



RAINER RILLING

## »Debating Multitude«: Ten Notes

**The book »Multitude«<sup>1</sup> resumes the thinking process about the order of capitalism within »the era of armed globalization« (p. 231), perceived by its authors as post-modern, post-fordist and above all imperial and thus spatial, temporary and socially derestricted. This discussion was initiated by Michael Hardt and Toni Negri (H&N) in their book »Empire«, recently been published in Russian and still trading with Ebay for 10 \$. An extensive dialogue with the authors arose on the subject of the book »Empire«, which in itself is one aspect of the *Altermondialistas* movement and the left's efforts to understand the development primarily of the political order of capitalism since 1989 and to develop a corresponding theoretical language.**

»Multitude« responds to reviews, it revises, sets new emphases, attempts definitions and makes suggestions of how to perceive the new role of violence and the military, and the subjects of emancipation taking shape in the new empire of global capitalism and why their political project is »absolute« democracy – all facets that hardly played any role in its predecessor »Empire«. (»Our primary aim is to work out the conceptual bases on which a new project of democracy can stand« [XVII]). These are the three central topics in the book, which with precautionary foresight states on its very first pages that it is a philosophical book and not one operating on sociological terrain or attempting like a political pamphlet an answer to the well-known question of the »What is to be done?« At the same time, however, it aims to contribute to a »postsocialist and postliberal program« (220) and in »reinventing the Left« (220) – and thus – and this is the tricky bit, wishes to break »with the worn-out socialist tradition« (255).

The book »Multitude« is perhaps less surprising and more pragmatic than »Empire«. It is quite obviously a text whose cadences aim to have a widespread effect. Fortunately it is called »Multitude« and not »Menge« (Masses) as was the concern following the translation of the first book in Germany. If we are to believe Francis Fukuyama's

review in »Time« August 2004, it is also »at its core unreconstructedly Marxist« and presents us with an »extremely confused theory«. According to John Giuffo, the book is, irritatingly, also »excessively theoretical« and »ultimately unreasonable«. In short: »a whole book full of (...) content-less utterances« says Paul McLeary. Liberation, 18.11.2004 chooses to simply regard it as »revolutionary Lyricism«. Others, such as Günter Sandleben, have reacted impetuously and dogmatically. Reviews pointing out difficult passages and points worthy of criticism are an exception (Philipp Zarifian, Daniel Bensaid; Joachim Bischoff and Christoph Lieber in 12/04 supplement of the German magazine »Sozialismus«). A series of reactions to the book Multitude have been collected on the »Multitude« website ([http://multitudes.samizdat.net/rubrique.php?id\\_rubrique=497](http://multitudes.samizdat.net/rubrique.php?id_rubrique=497)) and the one of the German Rosa Luxemburg Foundation ([www.rosalux.de](http://www.rosalux.de)).

### 1 – The Concept of Multitude

has found wide resonance in the multifarious social and political movements in Europe and Latin-American. Early on in the book, areas for definition are opened up. Multitude is something different from the »people«, the »masses«, »crowds«, the »mob« or the »working class«. It is not united, but rather plural, multiple and active in its form. It is a multiplicity, consisting of differences and distinctions (99-100) and perpetually produces such differences (356). »The multitude is a multiplicity of all these singular differences« (XIV) – and, in contrast with the masses it does this perpetually. At the same time it is a monster, as it lacks a sovereign head.

We are therefore dealing with *difference* and *singularity*. The re-evaluation and accentuation of diversity is the central political emphasis, which was already introduced by H&N in their book »Empire« – and this, irrespective of all the puffed up boasting and various problems, is the aut-

<sup>1</sup> Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri: Multitude: war and democracy in the Age of Empire. The Penguin Press New York 2004

horses main merit along with the project of understanding global political order through the idea of empire. Although one may not be prepared to excuse their ignorance of feminism and its ideas on difference and diversity, (which »Multitude«, in fact, penetrated but verbally) the authors have nevertheless managed to transfer this tradition thematically into an entirely different public arena.

*Empirically* descriptive and fixed internal differences appertain to the Multitude. That which is so separate from one another, is singular: »Multitude is an internally different, multiple social subject whose constitution and action of which is based not on identity or unity (or, much less, indifference) but on what it has in common.« (100) »The Multitude is created in collaborative social interactions.« (222). »This is the definition of the multitude (...): singularities that act in common« (105). In this way it is also »the common subject of labour« (101). In its concept, it is *ontological* (as the Multitude always has been, being an element of resistance in our social being) and it is *political*, and as such not yet, thereby it is a *project* – »a not-yet multitude«. (221). This has its advantages. Where it somehow fails politically, the political individual is able to retreat into the utopia of ontology. Once it works in real life, the better.

