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Reappropriating the means of production (they mean it)

Review of Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri: *Empire*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.) 2000. Hieman laajempi versio *Acta Sociologica* Vol. 44. No 2/2000 ilmestyneestä kirja-arviosta.

The weakening of the form of power that characterized modernity and the decline in the sovereignty of nation-states that goes with it does not mean liberation but the emergence of a new form of rule. This book attempts to understand the constitutional processes and figures of this new form of sovereignty that the authors call "Empire". Their ambition is to determine a new critical strategy with a solid rooting within this dominant historical process and the ontological conditions it presents in order to reorganize the processes towards a counter-Empire.

Even if little "touching", this Augustinian idea of the two cities, of fleeing the corrupt city but also constructing a new city, upsets the appeal of any mystical radicality of the "limit" or the "other" and is no doubt the boldest and most interesting aspect of the book, though also the most problematic.

The main tools used in preparing terrain to this investigation can be divided into three. From Michel Foucault they adopt the understanding about the materialist functioning of power which allows them to recognize the passage in social forms from disciplinary society to society of control and to delve into the positive, productive aspect of power—a principle they along the way come to deny or rather better, transform according to their own agenda.

The importance of economic production is reinserted—and it is about time!—in the analysis by following and elaborating further on the contemporary Italian Marxist authors and their analyses of the immediately social and communicative dimension of the capitalist production which permits Hardt & Negri to establish the relation between biopower and the economic production of value.

Thirdly, the generic analysis of the constitution of the new order is built upon the "universal history" according to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, formulated first in *l'Anti-Oedipe*, where all transcendental comes at the end under conditions determined by the decoding and deterritorializing movement of capital. Hardt & Negri situate their entire analysis within the movement from sovereignty's transcendent position to capital's plane of immanence—in this sense, and considering the elaborate analyses of the different social machines, the accusations of insubstantiality in Deleuze and Guattari make one little amazed.

All this sure-enough, the undercurrent that structures the book is both, and in this order, Marxist and Spinozist. The book works first of all to recognize a real historical antagonism: Empire and the repressive power of the capitalist relations of production that exploit the vital power of the proletarian productive forces. The latter half of the formulated antagonism in the political terrain becomes then transported to metaphysical terrain by being geared to Spinozian "potentia", the singular and universal power to act, the actual force of "constitution" (as opposed to "potestas", the transcendental force of command and domination) through which the "multitude", the collective social subject creates a social authority—even if this remains little mysterious since there is no room in Spinoza's metaphysics for "virtuality": God's "potestas" cannot be other than God's "potentia", in metaphysics the antagonism cannot exist.

The analysis of the articulations of sovereignty which is carried out in Part II— Part I only summarizes the general outline of the book—distinguishes four key moments: The revolutionary and founding event of modernity which destroys its relations with the medieval past when the powers of creation were articulated down to earth by Renaissance humanism's secularizing project.

The second mode of modernity arose as a reaction against the discovery of these immanent forces, articulated this new truth of humanity as crises and tried to formulate a way to expropriate the force of the emerging movements.

The third moment takes place when the modern state is formulated as a mediating political solution to the crises and the ontological dualism (desire vs. order) at the base of modernity is replaced by a functional dualism. It finds its perfection in the Hegelian articulation of command which brings together sovereignty and the theory of value in functional terms and overcodes the relationship between individuality and universality as a function of the development of capital: the antagonistic dualism at the base of modernity is subsumed in a functional synthesis investing all of politics and society.

The first articulations of the new form of sovereignty, the fourth moment, are located in the postmodern and post-colonialist challenges to the dialectic and binary oppositions as the central logic of modern domination and command. The modern dialectic of inside-outside as the condition of sovereignty's possibility is transforming into a play of differences, intensities and artificiality. Sovereignty does no longer create and maintain fixed boundaries among territories, populations and social functions, but destroys them.

The key point is then that the object of critique has changed, a postmodern form of sovereignty has come to replace the old one with politics of difference and celebrated differential hierarchies of the hybrid and fragmentary subjectivities. The consequence is that both the modern critical strategy to construct outside from within (since there is no longer "outside") and deconstructive critique (since it is the logic by which the new form of sovereignty operates) have lost their effectiveness. There is a need for a new critical strategy.

Preparing the terrain for articulating the standpoint of revolt from which critique could today be possible as Hardt & Negri see it, Part III focuses then on the passage in the capitalist form of production and its relation to the functioning of power.

Their general starting point is Marx's description of the phases of the capitalist subsumption of society (formal and real subsumption) together with his analyses of capital's tendency to create world market: the sphere of circulation must be expanded to realize surplus value (capital needs an outside) and to capitalize the realized surplus value it must export a social relation by which non-capitalist environment is incorporated within the expanding cycle of capitalist production and accumulation (the outside must be internalized). Capital depends on the non-capitalist environment to realize and capitalize its surplus value and thus continue its cycle of accumulation. This means necessarily expansion: capital's thirst must be extinguished with new blood and imperialism has been the historical method.

