractivism, even in its "green economy" version, as well as an anti-patriarchal one.

Yet, this does not suffice. The decision of Indigenous people from many nations, tribes, and places to speak up, as we see a resurgence happening in many countries, is fundamental not only because it demonstrates the racial distribution of climate injustice, making obvious the links between climate change and migration as well—but also and mainly because they are the bearer of a vision of the cosmos in which human and non-human nature are connected by the same fate, beyond any separation between subject and object, or the reification of non-human nature.

It is therefore necessary that the corpus of knowledges linked to the wider and diverse Indigenous visions of the world (and their ontologies and pedagogies) are embraced by radical ecological movements in the West, too, as there is so much to learn from. This of course does not mean appropriating Indigenous cultures, or superficially adopting their aesthetics. As *Moira Millán*, a Mapuche Indigenous activist from Argentina teaches us, any form of cultural extractivism needs to be avoided, as does any appropriation.

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See Moira Millan Speech at Venice Climate Camp, September 5, 2019. A video (in Spanish and Italian) and a transcription of her speech was published by the independent media platform www.globalproject.info

In my opinion, theories of degrowth, which fall back on dreams of small rural homogeneous communities reducing the sphere of contention to lifestyle considerations, are problematic too; from my own privileged position as a white European male, it is a question of doing something else altogether; of acknowledging and revising the altermodernity of this cultural legacy, of not betraying its legitimate maternity but, at the same time, of not being afraid to put it up for theoretical discussion, of putting it into practice and into struggles, conscious that we, the Westerners, unlike the Zapatistas, need to cease "being what we are" and, like the Zapatistas, we have the desire to "become what we wish," and open ourselves to the possibility of a world beyond ecological catastrophe.