However *no distinction between difference and diversity* is made and at no point is *a more detailed concept of singularity* developed that goes beyond the formal definition on page 99: »and by singularity here we mean a social subject whose difference cannot be reduced to sameness, a difference that remains different«. Singularity arises »without any such foundation in the other« (125f.). One can certainly assume that this refers to Deleuzes and Guattari's rhizomatic logic of singularity and interrelations. However: *What should we imagine singularity to be? India perhaps?* (p. 128) Is it all about individualization? If an understanding the Multitude is to be rendered more precise, then analyzing a distinct singularity (be it an incident, a person, a group) or a process of singularization is absolutely essential.

## 2 – Multitude and the working class

The concept Multitude, as it is also used by Paolo Virno, opposes the concept of »the people« as an identity and an imagined entity (Hobbes, Rousseau), the unforming idea of the »masses« (as an undifferentiated conglomeration) and the imaginary concept of the »nation«. It does not imply the disappearance of the industrial working class; the Multitude does *not* replace the classes – and an attempt is made by H&N to reactivate the political project of the class struggle on a biopolitical basis. For H&N, the Multitude is »the nature of the emerging global class formation« (VII preface). »Multitude is a class concept« (103). The idea of the Multitude is an attempt to revitalize and reconceptualize class theory. But this does not happen without

big problems. They refer to three factors as contributing aspects of class formation:

a) The decisive factor in constructing the concept of multitude as a new type of class is not a socio-economic relationship, i.e. the existence of relations of exploitation and appropriation of the surplus value production, but rather *the relationship between exclusion and inclusion* – and thus an *external* relationship (see p.106). For H&N, a narrow (the industrial working class) as well as a wider concept of the working class (the wage-labor relation) is still exclusive and excluding, which is why they introduce the Multitude as a non-exclusive concept. The notion of transgression and debordering central to the analysis of the imperial mode of power also forms the foundation of their version of the Multitude.

b) The concept of *production* as well, to which H&N refer as the second constituent element of class, is so wide-ranging that it makes sense to ask who does *not* produce, and therefore does not belong to a working class in this widest sense – »everything is production« wrote Deleuze / Guattari. This includes male industrial workers, female reproductive workers, industrial as well as agricultural workers, the employed and the unemployed, laborers and the poor – today, all of them (!) are »socially productive, they produce in common« (106f.). Taking the poor as an example, this is then discussed in detail: – nationally or globally there is no »line of division between workers and the poor... All of the multitude is productive and all of it is poor« (134) – »We are the poor!« (136) – the poor »is the primary figure of production« (152). »In fact, the old Marxist distinctions between productive and unproductive labor as well as that between productive and reproductive labor (...) should now be completely thrown out« (135). But when comparing material and immaterial labor, this weariness of making distinctions does not seem to apply! Immaterial or biopolitical production produces a surplus, is excessive and not quantifiable, in so far the value theory disappears (s.145). All of this, at one point divided into interaction and labor, (see for example Wulf D. Hund's short study »Stichwort Arbeit«, Heilbronn 1990,) now, under the sign of a diagnostic hegemony of immaterial labor and its focus on the material dimension and the biopolitical version of production merges into the concept of production. The appropriation of nature is insignificant. This may well all be done. Subsumption under wage labor as a vital structural relation causing differentiation hereby obviously and by all means intentionally, considerably loses significance. (Which is of course is viewed as completely wrong not only by Callinicos or Sandleben) although it is true that:

c) The Multitude refers to »all those who work under the rule of capital« (106). Therefore, thirdly, there is also a *class-forming and constituting rule relation of capital*. For H&N this, incidentally, does not involve a value-based

exploitative relationship. Today, exploitation should sooner be understood as »the expropriation of the common« (150). In other words: surplus has its place in the common. »Exploitation is the private appropriation of part or all of the value having been produced as common« (150) and: »capital, in other words, must exploit the labor of workers but it cannot really oppress, repress, or exclude them. It cannot do without their productivity« (333). If this is the case, we may well ask what substantial content (and more so: what socio-structural power and relevance) capital rule then has – after all, it is about more than just the dimension of the mutual dependence of »labor and capital«. Only trivial social mutual relations result from this (trivial) structure of interdependence and no outstanding power relations that lead to or constitute the formation of society and the system of rule, which constitute a historical specific order (by the way: also of resistance). Even in defining the Multitude this thought of transgression takes on a dynamic of its own: if, besides a (really very vague) countersubject, everything may be counted as constituting the new class »Multitude«, then the question of what exists *beyond* this great ontological, political and production-theoretical based pool of social and political subject relations, becomes politically extremely important.

