

# Laurier Seminar on Italian Theory



Morning: Senate & Board Chamber | Afternoon & Lunch: Hawk's Nest

Recently a debate has emerged about the "Italian difference." In Italy, there is a growing consensus that what makes Italian Theory different is its permanent opposition to state and biopolitical forms of power, grounded engagement in the critique of capitalism and an internal disposition of productive conflict. Antonio Negri claims that what distinguishes Italian Theory is the constituent affirmation of difference, which does not lead to separation and isolation but to resistance and creative transformation (2005). Whereas Roberto Esposito argues that Italian Theory is characterized by the immanentization of antagonism because at its core it is a theory of conflict and struggle (2012).

There is a growing body of works in this field (including *The Italian Difference* edited by Chiesa and Toscano, *Italian Theory* by Gentili, and *Living Thought* by Esposito), international conferences have been held in Paris (January 2014) and Naples (May 2014), and a new international network of radical scholars is being established. Contemporary Italian Theory takes off from the work of a range of thinkers, with the three main contemporary theorists being Giorgio Agamben, Roberto Esposito and Antonio Negri (although these thinkers are part of a larger ensemble including Gianni Vattimo, Paolo Virno, and others). Main research themes include the legacy of *Operaismo*, the critique of biopolitics and the problem of political theology.

## 11:00 – 11:20 Introductions

SESSION 1:

### 11:20 – 12:30 Live from Italy: What is Italian Theory?

**Roberto Esposito** (Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa)  
**Daniela Calabrò** (Università di Salerno)  
**Dario Gentili** (Università degli Studi Roma Tre)  
**Elettra Stimilli** (Università di Salerno)

## 12:30 – 1:30 Lunch (Hawks Nest)

SESSION 2:

### 1:30 – 3:00 Canadian Interpretations of Italian Theory

**James Overboe** (Wilfrid Laurier University)  
**Donya Mosleh** (Wilfrid Laurier University)  
**Jon Short** (York University)  
**Greg Bird** (Wilfrid Laurier University)

## 3:00 – 3:15 Snack break

Session 3:

### 3:15 – 4:45 Canadian Interpretations of Italian Theory

**Mihnea Panu** (Wilfrid Laurier University)  
**Milo Sweedler** (Wilfrid Laurier University)  
**Group Discussion**

## About the Participants

### DANIELA CALABRÒ

A permanent researcher in the Department of Human Sciences, Philosophy and Education at the Università degli Studi di Salerno in Italy. Her research interests range from bio-ethics and biopolitics, to French phenomenology (Sartre and Merleau-Ponty), to the problems of corporeality and community in Esposito and Nancy. Her books have been published in Italian and French, including *Les Détours d'une pensée vivante: transitions et changements de paradigme dans la réflexion de Roberto Esposito* (Mimesis, 2012), *Dis-piegamenti. Soggetto, corpo e comunità in Jean-Luc Nancy* (Mimesis, 2006), and *L'infanzia della filosofia. Saggio sulla filosofia dell'educazione di Maurice Merleau-Ponty* (Utet, 2002). Her many articles have been published in English, Italian and French, in such journals as *Aut Aut*, *Chiasmi International*, *Il Pensiero*. She has also co-edited *A lezione da Roberto Esposito. Comunità e biopolitica* (Mimesis, 2012) and *Jean-Luc Nancy. Il peso di un pensiero, l'approssimarsi* (Mimesis, 2009).

### ROBERTO ESPOSITO

Vice-director of the Italian Institute of Human Sciences and full professor of Theoretical Philosophy at Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa. He has lectured and given seminars at major universities around the world, including Harvard, UCLA, Columbia, Brown, Duke, Michigan and Cornell in the United States; and in England, France, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Japan, Argentina and Chile. He was one of the founders of the European Political Lexicon Research Centre and the International Centre for a European Legal and Political Lexicon. For five years he was the only Italian member of the International Council of Scholars of the Collège International de Philosophie (CIP) in Paris. Currently he co-edits the review *Filosofia Politica* published by il Mulino, the series *Comunità e Libertà* for Laterza, and acts as a philosophy consultant for the publisher Einaudi. His books are translated into English, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Japanese and Korean.

### DARIO GENTILI

Gentili holds an honorary fellowship in Moral Philosophy in the Department of Philosophy at Università degli Studi Roma Tre. He is also a research fellow at the Istituto Italiano di Scienze Umane (SUM) in Florence, Italy. He was a recipient of a DAAD post-doctoral grant at the Walter Benjamin Archives in Berlin and a post-doctoral researcher at SUM. Dario has published extensively in contemporary political philosophy, Italian Theory and on Walter Benjamin. He is currently conducting a biopolitical genealogy of the medical and political fields of the "dispositif of crisis." He argues that in our neoliberal era, crisis has become the new art of government. His main publications include his extensive study of radical political thought in Italy (*Italian Theory. Dall'operaismo alla biopolitica*, 2012) and his previous work on Benjamin (*Topografie politiche. Spazio urbano, cittadinanza, confini in Walter Benjamin e Jacques Derrida*, 2009 and *Il tempo della storia. Le tesi "sul concetto di storia" di Walter Benjamin*, 2002).

