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Antonio Negri, *The Winter Is Over. Writings on Transformation Denied, 1989-1995*. Los Angeles, Calif.: Semiotext(e), 2013. 264 pp. \$16.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-1-58435-121-4.

Review by Giuseppina Mecchia, University of Pittsburgh.

Scholars of French history—and French Studies in general—will doubtlessly be surprised to encounter the name of a controversial Italian political philosopher in a book presented as a chronicle of an important turning point in recent French history. And in a way, we are indeed faced with a case of false—or maybe incomplete—advertising, since the book is at the same time much more and much less of what it claims to be in the first paragraph of its back-cover description.

Written by Antonio Negri during his years of exile in Paris, the essays contained in this volume first appeared as a collection in Italy in 1996. The motivation for the publication was the renewal of leftist struggles that France had witnessed in December 1995, when a wave of public workers strikes had paralyzed the country for several weeks in a vast insurrectional mode reminiscent not only of May 68, but of nineteenth-century barricades and revolutionary upheavals. After a prolonged latency under the aegis of Reaganism and Thatcherism, it seemed that “the winter” of capitalist and State repression might finally be “over,” a feeling that is reflected in the collection’s title. The elation apparent in Negri’s original introduction to the book is easily understandable, given his own political and intellectual history.

Since French historians might be less familiar with Negri’s trajectory than specialists of political theory and Italian studies, I will summarize the most relevant aspects of a long and often surprising career. Negri was a professor of political philosophy in Padua, Italy, from the early 1960s until 1979, when he was accused of being associated with the Red Brigades and of having masterminded the 1978 kidnapping and murder of the Italian Prime Minister, Aldo Moro. Both accusations were unfounded and soon dropped, but Negri was still arrested and spent four years in prison awaiting trial for “insurrection against the State.” In 1984, Negri was put on the ballot for parliamentary elections by the Italian Radical Party: he was elected and therefore released from prison and this is when he escaped to France, where he had already taught at the Ecole Normale Supérieure. President François Mitterrand, at the time, had questioned the honesty of the Italian justice system in its prosecution of alleged left-wing terrorists, and had adopted a policy of granting them political asylum. Negri was to remain in France until 1997, when he negotiated the terms of his return to Italy and served the rest of his sentence. His years in France were extraordinarily prolific in terms of intellectual output, and it is there that he first met Michael Hardt, the American professor of comparative literature with whom he co-authored *Empire*, the book that catapulted him to the forefront of the Anglo-American academic world.[1]

These brief remarks will help the reader of *The Winter is Over* to understand the nature of the essays contained in the volume. Negri is not a French historian, and this is not a book of history. It is, rather, a reflection on the changing nature of workers’ struggles and cultural politics in Western Europe from the mid-1980s onwards. The contingency of Negri’s exile to Paris determines his point of access to these realities, but not really his critical focus.

The book is divided into four parts, and besides the introductory piece that I have already mentioned, only three out of thirty-five essays can be said to deal explicitly with contemporary French historical events. The fourth part is, in fact, an assessment of the most recent events in Italian contemporary history, as the traditional party system fell apart at the beginning of the 1990s and Berlusconi's rising star appeared on the horizon. To a certain extent, and not surprisingly given Negri's identity, these are the most "historical" pieces of the collection, and will certainly be of interest to readers and scholars of Italian Studies.

Going back to the two essays about French events, one is in the first part, and although it is entitled "Worker Restructuring in Europe" and addresses a more generalized transformation in labor practices now widely known under the name of post-Fordism, it does take as a point of departure the nurses' strikes that were prevalent in France in the late 1980s and that, in the 1990s, spilled over into other sectors of public employment. Negri analyzes these events as examples of the shift in terms of workers' productivity and exploitation that has occurred in advanced capitalist societies: what is produced, now, are no longer actual commodities but social relations, through various forms of communicative and affective technologies. Nurses and other caregivers are part of a new class of "immaterial" laborers whose performance is not easily measured in terms of value creation. In France, moreover, hospital workers are *fonctionnaires*--public workers--and therefore deeply involved in the centralized, state-regulated control on its citizens. In Leninist terms, then, the nurses are part of a vanguard of workers whose skills are in high demand and thus can lead a more generalized struggle, just as the transportation workers will do in the 1995 strikes that prompted the publication of the collection.