### 3 – Two afterthoughts become necessary on the concept of class,

as developed by H&N (p. 121ff). Firstly, Marx' idea of class and the bourgeois-liberal concept »class« are quite consciously methodologically placed on the same level by H&N. »Unity« versus »plurality«, on the one hand »the proletariat«, on the other »a potentially infinite number of classes that comprise contemporary society based not only on economic differences but also on those of race, ethnicity, geography, gender, sexuality, and other factors.« (103). On the one hand, »binary class conception« (105), on the other, liberal models of »class pluralism« (105). H&N themselves say that in his historical writings, Marx' »analysis treats separately numerous classes of labor and capital« (104) – what is meant though is *social groups* (fraction and so on), as is also designated by the English concept of »social class«. The »unwaged classes« (106) beyond the waged working class are therefore also mentioned. H&N evidently wish to reconcile the two models and to »demonstrate that a theory of economic class need not chose between unity and plurality. A Multitude is an irreducible multiplicity« (105). It is hardly necessary to refer H&N back to the Marxian und Marxist classics which deal with the relations between class and groups – but a justification for the transformation of the methodological perspective would be required, all the more so as class theory has produced volumes on the historical/logical, the essence/aspect, and on class in itself, all of which are far from superfluous. Evidently, the decisive factor for

H&N is the fact that class is politically determined. Class (the Multitude) is a political concept, a project (104), the result of struggles –the question is, after all, not what the Multitude is but rather what it can become (105).

Secondly, H&N again argue fervently that *immaterial labor* (»it's a bad term«, Hardt) has taken on a hegemonic quality, whereas they do not repeat their formerly often hermetic and excessively expressive analogy between hegemonic production and the dominant social figure. They prefer this concept to the term »cognitive labor«, which is normally used in France. Even if at this point the poor, as a paradigmatic figure, are almost idolized (and so the former cult of the proletariat is rampant), it is in fact the divorce of material and immaterial labor and the hegemonic function of the latter, which serves to unite the Multitude in the multiplicity of its singularities.

Immaterial labor is work, which creates: »immaterial products, such as knowledge, information, communication, a relationship, or an emotional response« (108), as opposed to material labor (put in a vulgar way, 109). Immaterial labor is therefore information labor and affective labor, it is in actual fact biopolitical labor, as it establishes social relationships. The production of social relations, communication and cooperation as the object of labor, and the result thereof is the point and the difference to (im-)material labor, which reproduces relations such as these. Here, likewise, we are dealing with a comparison of substance. *Hegemony does not refer to the economic form, but to the material nature of labor*, which is here propounded as being the difference between material and immaterial labor. The products of immaterial labor in many respects are themselves »immediately social and common« (114); Marx' concept of the »immediately common«, however, refers to the lack of exchange of commodities and here too, the »factory« is projected operaistically onto the world. What is defined by Marx as »societal« or even as »collaborative« (»gemeinschaftlich«), here emerges as »common« (for instance »thinking«, 148) even if they do turn their backs on the communitarian concept of »community« (204).

### 4 –The political problem

that H&N discuss in their conception of the Multitude and their debate about concepts such as identity and coherent units such as peoples, mass, nation, race or class is one that is pivotal to politics in general and thus a central issue of political theory (including left political theory): »Thus, the challenge posed by the concept of multitude is for a social multiplicity to manage to communicate and act in common while remaining internally different.« (XIV )

### 5 – The common or the commons

Working on the possibility of such relationships and the reasons behind them, and thereby on a historically speci-

fic social commonality, which allows a specific figure – here the Multitude – to be conceived as a category of society, is most probably at the core of H&N’s theoretical efforts in the Multitude. This work concentrates on the concept of the »common« (the shared, the communal), introduced on page V of the preface and found on almost every page. This is not about communism or the joy of being a communist. It is arguable whether the word communism occurs at all in the book – in Berlin, Michael Hardt said in a debate in December 2004 that this was not the case, but that they had, at the same time, composed a *communist book*. In just a few lines they also dismiss the concept »commons« as being a backward looking, descriptive-historical and not a philosophical concept. (V preface) – an opinion that erroneously ignores the theoretical as well as the political changes in radical, liberal and socialist debate about the commons, which the work of the Ostrum circle, the commoner project or the more recent dispossession debate represents. There is thus also an ignorance of the concrete differentiations of the various forms, practices, and policies of property and appropriation undertaken in these projects. This is an incomprehensible weakness in the *Multitude* project. Thereby the development of the category Multitude on the issue (additionally and not exclusively) of appropriation and its manifold dimensions is suppressed.

