

# love & politics

edited by

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### **On Love: A conversation between Michael Hardt and Mikhail Karikis**

This text features my conversation with the influential political philosopher Michael Hardt, co-author (with Antonio Negri) of the seminal trilogy of books on contemporary political and economic philosophy *Empire* (2000), *Multitude* (2004) and *Commonwealth* (2009).<sup>1</sup> After reading *Multitude* in which the authors introduce the idea of political love, I was very much anticipating *Commonwealth* where they dedicate an entire chapter to this subject, which has been inspiring and influential, but also the subject of debate and theoretical critique particularly from the post-Marxist philosophical arenas.

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<sup>1</sup> The new book by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri *Assembly* was published in October 2017 by Oxford University Press. (editors' note)

While working on my large-scale project – *Children of Unquiet* (2012-2015) – in Italy, and engaging with a community of people whose lives had been greatly affected by the privatisation of natural resources, mass unemployment, migration and rapid depopulation, Hardt's and Negri's *Commonwealth* seemed to offer a different way for me to start conversations with local politicians, industry, workers and their children. Widespread narratives of failure and feelings of resentment were being passed on by adults to the younger generation, perpetuating reciprocal animosity. *Commonwealth's* introduction of the notion of a political love and its >puzzles< into the contemporary thinking of interpersonal, socio-political and economic structures opened up the potential to imagine different probable, possible or invented futures with a reactivated individual and communal agency.

The central component of the multi-partite project *Children of Unquiet* features a film which orchestrates a children's take-over of one of the deserted workers' villages in the Devil's Valley in Tuscany, where the project is located. In one scene we see groups of seven-year-old children reading fragments from Hardt's and Negri's book *Commonwealth*. While this project is partly creating a conversation with some of the ideas in the book, I also initiated a direct dialogue with Michael Hardt, who in turn responds to my film.

Mikhail Karikis: Michael, you have repeatedly written on the notion of love in political terms, and I have been particularly interested in your understanding of love as an event that is (paradoxically) connected both to change and to stability. Your thesis suggests that love brings about fundamental changes in how we perceive ourselves and the world around us, but it also creates strong sustainable bonds that may resist and withstand change. So a political kind of love presents itself as a powerful model for the creation of systems and institutions that encourage revolutionary change while maintaining social bonds. Would you like to expand on this?

Michael Hardt: I am intrigued by the powers of a political form of love; it is a force of transformation, of bonds and community formation. What continues to preoccupy me about love as a political project is the common functioning of love as a unifying process or even a process that selects for sameness, which is not only inadequate, but also politically detrimental. Forms of white supremacy, nationalism, and religious fundamentalism are powerful today, and they function as a kind of love of the same or even a process of merging into one. Much more helpful than thinking of traditional notions of racism, fascism and religious fundamentalism in terms of exclusion or hatred is to think of them as political forms of love, which are based on love of the same and are destructive.

A political conception of love for me would have to operate on a principle of difference, or even of proliferation of differences. Love would not be a becoming one. Then the Judeo-Christian notion of >loving your neighbour< would not be conceived as a love of the one who is the same or most proximate, but loving the one who is different from you, not in order to make them like you but to work with and



appreciate these differences. Of course this idea would need to develop – I am presenting it as a necessary principle of turning love as a political concept into a useful one and creating an alternative to the most readily available political form of love that is powerful today and horribly damaging.

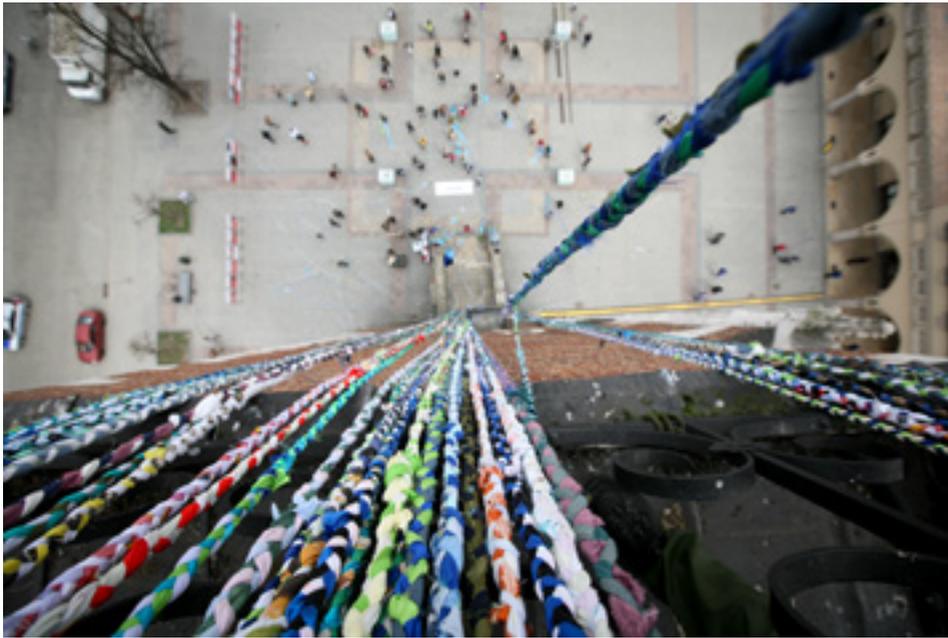
Some people react by claiming that love has no place in politics, and my response is that actually love has a role in politics already but we are not looking at it. The challenge is to create a different logic for the formation of bonds that are able to transform us, not so that we become the same or tend toward a uniform identity, but so that they proliferate differences and multiplicity.