At a certain point the expansion reaches its limit and capital can no longer depend merely on the outside. The integration of labour under capital must become more intensive than extensive and the rigid boundaries of inside and outside created by the imperialist practices come to obstruct capital's development and the realization of the world market: capitalism must overcome imperialism and destroy the barriers. At this point Hardt & Negri adjust Foucault's understanding of the change in the functioning of power in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries into an analysis of the movement from the absolute form of sovereignty to "another form of sovereignty"—the element of transcendence articulated to disciplinarity above the social field of production is rather hard to swallow, but important to Hardt & Negri's thesis of a "midway hotel". By drawing an equals sign between disciplinarity as a form of governing and a form of production they elaborate further on Taylorist organization of labour, Fordist wage regime and Keynesian macroeconomic regulation of

society as a necessary transformation of social and productive relations in a process of real subsumption and a step towards the realization of the world market.

Yet disciplinary sovereignty came to pose an obstacle to capital's development, like modern sovereignty's structures of right and force before. In disciplinary society subjectivity was in a constant social process of generation and institutions provided a discrete place and time where different identities were produced. In Empire subjectivities are indeed still produced, but the enclosures are broken down and the logics, like that of capitalist exploitation, are not limited to a discrete site like the factory, but spread across the entire social terrain: social institutions have become fluid processes with a structure like a software that carries a virus. These new pandemic practices—a working sequel to Foucault's use of lepra and separation and plague and segmentation in *Surveiller et punir*—function no longer linearly and contributing to social unification but fractally by acting as a differentiating mechanism, by controlling these differences, by having many logics to do so and by being unified only through their local effectiveness. The objective is a mobile and flexible subjectivity whose general capacity to produce and to relate to the presence of others is exploited.

The point of open sesame in the book is this: according to Hardt & Negri, relying now on Marx's analysis of capitalist crises as not simply a function of capital's own dynamics but caused directly by the proletarian pressure on the rate of profit, it is in fact the proletariat (now with a new definition: all forms of labour within and sustaining capital) that actually always invents the social and productive forms that capital will be forced to adopt if it wishes to continue accumulating.

This, together with the transformation in the dimension of economic production where intelligence and affect have become fundamental productive forces, permit Hardt & Negri to relate to that part of modern European philosophy which poses power as a verb at the center of the ontological dynamic: Bacon's *inventio* and Spinoza's *potentia*, but also Nietzsche's will to power. Labour becomes now articulated as a general and expansive power, a passageway from the "virtual" powers to act (being, loving, transforming, creating) that reside in the multitude to the "real"—that is, nothing but productive excess with respect to the existing order.

This is also the standpoint of Hardt & Negri's new critical strategy: the fundamental productivity of being. It is the barbaric force that will bury Rome. To flee the corrupt city of Empire—where the production of surplus and life tend to coincide and the multitude's general capacity to produce is exploited by a form of power that draws its vitality from the multitude's productive excess—is then to configure the human collectivity itself as a *telos* and direct its power towards its own crescendo. Yet bending its force on itself can be established only by being carried out: by controlling its own movements (demand for global citizenship), its own body and time (demand for social wage), by controlling itself and its production (reappropriation of the means of production). A biopolitics.

Though an elaborate and decisively carried out book, some questions remain. As a conclusion I will point out one.

With some benevolent effort one may recognize in the structure of the book an influence of Deleuze and Guattari's but also of Foucault's theoretical formulations in so far as the book may be seen as an analysis of the change in the "expression" (Part II) and in the "content" (Part III) of sovereignty and as a surplus-value subtracted from these, in the movement from one apparatus to another (Part IV).

But the theoretical kinship tends to end here as for Hardt & Negri the expression of sovereignty tends to be interpreted as a kind of ideal and superstructural level that is a "symptom" of the changes in the "material conditions of production" and not part of the "actual process by which the imperial machine is set in motion".

For both Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari, the expression could never be made into a form reflecting a content. The family of statements articulating what sovereignty is and what it does which has both form (as in this case: dialectics vs. axiomatics) and substance (maintain boundaries vs. destroy boundaries) and the formalization of content organizing sovereignty which also has both form (techniques of imperialism vs. those of controlling) and substance (People vs. flexible and differentiated multitude) are two different positivities which have their own histories and their own formations. The key point is to explain how the interpenetrations of the two formations come about in a variable way without reducing everything to an effect of the material reality of productive relations (base-superstructure addicts) nor remaining only in a sphere interior to language (signifier enthusiasts).

Even if the "agacement of desire" and the "dispositif of power" are somewhat different solutions (the one emphasising society taking a flight, the other society getting strategized), they are both such immanent causes (i.e. realized and integrated by their effects) existing within the social field. As such, they replace all intentionality, no matter how "deep" or "material", with the weaving of the two formations, but weaving which is a battle. The battle could not be created if the two formations did not flow from something that was itself not of "form": the relation between forces. This is the source of the encounter which only solidifies the dust of the battle and any experience is caught up in there. When the multitude, as a force among forces, "breathes deeply" the forces that compose it to "configure itself as a telos" the outside cannot then but fold and create a Self. But since the formations are already interlocked and the battle has already been joined, is not the innocence of multitude for ever lost?