The concept »common« used by them instead, offers the solution of the sketched political problem: the common is the third .... »that allows them to communicate and act together.« (XV) It designates what transforms singularities into the Multitude. And how can singularities transform the Multitude through the common? By (a) already being common, (b) producing via communication and cooperation which also contain the dimension of common (c) they, in the end, produce »the common« in so far as they work immaterially: »The common appears at both ends of immaterial production, as presupposition and result. Our common knowledge is the foundation of all new production of knowledge; linguistic community is the basis of all linguistic innovation; our existing affective relationships are based on production of affects; and our common social image bank enables the creation of new images. All of these productions accrue to the common and in turn serve as foundation for new ones. The common, in fact, appears not only at the beginning and end of production but also in the middle, since the production processes themselves are common, collaborative and communicative. (148). »Once we recognize singularity, the common begins to emerge. Singularities do communicate, and they are able to do so because of the common they share. We share bodies with two eyes, ten fingers, ten toes; we share life on this earth; we share capitalist regimes of production and exploitation; we share common dreams of a better future. Our communication, collaboration, and cooperation, furthermore, are

not only based on the common that exists but also in turn produce the common. We make and remake the common we share every day.« (128) It is also about: »languages, forms of speech, gestures, methods of conflict resolution, ways of loving, and the vast majority of the practices of living« (188); and (pragmatically) about habits that communicate our social being for instance: speaking, that which is based on language, establishes this common ground and occurs in dialogue.

What this list has in »common« is that here a theoretical concept is constructed from a motley collection of what are relatively strong worldly rivalries. *There are all kinds of elements and conditions of the societal in general – not more. They are unable to provide a justification for a historically specific social figure »Multitude«, especially one that is distinguished by the ontological quality of resistance and liberation.*

This strong reference to the common also retracts the theses of the incommensurability of singularities and their struggles as it was presented in »Empire« (see 112). H&N are of the opinion that the »becoming common of labor is a central condition necessary for the construction of the Multitude« (129). As different forms of labor increasingly become alike, portray common characteristics, production occurs in common and therefore also do common circumstances, that means the common, therefore the Multitude. (338). »The production of the common tends today to be central to every form of social production« (and not of profit, R.R.) »and is in its particularity »the primary characteristic« (V) of immaterial labor.

The common is evidently a realm (114); the common occurs via communication, knowledge and the affects that »we share in common« (114). For H&N, the common is therefore the foundation of a postliberal and postsocialist project, surmounting the old contradiction between the private and public (meaning the state) (on the issue of ownership, see »life as commodity«, 179-188). The line of attack is also aimed at expropriation through privatization and private appropriation. Eliminating diverse differentiations would become possible with the concept of the common: »We need...a conception of privacy that expresses the singularity of social subjectivities (not private property) and a conception of the public based on the common (not state control)« (pp. 203f). The concept of general or public interest should be replaced by the »common« interest – an interest which is thoroughly a general interest but whose constitution and implementation goes without any state intervention (see 206). This is a move away from *res publica* to *res communis*, as the public is regarded as being state property and common interest as an attribute of sovereignty. Not a return to the public but rather the creation of the common (see 303). The world-reknowned scholar Fukuyama did not understand this at all as evidenced by his comment on immaterial labor as being: »inhe-

rently communal, which implies that no one can legitimately appropriate it for private gain. Programmers at Microsoft may be surprised to discover that because they collaborate with one another, their programs belong to everybody.«

*It is extremely difficult to understand why for H&N this design is harmonious in itself.* Quite apodictically, they establish that: »there is no contradiction between this singularity and commonality« (114). And they write: »In conceptual terms, Multitude replaces the contradictory identity-difference with the complementary couple commonality-singularity. In practice the multitude provides a model whereby our expressions of singularity are not reduced or diminished in our communication and collaboration with others in struggle« (pp. 217f). By dedifferentiation (of the »systems« and »of the realms«) – so are we off to premodern times? Can this post-modern Multitude be regarded as a fusion (convergence, dedifferentiation, identity trap)? Does this turn to the Multitude signify a return to pre-political circumstances and to a situation of outright war?