M. K.: In her book *For More than One Voice*, the feminist thinker Adriana Cavarero discusses the dangers of nationalism and our



Cecylia Malik, *Tree 332*, performance / photograph, 2010. Courtesy of the artist

**365 Trees / Białka's Braids /  
Polish Mothers**  
by Cecylia Malik



Cecylia Malik, *Białka's Braids*, campaign to protect river against regulations, 2013.  
Courtesy of the artist, Mieszko Stanisławski and Tomasz Wiech (photographs)



## ABSTRACT

If polemics is the concept for love in politics, is there a polemics in contemporary art that could be considered significant? The present essay provides an affirmative answer to this question and locates the polemics of contemporary art in a debate that reveals itself to be both a political debate about politics and a debate between theory and philosophy. Theory, it is claimed, must always assume the existence of its object while philosophy begins without presupposition. The proper names involved in this debate, the proper names of a theorist and a philosopher, are Juliane Rebentisch and Alain Badiou. In the end, the debate is left behind and the path of the investigation turns toward »idle waiting«.

## **Polemiken oder wenn sich die demokratischen Tiere um die Gegenwartskunst scharen**

by Alexander García Düttmann

Polemik ist der Begriff für Liebe in der Politik.

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Dass Gegenwartskunst, ihr Verständnis und ihr Begriff Anlass zu Polemiken geben, ist nicht verwunderlich, so rar diese Polemiken unter Philosophen, die sich mit Kunst beschäftigen, sein mögen. Denn wenn man den Ausdruck »Gegenwartskunst« als einen Namen verwendet, also nicht als Bezeichnung für die Kunst, die in der Gegenwart erzeugt wird, sondern als Bezeichnung für eine Kunst, die in der Gegenwart

neben andere Kunst tritt, dann zeigt sich schnell, dass ihr Begriff erst noch gebildet, konstruiert, erfunden werden muss. Verschiedene Versuche, sie auf einen Begriff zu bringen, ihr Verständnis zu erschließen, wetteifern dann miteinander. Sicherlich ist das ein Umstand, der auf jede Kunst zutrifft. Doch die Bildung eines neuen Begriffs vergangener, vermeintlich bekannter oder wiedererkennbarer Kunst zeichnet sich dadurch aus, dass sie sich auf mehr oder weniger etablierte, also bereits gebildete und gängige Begriffe zu beziehen vermag, auf vorgegebene Auffassungen. Man kann die Schwierigkeit an der Hegelschen Einsicht ablesen, das Denken, das als gegenwärtiges seine Gegenwart zu begreifen trachtet, könne einen Begriff von Gegenwart nur gewinnen, wenn diese zur Vergangenheit geworden sei.

Hat man einmal festgestellt, dass Gegenwartskunst eine vergleichsweise ungewisse Gegebenheit der Gegenwart ist, so sehr der eine oder andere schon über ihr Verschwinden spekulieren, sie der Vergangenheit zuordnen mag, hat man einmal zugegeben, dass die Gegenwart sich nicht als eine Gegebenheit betrachten lässt, um so weniger, je mehr sie aufgrund ihrer Unmittelbarkeit sich den Sinnen aufdrängt und den Verstand auf sich lenkt, muss der Begrifflosigkeit abgeholfen werden, der Blindheit aller Gegenwartskunst, steht die erfinderische Konstruktion ihres Begriffes aus, geschieht sie gerade, jetzt, in der Gegenwart. Man muss sich fragen, ob, wie und warum Gegenwartskunst gegeben ist, was es heißt, dass sie gegeben ist oder nicht, was sie ausmacht – und diese Konstruktion kann eben wegen des Fehlens einer über einen langen Zeitraum erprobten begrifflichen Praxis umstrittener sein als jede Konstruktion, die von einer derartigen Praxis gestützt wird oder sich gleichsam an ihr abzureiben vermag.