The second essay bearing some trace of French historicity is in the third part and is entitled "Euro Disney and Tiananmen." It addresses, among other things, the then-upcoming opening of the first European Disney Park in the outskirts of Paris. Negri ties this event to a critique of the "society of spectacle" analyzed by Guy Debord in his 1969 classic, since the piece is in fact a reflection on the role of television in the relaying and creation of contemporary "events."<sup>[2]</sup> In this respect, a truly dramatic event such as the revolt of Tiananmen Square shares the screen with far more mundane happenings, and Negri invites us to reflect on the televised juxtaposition of Euro Disney and Tiananmen, which, in his words is an "absolute contradiction" (p. 183).

Scholars of French cultural history and philosophy will also be interested in Negri's two essays about the publication of Deleuze and Guattari's *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?* (*What is Philosophy?*).<sup>[3]</sup> Negri's assessment is carried on with true philosophical depth and sensitivity, summarizing with rigor the book's main arguments and intents. The pedagogical vein that undoubtedly constitutes one of the most salient aspects of the last book co-authored by the two French thinkers is recognized and appreciated by Negri as one of the work's most valuable contributions. For him, pedagogy becomes "a plan of action" (p. 151) that he particularly appreciates in his ongoing effort to mobilize a counterattack against the domination of contemporary forms of capitalist domination. The struggle is now situated in "the brain" (p. 151) and Deleuze and Guattari give us an understanding of the three main forms of human interaction with the world (philosophy, art and science, with a detour through logic that Negri chooses not to address in his review), which occur both at the level of conceptuality and of material creation and analysis. Negri, of course, pays particular attention to what he calls "the ethical-political perspective" of the book, precisely at the point where the intellectual appreciation of "the plane of immanence meets up with the problem of the historical event" (p. 161). Deleuze and Guattari's reflections on the historical territorializations and de-territorializations of "the subjective productions of the brain" are brought back to the problem of the historical possibility of the revolutionary process. Negri's interpretation of the theses of *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?* with regard to this particular issue is, I believe, interesting enough to be quoted here at some length: "Ethics lives in the realm of the mutation of concept becoming event, and it produces a new collective reality within singularity. The political appears here as a veritable entrepreneurship of being, as the social factory of the collective being, the construction of freedom by

means of its mass expression. To add (or not) ‘communism’ to this ontological qualification is only a question of terminology” (p.164).

For Negri, the value of Deleuze and Guattari’s approach to history ultimately resides in its ability to serve as possible ontological basis for “communist” politics, and since this is not really a clear outcome of their philosophical positions, Negri immediately proceeds to articulate his two main criticisms of the book. The first focuses on what he perceives to be Deleuze and Guattari’s lack of interest in the politics of the relation “between science and history” (p.164), and the second on their position on historical development, which tends to resemble “the neutrality of a Braudelian development and to forget...the antagonistic dimensions...that lie at the origin of the dynamism of historicity” (p.165). In one word, Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy of history is not Marxist enough for Negri, and while this is not the place to really delve into his arguments, I think that historians—although not necessarily French historians—will be interested in reading Negri’s objections.

In conclusion, this is a volume that will appeal to a diverse public, and first and foremost, to the growing cohorts of Negri scholars, who will welcome the opportunity to read in English translation previously pieces that had originally appeared only in French or in Italian. The fourth part is an interesting perspective on a crucial moment of Italian history, seen from the perspective of an exiled revolutionary intellectual. Scholars of French cultural studies will be drawn into the essays more directly addressing changes in French and European economic and social development, and finally, the essays on Deleuze and Guattari will give food for thought to all interested in the philosophy of history. Thus, while the book is maybe not exactly what it claims to be, it is still a more than worthwhile addition to the shelves of a great deal of potential readers.

## NOTES

[1] Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Empire* (Harvard, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999).

[2] Guy Dubord, *La Société du Spectacle* (Paris: Buchet Chastel, 1969).

[3] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Qu’est-ce que la philosophie?* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1991).

Giuseppina Mecchia  
University of Pittsburgh  
[mecchia@pitt.edu](mailto:mecchia@pitt.edu)

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