## 6 – The characteristics of Multitude

In the Berlin debate December 2004, Michael Hardt conceded that the issues of conflict, contradiction, inner disputes or even struggles are not nearly sufficiently dealt with in the book. For example, one can read: »This coincidence of the common and singularities is what defines the concept of the Multitude« (308). Or: do we »today have to grasp the complementarity between the multiple singularities and our common social life« (310). One review says: in the world of the Multitude it is the governed »who will really run the show«, the world's population is treated »as if we were all one big, happy, left-wing underground, undivided by cultural differences, eagerly awaiting our chance to sock it to global capitalism«. Fukuyama's criticism: »The half of the country that votes Republican is evidently not part of the book's Multitude« cannot be countered with the note that the political project will address this. The Multitude is also a political project rife with *conflicts and ambivalences*. Do deep »divisions« exist in a Multitude, in a Multitude of the Multitudes, the movement of movements, the diversity of resistance? Difference (or diversity?!) is quite rightly celebrated as opposed to the dominant culture of unity and coherence of political subjects – however, differences must also be thought of as *hierarchical events! This in itself already demands that the Multitude be thought of as an event of contradictions par excellence and a rejection of every harmonic synthesis between the singular and the common. Only in this way will a criticism of the Multitudes weapons and of dominance be possible. We shouldn't think of the Multitude as a social relation without power, inequalities and hierarchies*. Here it also becomes clear that at its core the theo-

ry is still operatist and that feminist theory, for example, is overlooked.

## 7 – Empire

As has no other text in recent decades, the book »Empire« has inspired the debate about the political order of global capitalism. Multitude concerns itself with specifying, correcting, and updating a text about the political theory of sovereignty in a new global order, which was written long before 9/11. They maintain the central conclusions of this theory. They still do not think much of the use of the term »imperialism«, because in their understanding imperialism was »based primarily on the sovereignty of the nation – state extended over foreign territory« (II). In globalized capitalism, the empire secures what the nation state afforded in the capitalism of modernity: the political and judicial embedding of capital economy.

Historically, we are evidently in a *developmental phase of empire and thereby in a phase of transition*. Empire is described as a »tendency« (III) »we mean that it is the only form of power that will succeed in maintaining the current global order.« (III) »We are in a period of transition or, more precisely, an interregnum« (162) – »Our contemporary interregnum, in which the modern national paradigm of political bodies is passing toward a new global form ...« (163). In so far as the present phase is defined as an interregnum or tendency, processes and structures that appear to be imperialist in the classic sense (such as the USA's occupation of Iraq) may still be described as »imperialist« (more often so Toni Negri) and attributed to a declining structure, which has nothing to do with the sketched imperial structure of the future. This argument is of course only applied in the periphery in Multitude; in some parts, the vague arguments often to be found in »Empire« are repeated: The USA's war is characterized as »a regulating process that consolidates the existing order of empire« (25) – here the empire already exists and is in the process of being straightened out. In other parts, the Iraq war represents the logic of imperialism, whereby the other great powers already dance to an imperial logic. The »imperial logics of political, military, and diplomatic activity on the part of the United States and the other dominant nation-states will have to win out over imperialist logics« (61). As it is, H&N's historical workshop is still buzzing loudly.

Their treatment of the »Problem USA« shows, on the other hand, that they only manage to uphold their originally developed paradigm »empire« with the greatest of efforts, showing signs of filing it away or of making substantial differentiations. A clear and quite realistic modification of the original approach can be seen in the fact that the possibility of deep political rifts in the imperial space is thoroughly accepted, in particular concerning the military, monarchic role of the USA, even if in their argument,