Trotzdem ist der polemische, streitbare Umgang mit Gegenwartskunst, der in dem für sie konstitutiven Fehlen eines ausgewiesenen Begriffs an-

gelegt ist, zumindest als Tendenz, überraschend, wenn man sich einen wichtigen Aspekt solcher Kunst vor Augen führt. Denn in dem Maße, in dem die Entgegensetzung von Autonomie und Heteronomie, so dialektisch sie gehandhabt werden mag, die Erzeugnisse der Gegenwartskunst nicht mehr erfasst, weil ihre Vermarktung ihnen nicht äußerlich ist, nicht äußerlich sein soll, herrscht in der Welt, die sich um die Gegenwartskunst dreht, gewöhnlich kein polemischer Ton, sondern, wie man an einem ihrer Manifeste, Bourriauds Schrift zur relationalen Ästhetik, leicht erkennt, ein freundliches und umtriebige Mit- und Nebeneinander, ein allgemeiner guter Wille zur Anknüpfung, der sich wiederum von ökonomischen Interessen gar nicht trennen lässt und deshalb nicht einfach als Konformismus denunziert werden kann. Alle sind furchtbar nett und furchtbar geschäftig, Künstler, Kuratoren, Kritiker.

Die Entschärfung von Autonomieansprüchen und Heteronomievorwürfen mindert die Bedeutung der Polemik, unabhängig davon, wie sehr die Machtkämpfe toben. Ihren Ort scheint sie eher in der Schwierigkeit einer Konstruktion oder Erfindung des Gegenwartsbegriffs zu haben, in dem Erfassen der Zeit in Gedanken, der Zeit, die die Zeit der Gegenwartskunst ist, der Gegenwart. Doch diese reale Schwierigkeit ist auch eine triviale Schwierigkeit. Wo also entfacht sich um die Gegenwartskunst eine signifikante Polemik, eine Polemik, die etwas über die Gegenwartskunst aussagt?

Juliane Rebentischs Antwort auf Alain Badiou's *Drittes Manifest des Affirmationismus*, selber als »Gegen-Manifest«<sup>1</sup> konzipiert, ermöglicht eine aussagekräftige Kollision, gleichgültig, ob diese Polemik in der

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<sup>1</sup> Juliane Rebentisch, »Negations. Against Aesthetic Affirmationism«, in: *Aesthetics and Contemporary Art*, hg. von A. Avanesian und L. Skrebowski, Berlin 2011, S. 52.

**»I love you«: A musical utterance or a flat one?**

by Soumyabrata Choudhury

What is enumerated below is a set of notes towards elaborating the question: does the enunciation of the sentence »I love you« result in a musical utterance or a flat one? To repeat – the attempt below is to elaborate the question, not to answer it:

1. As a musical utterance »I love you« is already to sing too much, in too many words. It is enough to hum the song of love where even the sound of the word >love< is not quite distinct. It is enough because all humming, all indistinct music, all modulation and repetition, all echo and refrain is love anyway, without the need of linguistic or *literal* punctuality of the word and sentence of love.

Actually what is distinct about the indistinct music of love, barely audible as a low hum in the air, is the *insistence* of that music. Low as it is, the hum is continuously and inconsolably modulated. Love doesn't care all that much for the punctuation of the letter, the word, the sentence, because it is not punctual. Its time is endless and repetitive with no interstice between one moment of love and another. Love is not a point, it is a sinuous line with no beginning and end – so the *point* of love in language is a redundant pre-occupation. At the same time, love is a ceaseless pre-occupation with its own motif and image, its caesurae and syncopations. But even in its local endings and silences, crises and involutions, there is no real punctuation or discontinuity in its being. That is because love is a mode of being of the Being which is love itself. Love, in this view, is like Spinoza's nature on both sides – in substance and in the world, as *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*.<sup>1</sup> That is why even when everything has become unbearable and fallen apart, everything is still perfect. Because the night that rises in the throat like a conclusive nausea, retains the eternal low hum of Being, because, as the mad, heart-broken poet will joyfully and resoundingly mutter, it still *rhymes!*

2. As a musical mode, love is a singular effect of an apparatus of redundancy; that is, music is the effect which is the heterogeneous, and yet, inherent, feature of language. While music is the instantaneous transformation of language into rhythm, syncope, vertigo, ecstasy, the >flat< utterance of the words »I love you« is another sort of event predicated on the use of language. In the musical case, the reality of love is indiscernible from the reality of language and language is indiscernible from a certain music. But in the flat one, everything is wagered on the utterance »I love you« transmitting