### ELETTRA SIMILLI

Similli lives in Rome and is a researcher at the University of Salerno, Italy. She was part of the editorial board of the journal *Forme di vita* with Paolo Virno. Currently she is part of the editorial board of the journal *LINKS: Zeitschrift für deutsche Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaft* and she directs the editorial series *Filosofia e Politica* by the publishing house Quodlibet. She is author of numerous essays that focus on the relationship between politics and religion, with particular attention to contemporary thought. She recently published *Il debito del vivente. Ascesi e capitalismo* (Quodlibet, 2011), which won the prestigious Premio Fernonia award in 2013. She has also published the only existing monograph on Jacob Taubes: *Jacob Taubes. Sovranità e tempo messianico*, (Morcelliana, 2004). She has translated and edited many of his works, including *Jacob Taubes, Il prezzo del messianesimo. Lettere di Jacob Taubes a Gershom Scholem e altri scritti* (Quodlibet, 2000) and the German edition *Jacob Taubes, Der Preis des Messianismus: Briefe von Jacob Taubes an Gershom Scholem und andere Materialien* (Königshausen&Neumann, 2006).

### GREG BIRD

Bird is a social and political theorist. He and Short co-edited a special issue of *Angelaki* on Esposito (2013), which is being published by Routledge as an edited book (forthcoming). Besides publications on phenomenology, Esposito and Jean-Luc Nancy, he has a forthcoming publication in Italian on the dialectic of alienation and appropriation in revolutionary thought. This summer he spent time working as a visiting fellow at the Istituto Italiano di Scienze Umane in Naples, Italy, where he was working on his book on the problem of the proper in the debate about community between Giorgio Agamben, Roberto Esposito, and Jean-Luc Nancy. He is an Assistant Professor in the Sociology Department at Wilfrid Laurier University.

### JAMES OVERBOE

An associate professor in the Sociology Department at Wilfrid Laurier University. His theoretical work is informed by Italian & French poststructuralist theory, Feminisms, Queer Studies, Disability Studies and Mad Studies. From inception, his scholarship has been informed by what is termed as the discipline of 'New Materialism' and especially as it applies to the study of life within the context of the impersonal registry (also known as pre-individual or the inhuman). Also his scholarship rejects lived experience that is often measured by judgment, expectations, meaning (a continuum ranging from meaningless to meaningful) and hope (a continuum ranging from hopeless to hopeful). Instead he articulates life as expressed without: it experiencing the weight of expectations, it's suffocation by the interrelated continuums of meaning and hope. Specifically, he considers life expressed as the materiality of 'impairment' that too often is perceived to be 'obstructive' or at best a 'useless' remainder that 'impairs' so-called appropriate identity formation and thus subsequently this excess materiality metaphorically is tossed on the slag-heap of humanity. On a broader investigation Overboe examines other 'useless' remainders to see if such deficits express are simply (a) 'life' expressed.

### DONYA MOSLEH

Recently graduated from the MA Program in the Sociology Department at Wilfrid Laurier University (Fall 2014). Her research uses contemporary biopolitical thought to critically examine how "healthism" places extreme constraints on contemporary Western populations. Purported by Crawford (1990, 2006), healthism is a concept which describes the expansion of health as an ideological metaphor. Healthism describes a new "health consciousness" as a pervasive medicalized ideology within Western society. In her future research, she aims to further explore this problem by drawing from a wide-range of theorists working in the field of biopolitics, including Roberto Esposito.

### MIHNEA PANU

Panu is interested in the governing apparatuses that shape simultaneously truth, identity and enjoyment. His monograph, *Contextualizing Family Planning: Truth, Subject, and Other* in the US Government (Palgrave, 2009), argues that liberal-capitalism, the epitoma "modern" form of bio-power, is structured by unacknowledged foundational assumptions that are, among other things, patriarchal, heterosexist, racist and eugenicist; and describes the mechanisms through which those assumptions shape the governing of the Nation's health. His current research explains the apparent intractability of the modern symbolic/power regime in terms of the contemporary bourgeois subject's intimate investment in the forms of jouissance made possible by this regime. He is an associate professor in the Sociology Department at Wilfrid Laurier University, Canada.

### MILO SWEEDLER

An associate professor of French and Cultural Analysis & Social Theory at Wilfrid Laurier University. His research on French literature and theory and on contemporary politics, culture and society has appeared in diverse journals and numerous edited volumes. His first book, *The Dismembered Community: Bataille, Blanchot, Leiris, and the Remains of Delaware*, was published in 2009 by University of Delaware Press. He is currently working on a follow-up study on the friendship between Bataille and Blanchot for a special issue of the *Cahiers Maurice Blanchot* dedicated to the two authors.

### JON SHORT

A social and political theorist specializing in biopolitics and contemporary political theory. He and Bird co-edited a special issue of *Angelaki* on Esposito (2013), which is being published by Routledge as an edited book (forthcoming). He has published several scholarly articles and is currently working on a book manuscript on radical critiques of liberal biopolitics. In 2012 he was a Researcher in the internationally recognized Theory Department at the Jan Van Eyck Academie in Maastricht, Netherlands. He is presently a contract faculty member in the Department of Sociology at York University in Toronto.

Co-sponsors:  
 Department of Sociology (Laurier), MA Program in Sociology (Laurier),  
 and Cultural Studies & Social Analysis (Laurier)

Organizers:  
 Greg Bird (Sociology, Laurier), James Overboe  
 (Sociology, Laurier), and Jon Short (Sociology, York)