the former harmonium comes to the forefront. (188ff.) They note: »not all the powers in Empire's network, of course, are equal« (II), »there are still of course [...] important differences among nations and between the large geographical zones of the world.« (164) and correspondingly, unawares, they speak of the dominant nation states (II) and of »powerful contradictions« (323). Europe, Russia and China are now great competitors in the »network« (316). Between the »Nodes« in the networks there are »radical hierarchies« (Hardt). The empire contains hierarchies (s. 29). They state that there is a struggle for relative dominance within the hierarchies at the highest and lowest levels of the global system. Those at the top can dodge the imperial law (see also: *lex mercatoria*, 169-171). A topography of »the hierarchies of the system of power and its unequal relations in the north and south of the globe« (159) can be drawn – an aspect which had more or less disappeared from the smooth surface of the empire as it was painted in »Empire«. The sharp reduction of the territorial and the nation states (and the political media in general- the negotiators) to residual elements of the homogenous empire is put into perspective. Both will and a conjured up notion that »in order to maintain itself, Empire must create a network of power that does not isolate a centre of control« (324) are almost the only things left over from the formerly developed concept of empire. More still: The authors not only concede to the »exceptionalism of the United States as the only remaining superpower« (8) and its claim to exceptionalism and special position in respect of the law (8); characterizing it as the »uncontested military superpower« (52), that after 1989 was capable of creating a zone of imperial commando stretching from the Middle East to East Asia under the control of the USA (316). In fact even the »exceptional power and its ability to dominate the global order« is conceded (9), a »US global hegemony« (234) is spoken of and at one point even explained: the »*United States unilateralist version of Empire has been imposed by military might*« (320). »Global Sovereignty has adopted an imperial figure under the control of the United states« (316). Here, *the American empire project as a rival project* appears unawares without even using the term. An imperial project with a US American face shines through without really being the texts serious intention. It deserves to be worked through – and by the way the »neoliberal empire« model as well (the term neoliberalism makes its first appearance on page 120 – in no way does it fit into the political theory of empire).

Why is this not a serious option? H&N are of the opinion that even the USA would not be capable of going it alone (II preface). »It is becoming increasingly clear that a unilateral or »monarchical« arrangement of the global order, centered on the military, political, and economic dictation of the United States, is unsustainable. The United States

cannot continue to go it alone« (320). The war in Iraq is »a failure« (Hardt). Imperialist projects are possible and can be initiated – *but they can no longer be successful*. The United States cannot go it alone, »in other words, and Washington cannot exert monarchical control over the global order, without the collaboration of other dominant powers. [...]. If the United States is conceived as a monarchical power on the world scene, then, to use old terminology, the monarchy must constantly negotiate and work with the various global aristocracies« (61). The USA therefore, must liaise with the worldwide aristocracy, the diverse fractions of the capitalist class. »Such unilateralist adventure is thus merely a transitory phase. Without the collaboration of the aristocracy, the monarch is ultimately powerless.« (61). The fact that an American empire, that is, an imperial project with the colors of the USA must also have a hegemonic functional pattern, which is able to comprise the conflict-ridden cooperation between »monarch« and aristocrats (including US Americans) is not seriously considered as a possible development option.

After all, even in »Multitude«, *empire and human interest are put on the same visionary pedestal*. Beginning with the sketch of the character of the UN: »When the United Nations was formed at the end of the Second World War it brought together the enlightened aspiration for cosmopolitan government with a democratic arrangement among the nation-states that had won the war against fascism.« (315). There is no mention that this was the project of the informal American empire as was recently recalled by Peter Gowan in »New Left Review«. The UN has »now« (316) been caught in the dominance of the USA – as if the USA had not always been the hegemonic UN actor. Or: since the 1990's the foreign and military policy of the USA has been oscillating between »imperialist and imperial logics« (60), by which they actually mean: »which is cast in reference not to any limited national interests but to the interests of humanity as a whole« (60). Imperial logic here again is outlined as »humanitarian logic«. It is no wonder then if (see pages 321 etc.) peace, security, eliminating poverty, absolving debts and reversing the process of privatization are unexpectedly turned into possible aims of the global aristocracy. On reading »that the US military [must] become a network, shed its national character, and become an imperial military machine« (59) then the path to conceptualizing the US military as a machine in the interest of humanity becomes all too narrow. Despite such inconsistencies, *two important changes to the previous concept of »empire«*, of differing importance can be picked up on. One is that the empire cannot be thought of as a smooth structure, ironed out by networks, but rather as an order that is contradictory and extremely prone to conflict; the other being that, as a result, one can also imagine a different (American, neoliberal) empire.

## 8 – War

The left may have protested against the war in force, theories, however, were hardly developed. Its analysis of terror, its practice and discourse was nipped in the bud early on. This is why H&N's examination of the war and the changes involved with it, is important and controversial. H&N assume a state of »a generalized, permanent global civil war« (341) and consider war as today's central issue. »War is becoming a general phenomenon; global and interminable« (3); they say that there exists, »a general global state of war« (5), that war is turning into »a permanent social relation« (12), to the »primary organizing principle of society« (12), and to a »regime of bio-power« (13).