some reality exterior to the symbolic function of language. Yet the unforeseen and contingent upsurge of that reality – merely and tremendously sexual – is an event inseparable from the singular envelopment of bodies by language itself. What sort of an envelopment is this? The envelope is actually a *breach* within the apparatus of redundancy called language that every part of the »I love you« participates in. As pure words the three particles in the sentence are abstract and infinitely repeatable and in the musical imagination, every repetition is also a rhythmic variation emerging from the great redundancy of language as such. However, the breach that results with the banal yet singular utterance »I love you« is totally flat when it is wagered on the transmission of an effective reality that challenges the symbolic apparatus to say love *for the first time*. As love uttered for the first time it is also the first thought of that reality from whose breach it issues. Love is a >thought< of reality, only sexual reality, that doesn't join two bodies into a form but provides the form for the very non-relation that entwines two bodies.<sup>2</sup> In this way, love is enveloped by language that formalises a breach which itself is the constitutive non-relation of every sexed situation or reality. Such situations solicit and provoke language to test the limits of its symbolic threshold whether sex as non-relation can ever be transmitted by linguistic symbols.

3. For the musical scintillation of love, its rhythmic lightening-flashes across the tortured and ecstatic night sky, there are no tests to undergo. Only modes to be lived through dispositions, angularities, tonalities and stylizations that bodies are traversed by ... and to say »body« is already to say too much. It is rather that body itself is only a mode and the mode is always a bodily passage between expression and involution. So when it is said that love is a kind of



Nauman Abid, *For a better future together*, C type print, variable size, 2014.  
Courtesy of the artist

## **Memory Virus**

by Tom Bland

A baby octopus sucked into the diner's mouth attempted to leap out by curling its tentacles around his lips as his teeth shut down on its almost fluid body, but he hoovered the tentacles into his mouth almost as if he was a vacuum cleaner, but he wasn't, he was a trophy hunter by trade. Inside his crocodile skin wallet, a passport sized photograph tucked inside, showing him sitting on top of a dead bear (shot in the head eight times) holding a hunting rifle the size of his tiny arms in the grip of his giant hands: tiny arms/giant hands. It was like he had a clown's body. Comic but savage.

Dr Benson sat opposite me chewing on his own living specimen out of the lukewarm swimming pool in the back garden of the

strangely named Marmalade Jesus Eatery only opened to members or gangsters or experimental police officers. Open to the kind of police officer who would commit murder and then be the one who investigated the death. Sometimes he would chop off the hand of the victim and place it onto the pocket or sleeping bag of a strung out homeless man who would be accused and found guilty. Benson remarked, >It is so easy to nail the accused to the cross if he doesn't have a good solicitor, the kind that costs £10,000 an hour. The prison service learnt a millennium ago not to make the same mistake as they did with Jesus. The nails go right in through the wrists, never the hands, or they just rip out, leaving you on the ground, giving you time to escape. No one is that lucky these days.<

Benson had a kind of ethics about him but not an especially kind or caring in its application. He cared for individuals but never the general populace. He kept the words of Friedrich Nietzsche in his wallet made out of the skin of a patient who lost his life on Benson's operating table –

WHATEVER  
IS DONE  
FOR LOVE ALWAYS  
OCCURS BEYOND  
GOOD OR  
EVIL

Being a medical doctor, he felt his healing work stemmed out of a love that hid just in the point where the optic nerve and the eyeball become one another; that strange limbo point. He saw his healing work as taking place in limbo as he didn't think healing a patient was

necessarily beneficial to anyone. In fact the crooks who took up his service enslaved, corrupted, deprived whole communities. His practice was essentially bad for the whole world.

He looked straight at me, then at his watch, then at me, then at his notes, then at me, staring way too long, >Tom, your results aren't good<, the eel attempting to free what was left of its body out through the gaps between his teeth, >You have about 18 minutes to live, well 13 to be exact. I told you it was bad.<

>I was once on a cruise ship with a Catholic priest who pushed a security guard over the side into the ocean<, I stuttered, >due to the type of fish they served on Friday. He hated white bait and believed it was the devil's fish purely out of own idiosyncratic reasoning. The security guard just didn't understand the babbling of the priest, so the priest ended up thinking the security guard was in league with the fish devil and pushed him with all his might over the side. That's not true, I dreamt it last night.< I paused for a second. >I knew you were the priest, and I, the security guard.<

Benson kind of ignored me and shouted >Look!<, leaping up from his chair knocking over his £246 glass of red wine, >it's the gulping fish dish!< The waitress held the metal tray level with a dark green fish on it. The mouth of the fish was still gulping for oxygen bubbles in amidst of unbreathable air, slight cuts along its body, and as she placed it down, she showed the diner how to cut it, stripping away thin layers. The gulping got faster and faster between the average suffocation of being on dry land and extreme torture.

>Ah! Wine!<, Benson hollered across the room drinking straight from the bottle downing all of it. He looked straight at me, >Don't worry, it only takes three minutes to get another bottle from the sultry waitress.< He screamed out her name, BARBARA, as she jumped

Sorry: end of preview

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