*Nineleven* was the watershed, even though the text is fairly inconsistent on this point as well: On p. 4 one may read that the assassinations »did not fundamentally change« the global situation, but that »a new era of war« had begun, which after all is in a way a fundamental change. More: this war demarcates the »passage from modernity to post-modernity« (4). This state of war is not about open military force, but rather it is a mechanism of containment. The »limits of war are rendered indeterminate« (14), the enemy is arbitrary – abstract. War is postmodern. The old sovereign conceptualization of war is being thrown overboard: within it war (as opposed to civil war) was declared an exception, war and politics were separate: »War was a limited state of exception.« (6) As the nation state loses relevance, war is becoming equivalent to civil war. War does not primarily occur between nation states. The state of exception is becoming permanent and universal. Now war is »the first and primary element, the foundation of politics itself« (21). War establishes rights. War has a tendency to be absolute; nuclearizing it is bio-power – which they presume to be rational as it does not destroy its subjects because it needs them (36), and finally, in its political consequence war is the »primary obstacle« (I) to democracy, the suspension of which becomes normality (17). »The need for democracy coincides immediately, in the present conditions with the need for peace« (67).

This assessment of the present basic situation as one that is characterized by the »de-bounding, the relinquishing of limits of war«, in which it logically becomes the *foundation of the political* (with this they file away their verdict of the classic materialist and Marxist political-economic dominant figure of »the material«, »the basic«, and »the economy« so that (»the separation of economics also from other social domains quickly breaks down here« (V, 109)), reflects the concept of war of the political warriors of the Bush Administration – this is after all the often forgotten vision of the world of the present US government: the most powerful country declares, and abides by a state of war. The change in the relationship between war and politics as described by H&N likewise reflects an actual trans-

formation – it is, however, very arguable whether war has in actual fact become the dominant mode of politics to social integration in developing countries. Callinicos is quite right in pointing out that the ideals of liberal democracy, consumerism or the remains of the welfare state are the factors, which integrate people into a capitalist order.

Perhaps more serious politically is that for H&N only one differentiation actually counts: the one between violence in order to secure a hierarchy or violence against the imperial order. »Violence that preserves the contemporary hierarchy of global order and violence that threatens that order« (32). Differentiating between committer and victim is not an issue. [There is nevertheless sparse mention that the victims of the enemy are no longer being calculated on page 46]. Instead, they are interested in the fact that »even in asymmetrical conflicts victory in terms of complete domination is not possible (54), for example. Sentences such as the following can be read: »*We have to construct the figure of a new David, the multitude as champion of asymmetrical combat, immaterial workers who become a new kind of combatants, cosmopolitan bricoleurs of resistance and cooperation ... construction of a common struggle against imperial power. This is the real patriotism, the patriotism of those with no nation*« (pp. 50, 51). »The exodus through the empire will never be entirely peaceful« (342) – do the victims share this view? One would have to find out with which mechanism one may succeed in legitimising the »use of force in the Multitude's struggle« (80), in justifying the »war of the multitude« (80). They are convinced that the »democratic use of force and violence ... is different« (342) and above all that it is possible, therefore one should add that, *a democratic mode of war and violence in the end makes a difference for the victims as well.*

People die, but democratically. Violence should be subordinated to politics and should be organized democratically, a critique of weapons should also exist; they should only be used in defense (343) – but of course: »We can imagine the day when the Multitude will invent a weapon that will not only allow it to defend itself but will also be constructive, expansive and constituent« (347). They quite simply speak of the »enemies«, which is to be fought against (62) – the question is whether the Multitude needs a term such as this and what its specifics are.

In short: a) if the behaviour of politics and war have fundamentally changed and b) the character and the societal function of war likewise, then c) it is hardly an approach to radically exclude the radical pacifistic option – it is possible that it may be the only lasting and sustainable option in a situation such as this. Already in »*Empire*«, H&N used a (in carefully chosen words: highly insensitive) rhetoric of violence. This did not change in the sequel.

## 9 – The concept of Democracy

The necessity, as with any other left project to democratically design a Multitude project is for H&N an urgent consequence of their analysis of war and its functions. To develop an alternative conception of war as a new tool of the Multitude is a pretty astonishing endeavour – discarding the quite unsuccessful left concepts of war and violence makes more sense. At least in H&N's concept of exodus— also exodus from the imperial state of war – this is not excluded. The traditional left treatment of the new state of war fails to highlight the issues of democracy, as left critical political theory does in general. Placing the project of democracy politically at the centre of the Multitude is thereby a stimulating decision. According to H&N, the practice of limiting it to equality (as does the liberal project) or freedom (as for the socialist project) must be countered by a project of *radical, absolute democracy*. As in the 18th century, it is the task in the 21st century to reinvent democracy. Absolute democracy is confronted with sovereignty and representation – these were the old attempts of modernity which transformed democracy from the leadership of *many* (the idea developed in antiquity) into that of *all*, and thereby created the idea of universal democracy and developed the concept of representation as a central improvement, that which *connects* and *separates* (e.g. Rousseau's idea »volonté de tous« vs. »volonté générale« – the latter unites the people). The principle of representation includes the fundamental »injustice of speaking for others« (Hardt). This is the basic problem of all reform proposals, which also manifests itself in the social and political reform movements of the present.

The nostalgic inclusion of civil society has likewise failed (Putnam, Sennett). And finally, postmodern democracy debates have not emerged from this and are unable to resolve the current deep crisis of representation. H&N for their part waver between a radical liberal discourse of destruction and the demand for a reconstruction of democratic sovereignty; demands of transition (exploiting the conflict between monarchy and aristocracy and seeing a skewed form of the Multitude even in the Multitude do not make any difference either.) If laborers can rule a factory then why can the Multitude not rule the world? However – the Multitude cannot be sovereign; it cannot be »reduced to a unity« (330). How then can one abolish representation and the moment of fundamental division – only in this way will sustainability follow on from singularity? In operaist (and bio-political) tradition, the solution of the problem is found in the fact that now even political decisions are »produced« – here also consequently a concept of production which is entirely diffused in society.

The possible meaningfulness of a confident politics opposing the boundlessness of the market is completely disregarded. The social nature of democracy – as structured arena of the class struggles – is barely mentioned.

Democracy and its *forms* are spoken of, not their *content* – and if this is so, then with a highly dubious reference to Max Weber and his understanding of capital and socialism: »Socialism, in every form, thus necessarily involves the *management of capital* – perhaps in a less privatist or individualist way, but always within the same relentless dynamic of instrumental rationalization of life« (254). These objections (to which evading the problem of the procurement of politics beyond the mechanism of representation should be added) do not change the fact that the question of a reform of global democracy must be answered further than by fantastic allusions to a World state.

## 10 – Theology

What is needed is a new science (309) of plurality and hybridity in which the foundation is not what is individual but the contradictory common. A science of the biopolitical relations of production makes sense. Certainly this will be a science which is fundamentally different to anything we know. But, whether it must include the moment of *theological pathos*, which suddenly emerges in H&N's »Multitude« is hopefully doubtful. Do we really need to celebrate the *martyr*? Do we require *love* to be a political building block of the Multitude? Do we need an optimistic anthropology? The theological materialism of Feuerbach, *Vitalism* (metaphors of the body play an important part here, as they did in Empire [»flesh!« p. 216f, and the otherwise so enjoyable evocation of monsters])? What is the point of *glorifying the poor* as ontological condition of resistance and productive life [entirely in the tradition of the cult of the proletariat and Marxian assumption that the dialectical counterpart could only come out of the abstraction of concrete labor]? What is this *happy end* – by exodus (thereby: withdrawal, emigration from labor and consumption – not understood in a territorial context p. 334)? What is the left to do with a political reasoning which swears by the *new* »race«, »humanité«, »nature humaine«, teleologically produced – which swears by a *new* humanity (213)? Why am I to materialize God's love in the Multitude? (»There is really nothing necessarily metaphysical about the Christian and Judaic love of God: both God's love of humanity and humanity's love of God are expressed and incarnated in the common material political project of the Multitude« (pp. 351f.).

I have not yet been brave enough to put this question to Michael or Toni because I've never read Spinoza.

Prof. Dr. Rainer Rilling,  
Rosa Luxemburg Foundation Berlin  
www.rosalux.de  
Sociologist University Marburg  
Tel. #49(0)30/44310129, E-mail: rilling@rosalux.de;  
www.rainer-rilling.de

Translated by Karen Tiedtke  
First published in www.linkslog.de December 22, 2004